

THE LegiSchool

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Fall 2000

PROJECT



The LegiSchool Project

More and more we hear about young people's indifference to political life. We hear about widespread mistrust of elected officials and apathy towards our country's system of governance. We also hear that young people don't get involved in our political process because they don't understand how to get involved, and more important, they don't feel as though our leaders are listening to them.

Civic education organizations around the country are working to reverse this trend and re-engage young people in public life. Such organizations are working hard to give students the tools they need to become active participants in matters of public policy and politics. Most important, these organizations are trying to get young people to think critically, exercise sound judgement, and care about the rights and welfare of their fellow citizens. Let me introduce you to one of these organizations.

Founded in 1994, the LegiSchool Project is an award winning educational collaboration between the California State University, Sacramento, and the California State Legislature. The mission of the project is to cultivate interest in the political process by creating opportunities for high school students to participate in debates concerning the problems affecting Californians. LegiSchool's approach to teaching government focuses on real issues...issues that impact all of us, including young people. By addressing issues directly affecting students, LegiSchool's activities and materials increase students' interest in public policy and governance.

To achieve our mission, LegiSchool focuses on two distinct initiatives: Town Hall Meetings and a Video Curriculum Library. The first element of the project is the Town Hall Meetings series in which state government officials and high school students meet face-to-face to discuss current issues and legislation. The primary purpose of the Town Hall Meetings is to engage students in the same debates in which their legislators are involved. More over, young people learn

from the Town Hall Meeting experience that their opinions matter! Each meeting is broadcast live from the State Capitol on the California Channel. To assist in the preparation of the meetings, free comprehensive curriculum guides are available to teachers and students.

The second initiative of LegiSchool is the Video Curriculum Library that draws from the State Legislature's video archives. Each "package" in the library contains videotaped footage of the legislative hearings, public testimony, and floor debates associated with particular bills recently debated in the Legislature, along with articles, press clippings, *continued on back page*

Thank you...

The LegiSchool Project wishes to thank the following legislators for their participation in 1999/00 LegiSchool Town Hall Meetings:

Senators Patrick Johnston, Bruce McPherson, Kevin Murray, Deborah Ortiz, and Adam Schiff; and

Assembly Members Hannah-Beth Jackson, George Nakano, Robert Pacheco, Gloria Romero, George Runner, and Patricia Wiggins.

Thanks to all of the teachers who responded to the LegiSchool End of Year Survey in May. Your feedback will enable LegiSchool to better meet the needs of teachers and students, and many of your suggestions have been incorporated into this year's activities.



September 2000

Dear Friends,

Welcome to another exciting year of LegiSchool Project activities! On behalf of our collaborators — the California State Legislature, California State University, Sacramento, and the California Channel — I am pleased to invite you to participate in this year's informative and engaging programs.

We have recently completed LegiSchool's most accomplished curriculum. Last year, with your support, we produced more Town Hall Meetings and enrolled more of California's high school students than ever before. Working together, we began tackling issues such as hate crimes on high school campuses, teen health issues and the effect of an accurate census count on California. And, to top it all off, we took LegiSchool on the road and produced our first Town Hall Meeting in Los Angeles.

This year will prove even more exciting. LegiSchool is preparing to conduct Town Hall Meetings on school prayer, E-Democracy and voting (in time for this year's presidential election) and the state's high school exit exam. These meetings are designed to give California's students the opportunity to discuss contemporary issues that will impact their futures.

We have already proven that this award-winning project is most effective with maximized local participation. Clearly, LegiSchool works best when all of you, our educators on the front line, join in and take part. With your help, expertise and fresh ideas, this coming year will be LegiSchool's best ever!

