The LegiSchool Project

This year, the LegiSchool Project celebrates ten years of excellence in the field of civic education. This milestone is an exciting occasion for LegiSchool staff because we are reminded of the hundreds of young people who have converged on the State Capitol to meet with state legislators to discuss important public policy issues and of the thousands of students around the state who have watched LegiSchool meetings and used LegiSchool materials to enhance their knowledge of state government and the legislative process in particular.

This year’s meetings offer timely and engaging topics for students and teachers alike. From the November presidential election to the controversial issue of drug testing students to legislation that works to protect young people from violent video games, the 04/05 Town Hall Meetings are sure to spark interest and debate.

LegiSchool is all about engaging students in the same debates that California’s policy makers are engaged in. Learning by doing is LegiSchool’s philosophy on getting high school students interested in the politics that impact so much of what goes on in their everyday lives. LegiSchool Town Hall Meetings offer students the chance to meet directly with legislators and other state leaders to share their thoughts and concerns on actual legislation as it works its way through the legislative process. LegiSchool’s Town Hall Meetings and curriculum materials are developed not only to engage students in public policy debates that are taking place everyday at the Capitol, but also to heighten students’ awareness about state government, how it works and the importance of civic involvement as a means to improve the society in which we live. Detailed meeting information can be found in the Calendar of Events section of this newsletter.

In addition to Town Hall Meetings, LegiSchool, in conjunction with the California Channel, offers a wide range of free, government-oriented classroom materials to help students learn about the basic functions of state government. Whether it’s a Town Hall Meeting videotape you’re using in the classroom or curriculum materials on the initiative process, LegiSchool materials are designed to be easily incorporated into the state’s social science and history content standards.

By making government relevant to young people, it is LegiSchool’s goal to help lay the groundwork for their on-going commitment to civic life. Read on to learn how you can involve your students in one of our LegiSchool Town Hall Meetings or to order LegiSchool’s free classroom materials. You can also learn more about LegiSchool at www.csus.edu/legischool.

Thank You...

The LegiSchool Project wishes to thank the following legislators for their participation in 2003/2004 LegiSchool meetings: Senators Wesley Chesbro and Deborah Ortiz and Assembly Members John J. Benoit, Jackie Goldberg and Joe Simitian.

LegiSchool would also like to thank AT&T, the Wells Fargo Foundation and the California Teachers Association for their generous contributions.

Dear Friends,

Once again, it’s time to join together in the challenging activities of the LegiSchool Project. The LegiSchool partner institutions—the California State Legislature, California State University, Sacramento, and the California Channel—in invite you to participate in this award-winning program. In the last few years, the accomplishments of the LegiSchool students have been extraordinary and we are very proud of all who have contributed.

In past years, we have helped many students excel to heights beyond their own expectations. We debated current issues, some more controversial than others, and allowed students to express their passionate views on subjects that directly affected their lives. Last fall, over 250 students from all over California submitted essays with the hope of being one of ten students chosen to participate in a Student Legislative Summit at the State Capitol. Their accomplishments have fueled the drive for LegiSchool to reach even more of California’s outstanding teens.

This year we are planning a very exciting agenda. We hope you will participate by helping LegiSchool reach students that are the future leaders and voters of our state with this most dynamic learning experience.

Sincerely,
Greg Schmidt
Secretary of the Senate

Mission

The LegiSchool Project is a civic education collaboration between CSU Sacramento and the California State Legislature, administered by the Center for California Studies. The Project’s mission is to engage California’s high school students in matters of public policy and state government by creating opportunities for students and state leaders to meet and share ideas on issues affecting California. In doing so, we hope to motivate young people to take an interest in the public life around them and to encourage their active participation in our political process.
Free Videos and Curriculum Materials
from the LegiSchool Project and the California Channel

The Lobbyist: The Power of Persuasion at Work
Commonly referred to as the third house, lobbying plays a significant role in the legislative process. This lively video provides students a thorough representation of what it takes to be a lobbyist in the state of California from tracking legislation to attending state legislative hearings to meeting with policy makers, all in an attempt to influence a particular outcome desired by their clients. The video provides students with the opportunity to learn about the legislative process while observing a lobbyist in action. Video will be available in late October.

