

U.S. Students Score Low Marks in “The Nation’s Report Card” for Civics

(Washington, DC) -- The National Assessment Governing Board released the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) “Civics Report Card” at a press conference today at the National Archives in Washington, DC.

“The Nation’s Report Card” is the only nationally representative, continuing evaluation of the condition of education in the United States and has served as a national yardstick of student achievement since 1969. The data released today provides the best available look at what students nationwide know – and don’t know – about civics.

The data revealed that only 27 percent of fourth-graders, 22 percent of eighth-graders and 24 percent of twelfth-graders scored proficient or higher in civics – meaning that millions of young Americans will be unprepared to be the informed and engaged citizens a healthy democracy requires.

Scores were even lower for low-income and minority students, with black students scoring on average, 24 to 30 points lower than their white counterparts. This persistent civic achievement gap undermines the equality of all citizens.

The data on the whole was nearly identical to that of the 1998 and 2006 Civics NAEPs, demonstrating a lack of progress in educating for democracy for more than a decade. For twelfth graders, slight declines in test scores illustrate that our high schools are not making progress in civic learning. Retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor said the results demand the nation’s attention and a concerted effort to reverse the decline in our national civic awareness.

“The scores from the Nation’s Report Card on Civics and Government are truly disappointing,” she said. “The scores reveal a very disturbing lack of basic knowledge of our system of government and how and why citizens must be engaged. The Report is a clarion call for action to restore the civic mission of our nation’s schools. We can and must do better in providing civic education to all of our nation’s school students.”

Ted McConnell, Executive Director of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, shared Justice O’Connor’s sentiment: “These results are deeply worrisome for all who care about our democracy, but there is a way out. Local, state, and federal education policymakers can and must restore the civic mission of schools as a cornerstone of American education policy.”

The full data from the 2010 Civics NAEP is available at <<http://nationsreportcard.gov/>>.

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools is a coalition of over sixty organizations committed to improving the quality and quantity of civic learning in American schools. The Campaign’s goal is to increase and improve civic learning in grades K-12 through changes in local, state, and national education policy, more information may be found at <www.civicmissionofschools.org>.