Sincerely,

Greg Schmidt
Secretary of the Senate

**Real Issues, Real Debate,
Real Curriculum**

Exciting Civic Education Opportunities

California C.I.V.I.C.S. (Community Involvement and Voting Information in Classroom Studies)

California C.I.V.I.C.S. is the newest program developed by Secretary of State Bill Jones. The program is designed to engage California's youth in the civic life of their schools, their neighborhoods and their communities. The goals of this program are to ultimately contribute to the renewal of America's commitment to community and to change youth culture from one of disenchantment and mistrust to one of participation and confidence in government and the election process.

The C.I.V.I.C.S. teacher's guide provides teachers with various elements in which to engage their students in civic participation, including classroom lesson plans, homework assignments, after school activities, current events, and even ideas and suggestions on how to get involved in various community events. For more information, or to request a copy of the guide, please contact Dawn Mehlhaff at (916) 657-2166 or via e-mail at CIVICS@ss.ca.gov.

Easy Reading Voter Guide—Order Now for the November 7, 2000, Presidential Election!

The Easy Reading Voter Guide will be available this September on-line at www.easyvoter.org as well as in the 16-page booklet format. The non-partisan guide is popular with students, teachers and all types of voters because of its straightforward language, clear explanations and easy-to-follow layout. In 16 color-coded pages, the guide covers California's seven political parties,

candidates for President and U. S. Senate and all statewide ballot measures.

Content development is funded by a grant from the California State Library; project partners also include the League of Women Voters and the California Secretary of State's Office. The guides are available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese and Korean. Orders will be filled on a first come, first served basis. For ordering information, visit our website or call (415) 454-6500.

Kids Voting California

KidsVoting California is a private, non-partisan, non-profit grassroots organization dedicated to building a more informed generation of voters. The program begins with teachers incorporating the hands-on KidsVoting Curriculum in the classroom and culminates on Election Day when students go to official polling sites and cast their votes on the same candidates and issues as adults. Students may also vote by mail or over the Internet.

The mission of KidsVoting is to promote voter participation and to educate students regarding the voting process. The Program strives to improve citizen involvement in democracy in our community by preparing current and future generations of citizens for participation in their government. KidsVoting encourages you to get informed and get involved! For more information, call (408) 287-3598 or visit Kids Voting California on the Internet at www.kidsvotingcalifornia.com.

Bring State Government Into Your Classroom for Free!

Here's a great way to introduce your students to California's government. Each video "stars" one or more high school students who guide viewers through the political process. Order one or all four for FREE. Just complete the Video Order Form, return it to LegiSchool and your order will be sent to you within 2-3 weeks.

A Day in the Life of the Secretary of State

Have you ever wondered what California's Secretary of State does? Grace Pak, a student from Sacramento, recently spent a day with Secretary of State Bill Jones to get the answer for us. Approximately 25 minutes in length, the video highlights some of the key aspects of the job, including the Secretary's role as chief elections officer, member of the World Trade Commission, and overseer of the state archives.

A Day in the Life of the Legislature

This 30-minute video features two key members of the Legislature, Senator Jim Brulte and Assembly Member Robert Hertzberg. Highlights of the video include footage from a Senate floor session, an Assembly committee hearing, a meeting between Senator Brulte and a group of lobbyists, as well as a staff briefing with Assembly Member Hertzberg.

Checks & Balances: The Three Branches of State Government

This 10-minute video is geared towards helping middle and high school students learn more about how our state legislative process works—and it is presented in a way that is enjoyable for everyone. The main premise for the lesson is that as in the federal government, the framers of our state's constitution wanted to be sure that no one branch of government would have too much power, so they divided the powers of the government.

How a Bill Becomes Law

Produced by the California Channel, this ten-and-a-half-minute video uses AB 2268, the Bicycle Helmet Law, to describe how a bill becomes law in California. Ideal for high school students, the video introduces concepts such as how a bill is authored, the process of first, second, and third readings, and how legislation is assigned to various committees within the Legislature.