The Voting Process: YOU Have the Power!
This energetic eight-minute video gives students a step-by-step look at procedures for voting in California. The goal of the video is to give young, first-time voters the knowledge and confidence to become involved in our most cherished constitutional right, the democratic process. Registration, absentee ballots, resources (websites, phones numbers, etc.) and demonstrations of the three prevalent forms of voting systems in our state are given a thorough treatment. Written materials include a mock voter registration form and instructions, a ballot, suggestions for in-class exercises and take home assignments.

Checks & Balances: The Three Branches of State Government
This ten-minute video is geared towards helping middle and high school students learn more about how our state legislative process works— and 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 into three equal branches.

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.

Dialogue on Freedom, A Nation Called Quest
In February 2002, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy visited his old high school in Sacramento, McClatchy High School. There he engaged a political science class in his “Dialogue on Freedom” using the fictitious country of Quest as a model for applying the best concepts introduced by the students. The purpose of this “Dialogue on Freedom” is to explore American civic values and legal traditions in the context of a hypothetical situation. The video is 30 minutes long.

A Day in the Life of a Candidate
During an election, citizens are bombarded with campaign literature and media coverage of candidates, but running for public office takes much more than slick mailers and TV commercials. This 35-minute video demonstrates some of the more routine, but critical work that goes into running for public office and features the Republican and Democratic candidates for the November 2000 race for California’s 5th Senate District. Two students serve as the video’s hosts as they take viewers through the last four weeks leading up to the election. Highlights of the video include footage from precinct walking, phone banking, staff briefings, interviews with both candidates, and election night coverage.

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.

State Government for Beginners Handout Binder ($10 to non-California teachers and administrators)
Looking for good, basic handouts about state government and the legislative process? Then this binder is for you! Easy-to-duplicate handouts include:

- legislative terminology
- a diagram of the legislative process
- a step-by-step description of the process
- a sample bill with instructions on how to read legislation
- voter registration and elections information
- useful state government and political websites and much more!

"Thank you for taking the time to create and send out valuable educational materials to those who request them. Your project helps students to be better informed citizens who will be able to make educated decisions.”

California Teacher

"From my experience at the Capitol I gained insight into the politics of our state and the tremendous amount of work that it takes for our state to function.”

Student Legislative Summit Participant

An educational collaboration between California State University, Sacramento and the California State Legislature
Incorporating LegiSchool into the State’s History-Social Science Content Standards

History-Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools
Grade Twelve: Principles of American Democracy and Economics

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 LegSchool curriculum materials have been aligned with many of the social studies standards now required by the state. Below are just a few of the standards that can be met through the use of LegSchool and its curriculum materials. By using LegSchool materials, students are given the opportunity to:

12.1.6 Understand that the Bill of Rights limits the powers of the federal and state governments;

12.2.1 Discuss the meaning and importance of each of the rights guaranteed under the Bill of Rights and how each is secured;

12.2.3 Discuss the individual's legal obligations to obey the law;

12.2.4 Understand the obligations of civic-mindedness, including voting, being informed on civic issues, volunteering and performing public service;

12.3.1 Explain how civil society provides opportunities for individuals to associate for social, cultural, religious, economic, and political purposes;

12.3.3 Discuss the historical role of religion and religious diversity;

12.4 Analyze the unique roles and responsibilities of the three branches of government as established by the U.S. Constitution;

12.4.3 Identify their current representatives in the legislative branch of the national government;

12.5.1 Understand the changing interpretations of the Bill of Rights over time, including interpretations of the basic freedoms articulated in the First Amendment and the due process and equal protection of the law clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment;

12.6 Students evaluate issues regarding campaigns for national, state, and local elective offices;

12.6.3 Evaluate the roles of polls, campaign advertising, and the controversies over campaign funding;

12.6.4 Describe the means that citizens use to participate in the political process;

12.7.5 Explain how public policy is formed, including the setting of the public agenda and implementation of it through regulations and executive orders;

12.7.6 Compare the processes of lawmaking at each of the three levels of government, including the role of lobbying and the media.

For a complete list of the standards, visit the Department of Education’s website at: www.cde.ca.gov/board/pdf/history.pdf

“My students gained a sense of purpose from the Town Hall Meeting. The forum allowed students to feel that they have a strong impact and say in our state’s legislative affairs.”

Teacher and Town Hall Meeting Participant

GETTING STUDENTS INVOLVED

Simple Ideas for Engaging Students

- Have students follow the November general election. Ask students to share who they would vote for and why. What issues or ideals do the candidates represent that are appealing to students? Have the class vote in a mock election and compare results with those of the electorate.

