

# STRENGTHENING CIVIC EDUCATION AND EXPANDING SERVICE LEARNING

The nation depends on informed and active citizens who engage in service in all its forms. Widespread and effective civic education and service learning is an essential requirement for fostering a culture of service in which Americans can identify how their own strengths, skills, and interests could contribute to the public good by addressing needs in their communities and Nation. The Commission recommends significantly expanding civic education and service learning to ensure young people have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to participate in civic life and serve their communities and the nation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### CIVIC EDUCATION

Civic education is vital, yet inadequately funded and insufficiently practiced. To participate effectively as citizens, Americans must have basic civic knowledge of the principles of democracy, how government works, and their rights and responsibilities, and they must have the skills necessary to participate in civic life.

The Commission respects the principle of federalism and the primary role of states and school districts in setting education and curriculum priorities and encourages state and local education authorities, schools, nonprofit organizations, and institutions of higher education to explore ways to provide high-quality, research-based civic education to all students.

The Commission's proposals are designed to expand and improve civic education to ensure more young people are prepared to actively participate in civic life, including by serving their communities and the nation. To support this goal, the Commission calls on Congress to:

- **Authorize and appropriate funds for a Civic Education Fund** at the Department of Education to provide \$200 million annually in seed grants to state and local education agencies and higher education institutions promoting civic education, applied civics, and service learning, including teacher training opportunities with a portion of funds reserved for school districts in high need communities.
- **Require all states to consistently administer the national civics assessment** and make results publicly available so citizens and policymakers can assess progress and determine additional steps to strengthen civic education.
- **Authorize and appropriate funds for a new award** for outstanding states, districts, schools, teachers, and students engaged in civic education, applied civics, and service learning.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SERVICE LEARNING

Service-learning is an instructional approach that integrates classroom teaching and reflection with community service. It can be applied in virtually any class—including science and math. High-quality civic education and service-learning play a critical role in creating informed and engaged citizens who are more likely to make a positive impact on the nation and their communities by pursuing service throughout their lives. Research indicates that students who participate in service-learning demonstrate stronger academic performance and understanding of civic responsibility.



Source: National Archives, *Students learn through hands-on exploration at the National Archives.*

To strengthen the ethic of service in the nation's youth, the Commission's proposals seek to significantly expand the practice of service-learning in our nation's schools and higher education institutions. To achieve this goal, the Commission recommends Congress:

- **Authorize and appropriate funds for a Service-Learning Fund at the Corporation for National and Community Service.** This fund would provide \$250 million annually in grants to state and local education agencies, state service commissions, higher education institutions, and nonprofits to carry out service-learning programs for K-12 and postsecondary students, with at least half of funds supporting projects in economically disadvantaged communities.
- **The Service-Learning Fund would provide grants for three types of programs:**
  - Service-learning programs in public schools and institutions of higher education.
  - Summer of Service pilot programs for students who will be enrolled in grades 6–12 at the end of the summer.
  - Semester of Service pilot programs across the country for students in grades 9–12.

Incentivizing states and school districts to implement service-learning and dedicated service terms will help students cultivate important skills for future education or careers, pursue service in the future, and promote a nationwide culture of service.

For more information about the Commission's recommendations on civic education and service learning, please see Pages 13–21 of *Inspired to Serve: [The Final Report of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service](#)*.