Video Order Form

Indicate below which video(s) you would like:

- A Day in the Life of the Secretary of State
 A Day in the Life of the Legislature
 Checks & Balances: The Three Branches of State Government
 How a Bill Becomes Law

Mail to:

Name: _____
School: _____
Address: _____
City/St/Zip: _____

Return by mail, fax or e-mail to:

CSUS
The Center for California Studies/LegiSchool
6000 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95819-6081

Fax: (916) 278-5199

Or e-mail your request to: ostgaard@csus.edu

Your order will be mailed to you within 2-3 weeks. Thank you!

Announcements

- Check out LegiSchool's recently redesigned webpage at www.csus.edu/calst/legischool.htm. Visit the site for the latest information on LegiSchool events and upcoming activities. Let us know what you think and how we can make the website more useful to teachers and students. E-mail comments to Kolleen Ostgaard at: ostgaard@csus.edu
- Join the LegiSchool e-mail update list! This year, LegiSchool will implement the use of an e-mail update list to provide educators with information on upcoming activities. If you would like to add your name to the list, e-mail Don Nahhas at: nahhasd@csus.edu.
- Remember... October 10 is the last day to register to vote in the November election. Voter registration information is available on the Secretary of State's webpage at www.ss.ca.gov or by calling 1-800-345-VOTE. Please share this information with students!



2000 - 2001 LegiSchool Calendar of Events

Mark your calendars now for this year's Town Hall Meetings! All meetings will take place at the State Capitol. If you are interested in bringing your class to the Capitol to watch a Town Hall Meeting, please contact Kolleen Ostgaard. A limited amount of travel money is available to classes outside the greater Sacramento area. Call for more information.

October 26, 2000, Town Hall Meeting, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.
Building a Strong Electorate: High Tech Solutions to Low Voter Participation

Today's young people are voting at rates far lower than in the past. In the 1996 general election, just 32 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds voted, and in the 1998 midterm election the number dropped to 17 percent. Why aren't young people voting and what can be done to curb this trend? Will the development of high-tech voting motivate more young people to participate? What can parents and teachers do to revive interest in voting in the 21st Century?

December 7, 2000, Town Hall Meeting, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.
Advertising at Schools: Is There Room in Public Education for Sodas and Snacks?

Vending machines at high schools are not uncommon. Today, many school districts sign lucrative contracts with beverage and snack-food companies to augment tight budgets. But despite the convenience of vending machines on campuses, serious consideration needs to be given to the impact on student nutrition, and corporate access to public institutions and future customers. These issues and more will be addressed at this meeting.

January 15, 2001, Essay Contest Deadline
See back page for contest details.

February 1, 2001, Town Hall Meeting, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.
School Safety: Who Fits the Profile?

In response to recent violence on high school campuses, two federal law enforcement agencies are promoting "behavioral profiling" software which allows school administrators to profile students perceived to be troubled. The software assigns "risk ratings" to students so that school personnel can intervene before violence occurs. Does this type of profiling threaten the civil liberties of our students and further alienate them from adults? How can we keep schools safe without compromising student rights?

March 22, 2001, Student Run Press Conference, 11:00 a.m. - noon
The Exit Exam: Road to Reform or Barrier to Success?

Part of a day-long Student Journalism Summit, the Student-Run Press Conference is designed to give students the opportunity to take part in their own press conference with state leaders. This year's press conference will address the state's high school exit exam. See information about the Exit Exam Essay Contest for more information.

May 3, 2001, Town Hall Meeting, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.
Religion at Public Schools: Free Speech or Public Sponsorship of Religious Beliefs?

School gatherings such as football games and graduation ceremonies have long incorporated Christian prayer. But recent court decisions have determined that prayer at school events violates the rights of those who are not members of a particular religion. Further controversy exists with religious-based clubs on school campuses. To what extent should the separation of church and state be upheld? What about students' Constitutional rights to religious freedom?

Upholding State Standards...

California's Grade 12 History/Social Science standards pay particular attention to the principles of American democracy, which are intended to provide students with the knowledge and skills that are required to assume the responsibilities of citizenship.