- Offer extra credit to students who go to the polls with a parent on election day. Have students write a short essay on their impressions of the experience. Which form of ballot was used? Were they surprised by anything they saw? What impressed them most about the voting process?

- Have students draw a cartoon depicting a political issue that is important to them.

- If the legislature is in session, have students identify a bill that their Senator or Assembly Member has authored and is of concern to them. Have students research the bill by contacting the legislator’s office and asking for the person who “staffed” the bill. Students should also be able to collect the bill’s legislative history via the internet (www.sen.ca.gov or www.assembly.ca.gov). Have students write a brief history on the bill, including what motivated the legislator to author it, what does the bill propose to do, who supports/opposes it and why, and has the media responded to the bill where does it stand in the legislative process?

- Have students write a letter to their legislators or local government representatives expressing an opinion on a public policy issue that is important to them. How many students received responses back? Were students satisfied with the responses?

- Ask students to interview an elected representative and share the experience with class members. Students can “go local” and interview someone from their city council, school board or county board of supervisors or state representative (Senators and Assembly Members have district offices which might be more accessible to students than State Capitol offices).

- Have students analyze an editorial from a newspaper covering an issue that is being discussed in class. Have students summarize the editorial’s position on that issue to the class and ask them to provide their own position and/or opinion on the issue.

- Have students identify common myths about government and politicians. Then, conduct a class brainstorming session citing positive examples of how government impacts and influences our lives.

- Ask students to identify and research an elected official who they admire and the changes that person has, or desires to bring about, in his/her community.

- Have students read up on California’s three branches of government (www.leginfo.ca.gov/califleg.html) and then ask students to imagine being either a member of the legislature, governor of the state or a Supreme Court justice. Have students write down their reasons for selecting one particular branch and why they did not select one of the other two branches. Ask students to identify three public policy issues that they would want to address as a member of one of the three branches of government and explain why those issues are important to them.

- Discuss separation of powers and checks and balances with the class and explain how these principles impact how government functions. Examine the history of these principles and have students explain and provide examples of what can happen in a government that does not adhere to such principles.

“There is little hope for democracy if the hearts of men and women in democratic societies cannot be touched by a call to something greater than themselves.” Margaret Thatcher

An issues-oriented civics curriculum promoting dialogue, participation and critical thinking.
LegiSchool’s Ninth Annual Essay Contest

Drug testing students: Right or wrong?

This year’s essay contest will ask students to consider the pros and cons of drug testing at high schools. The effectiveness of random drug testing remains a contentious issue among proponents and opponents of the policy. In addition to questions surrounding the effectiveness of drug testing are concerns related to students’ civil liberties and rights to privacy. Should school administrators be able to randomly test students for drug use with or without reasonable suspicion? Should school athletes be singled out? Does drug testing belong in schools at all?

Students will be asked to share their opinions on this controversial topic. Ten winning essayists will be invited to spend a day in Sacramento at LegiSchool’s Ninth Annual Student Legislative Summit on April 7, 2005. Look for essay contest details in early November!

LegiSchool…making government relevant to young people.
Mark your calendars now for this year’s LegiSchool Town Hall Meetings! All meetings will take place at the State Capitol. To find out how to participate in a meeting, please read on.

Election 2004: What’s at stake?
October 14, 2004
In November, voters will go to the polls to determine who will lead the United States for the next four years. While the field of candidates is broad, the two major party candidates are incumbent, George W. Bush, a Republican and his challenger, U.S. Senator John Kerry, a Democrat. Many important issues are on the minds of voters this year and this Town Hall Meeting will provide students with the opportunity to voice their concerns with representatives from both parties. Students will share their thoughts on issues ranging from national security and the war in Iraq to the state of the economy and environmental issues. This meeting will enable students to make informed “voting” decisions as they learn more about the candidates seeking the presidency and the issues driving the election. Following the meeting, students will vote in a mock election. Written materials developed for the meeting will assist teachers in the classroom in simulating the voting experience as closely as possible.

Teens and Voting: Does it matter?
December 9, 2004
SB 1606 (Vasconcellos) would have allowed a person who is 14 years of age or older at the time of the next election to register and vote. The vote of a person 14 or 15 years of age would count as ¼ of a vote, and the vote of a person 16 or 17 would count as ½ of a vote. However, statistics indicate that young people between the ages of 18-24 by-and-large do not vote. If young people who are currently eligible to vote choose not to, would a bill enabling 14–17-year-olds be necessary? This meeting will examine the pros and cons of SB 1606, along with the number of young people who voted in the November 2004 election with the intention of giving participants the opportunity to discuss why young people do or do not involve themselves in one of America’s most fundamental civic duties.