Topics addressed at LegiSchool meetings and in LegiSchool curriculum materials are aligned to take into account many of the standards now required by the state. Below are just a few of the standards that can be met through the use of LegiSchool and its curriculum materials. By using LegiSchool, students can learn/study the following:

- How to compare the present with the past, evaluating the consequences of past events and decisions and determining the lessons learned from such events;
- The meaning and importance of the rights guaranteed under the Bill of Rights;
- The legal obligations of obeying the law;
- How public policy is formed, including the setting of the public agenda and how it is carried out through regulations and executive orders;
- The obligation of civic-mindedness, including voting, being informed on civic issues, volunteering and performing public service;
- The reciprocity between rights and obligations (i.e., why enjoyment of one's rights entails respect for the rights of others);
- How civil society provides opportunities for individuals to associate for social, cultural, religious, and political purposes;
- The means that citizens use to participate in the political process (i.e., voting, campaigning, lobbying, running for political office);
- How our society makes it possible for people, individually or in association with others, to bring their influence to bear on government in ways other than voting and elections; and
- The process of lawmaking.

"I think LegiSchool is one of the most powerful tools in California education. I'm completely wedded to the concept of involving students in government. This is the real thing. Legislators listen. I think that's a very powerful message to communicate to students."
— Deborah Aufenspring, teacher, New Technology High, Napa

"Thank you for inviting me to be on the panel. I loved being up there—I felt so important and I loved that legislators were taking notes on all of our ideas! It made government such fun."

—Student, Bear Creek High, Stockton

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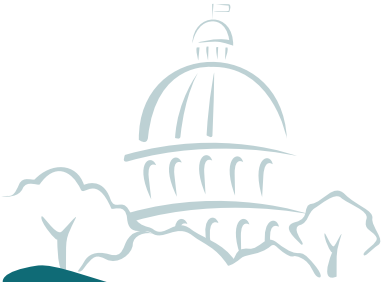
For more information about LegiSchool, contact:

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The Center for California Studies/LegiSchool
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Sacramento, CA 95819-6081
(916) 278-6906
ostgaard@csus.edu

Visit LegiSchool on the Internet at:
www.csus.edu/calst/legischool.htm

**Your feedback is important to us!
Tell us what you think...**

If you have an idea for a future Town Hall Meeting, suggestions on how to improve LegiSchool, or want to share a story about a successful civic education program in your community, please contact Kolleen Ostgaard at the Center for California Studies.



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and reports related to the bills. Materials in the library address issues such as the bicycle helmet law, teen pregnancy prevention legislation, the "Three Strikes" law and school uniforms. The most recent additions to the library are "A Day in the Life of the Legislature" and "A Day in the Life of the Secretary of State."

It is estimated that 12,000 California high school students take part in LegiSchool activities each year either through direct participation at Town Hall Meetings, via television on the California Channel, or by free videotapes and curriculum materials provided to teachers. To learn how you can involve your students in one of our LegiSchool activities, contact me at (916) 278-4642 or e-mail me at ostgaard@csus.edu. You can also learn more about LegiSchool's exciting plans for the 2000/2001 school year at www.csus.edu/calst/legischool.htm. See you at the Capitol!

Kolleen Ostgaard,
LegiSchool Project Director

LegiSchool's Fourth Annual Essay Contest

California's Exit Exam: High Stakes Testing for Higher Standards

In 1999, Governor Davis signed a bill requiring all of California's high school students to pass an "exit exam" as a condition of graduation, effective with the graduating class of 2003/04. The goal of the exam is to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in college or the work place.

This year's essay contest will address the exit exam and how students feel about this new requirement. Do students see it as a barrier to graduation, just another exam, or a necessary requirement to ensure that all students are learning what they should?

Ten winning essayists will be invited to spend a day in Sacramento at LegiSchool's Fourth Annual Student Journalism Summit on March 22, 2001.

Look for essay contest details in late October!