Drug testing students: Right or wrong?
February 10, 2005
Currently, some school districts rely on random drug testing of students to help maintain drug-free school sites. The effectiveness of random drug testing remains a contentious issue among proponents and opponents of the policy. In addition to questions surrounding the effectiveness are concerns related to students’ civil liberties and rights to privacy. The legislature has recently addressed these issues through bills relating to random testing of high school athletes along with legislation that would prohibit drug or alcohol testing without reasonable suspicion. Do schools have the right to test students for drug or alcohol use? If so, should the policy extend to all students or just those who are suspected of use? Should athletes be singled out? Should an individual’s rights to privacy supercede a school’s attempt to maintain a drug-free environment? This meeting will give students the opportunity to share their experiences and concerns on these important issues.

Participants at this meeting will be drawn from LegiSchool’s annual essay contest.

Video games and young people: Access and rights
April 7, 2005
AB 1793 (Yee) calls for video game retailers to display signage notifying parents of the video game rating system along with information explaining the ratings. According to Assembly Member Yee, the intention of the bill is to “provide one tool for parents to help protect their children from overly violent video games.” Do violent video games contribute to aggressive behavior among young people? As a society, have we become desensitized to violence and, if so, what are the consequences of this? Would this bill be an effective tool for parents? Should government even be involved in what video games young people play or should it be left entirely up to parents and their kids?

See reverse side for information on how to watch and/or order free curriculum materials for these meetings.

How you and your students can attend a LegiSchool meeting...
LegiSchool frequently invites small groups of students from around California to participate in Town Hall Meetings. Limited travel money is available from LegiSchool for this purpose. If you are interested in bringing a group to attend a LegiSchool meeting and spend a day learning about the legislative process, please contact LegiSchool at (916) 278-6906 or send an email to legischool@csus.edu. If you are particularly interested in a specific meeting, indicate so in your email. If an opportunity arises for you and your students, you will be contacted by LegiSchool staff.

Thank you for your interest in the LegiSchool Project.
Town Hall Meeting Materials
Packet includes free video tape and curriculum guide

October 14, 2004, 1–2 p.m.
Election 2004: What’s at stake?
☐ We will view the meeting live on the California Channel.
☐ We will view the meeting on video after the broadcast.

December 9, 2004, 1–2 p.m.
Teens and Voting: Does it matter?
☐ We will view the meeting live on the California Channel.
☐ We will view the meeting on video after the broadcast.

February 10, 2005, 11 a.m.–12 p.m.
Drug testing students: Right or wrong?
☐ We will view the meeting live on the California Channel.
☐ We will view the meeting on video after the broadcast.

April 7, 2005, 1–2 p.m.
Video games and young people: Access and rights
☐ We will view the meeting live on the California Channel.
☐ We will view the meeting on video after the broadcast.

Please consider our class for an interactive role in a Town Hall Meeting.

State Government Curriculum Videos
Packet includes free video tape and Video Viewing Guide including key terms and critical thinking questions

Indicate below which materials you would like:
☐ The Lobbyist: The Power of Persuasion at Work (available in late October)
☐ The Voting Process: YOU Have the Power!
☐ The Initiative Process
☐ Checks & Balances: The Three Branches of State Government
☐ How a Bill Becomes Law
☐ A Day in the Life of a Candidate
☐ A Day in the Life of the Secretary of State
☐ A Day in the Life of the Legislature
☐ Dialogue on Freedom, A Nation Called Quest

State Government for Beginners handout binder
☐ FREE to California teachers and administrators
☐ $10 per binder for non California teachers and administrators. Please send a check in the amount of $10 payable to CSUS Foundation to the address below.

How to Order

Mail order to:

Name: ____________________________________________
School: ____________________________________________
Address: ____________________________________________
City/State/Zip: ____________________________________________
E-mail: ____________________________________________

Fax order to (916) 278-5199 (no cover sheet necessary) or send (with check if applicable) to:
LegiSchool
California State University, Sacramento
6000 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95819-6081

You can also submit your order electronically from LegiSchool’s website at: www.csus.edu/legischool