In the public debate about school improvement, we rarely step back to consider a crucial underlying question: What do we want for our children? There is a tendency among reformers to view job preparation as the primary goal of education, ignoring the vital role it plays in promoting democracy and developing well-rounded individuals. Obviously, career readiness is important, but we should adopt two other central goals in educating young people: to spur their active civic participation and to enable them to lead full lives made rich by learning. All three of these goals are equally valid.

Goal 1: Job Preparation

National and international tests have shown that our country has much work to do if we are to stay competitive and fulfill the promise of good jobs awaiting students upon graduation.
For more about the problem of low performance, see Have High-Stakes Testing and Privatization Been Effective?

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy; the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics; and the frameworks, curricula, and materials based on these standards have identified college and career preparation as a primary goal of public education. Yet it is important to recognize that math and reading scores offer only limited information about a student's readiness for college and career. Other subject areas are equally important, as are twenty-first-century skills like communication, collaboration, and creativity, particularly in solving unique problems. Also essential are the inter- and intrapersonal skills of perseverance, social intelligence, and knowing how to learn.

The Common Core State Standards; the new Next Generation Science Standards; and recent standards-based mathematics, language arts, science, and history-social studies frameworks have all begun to encourage the broadening of instruction. New standards and frameworks also emphasize the importance of being well read and having deep knowledge across disciplines. These supporting documents now incorporate the practices of problem solving, explanation, modeling, written and oral communication and discussion, and collaboration.

Goal 2: Active Civic Participation

Things are more dismal on the education-for-democracy front. Many reformers have so enshrined the importance of choice, privatization, and job preparation that they ignore the widely accepted purposes that have traditionally sustained free, public education in this country. From the very beginning of our experiment in democracy, from early champions like Jefferson, Franklin, and Adams, civic education and nation building were major reasons people supported public schools. They were, after all, called “free common schools”; people widely endorsed the ideal of all students having a shared sense of national identity. Unfortunately, this view of education has recently fallen on hard times. Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, has written a splendid article on this point. For more on the subject, also see the report coauthored by Stanford professor William Damon and the wonderful section on the history of public education in Dana Goldstein's book, The Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession. See also the opinion piece in The Seattle Times by former US representative George R. Nethercutt Jr. on some of the bipartisan national efforts encouraging civic engagement.

Currently, several national efforts are under way that focus on revitalizing civic education. Among these are the jCivics organization, founded by retired US Supreme Court justice Sandra Day O’Connor and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, which produced an excellent report, Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools. The report identifies six proven practices of effective civic education:
1. **Classroom Instruction** Provide engaging instruction in civics and government, history, economics, geography, law, and democracy that goes beyond rote memorization.

2. **Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Issues** Incorporate discussion of current events and issues—local, national, and international—especially those that are relevant to students’ lives.

3. **Service-Learning** Design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.

4. **Extracurricular Activities** Give students opportunities to work together toward common goals outside the classroom.

5. **School Governance** Help students learn responsibility by giving them a voice in the management of their schools and classrooms.

6. **Simulations of Democratic Processes** Encourage students to participate in simulations of democratic processes and procedures such as formal debates, voting, mock trials, or Model United Nations.

Aligned with these six research-based practices, the *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools* has been designed to make civic education relevant and meaningful for young people. My colleagues and I recognize that each generation must be persuaded of the benefits of democracy and the need to guard against the erosion of its principles and protections. Understanding how our democracy evolved is a crucial educational goal. The framework has many suggestions for making abstract concepts concrete—free speech, press, and religion; free, fair elections, and a broad franchise; due process; and the rule of law. Students grasp the importance of these constitutional guarantees when they are examined in the context of the historic abuses they remedied. The framework gives equal weight to examples from world history in which human rights were systematically destroyed by totalitarian governments such as those headed by Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Castro, and Pol Pot—despots who overthrew or ignored democratic rule with terrible consequences for their populations and the world. The framework also calls for students to learn about current dictators who squelch democratic development or impose authoritarian rule.

Making civic education relevant is particularly important when discussing current events and controversial issues. If we want students to become involved and register to vote when they are 18, schools must help them understand how their act of voting contributes to preserving our democracy. I witnessed an interesting example of this need during a visit to an inner-city 12th-grade class in Sacramento. When I asked how many were 18, about two-thirds of the 30 students raised their hands. This is how the conversation unfolded:

“How many of you 18-year-olds are registered to vote?” Only two raised their hands.

“Why not,” I asked the others.
“Because it doesn't matter.”

Given that it is extremely rare for a contest to be won by a single vote, the students were too streetwise and too savvy to believe the shibboleth that one person’s vote could determine the outcome of an election. I agreed but offered a counterargument. Voting is a collective pact with fellow citizens, especially those who want the same things you want. If members of your group all agree to vote, then your positions will be better represented; if you stay home, people with different interests will certainly prevail.

The students thought my argument made sense, but they said no one had made that case to them before. This perfectly illustrates the need for convincing the next generation that it takes their personal involvement to sustain a democracy. At the close of the Constitutional Convention, a woman approached Benjamin Franklin to ask him what sort of government the delegates had proposed—a monarchy or a republic. Franklin responded: “A republic, Madam, if you can keep it.” That sentiment is just as true today.

Florida is among several states that have passed bipartisan legislation supporting efforts that bolster civic education. In California, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson sponsored the California Task Force on K–12 Civic Learning, which produced a blueprint for action in the state and a follow-up Power of Democracy website. I was privileged to serve on the task force. Key players from the group are now organizing county committees composed of educators, political representatives, and business leaders to advocate for greater inclusion of civic education in schools. Civic education needs to be reinstated as a major aim of our schools.

### Goal 3: Leading a Full Life

Discussion of the third important purpose of education—to enrich every child’s life—has virtually disappeared from public discussion about schooling. Historically, it was one of the major rationales for providing a liberal education for all in the sense of helping students reach their potential and develop crucial character traits. Fareed Zakaria recently offered a detailed explication of this idea in his book *In Defense of a Liberal Education*. See also the previously cited section in Goldstein’s *The Teacher Wars*.

Daniel DeNicola contends that a liberal education has transformative power. In his *Learning to Flourish: A Philosophical Exploration of Liberal Education*, he interprets it through the lens of five paradigms:

1. Transmission of our culture since cultural ideas, literature, stories, and our core values are potent tools to help our children live a richer, more rewarding life, build character, and assist them in becoming what used to be called “a good person”
2. Self-actualization or helping each student reach his or her potential and develop
unique talents and interests
3. Understanding how the world works and how the people in it interact, especially in the area of developing perspective
4. Engagement with the world, which includes the type of democratic participation discussed earlier, and encouragement of both individual and collective participation; and
5. The skills of learning including self-monitoring, working in groups, being able to judge the quality and reliability of information, and understanding how different disciplines view the world

DeNicola combines these five into the general goal of helping each student learn to flourish. Evaluating school quality based solely on the results of reading and math tests distracts us from this worthy aim. In his book, DeNicola also rebuts critics of the liberal arts who negatively influence educator and public attitudes by claiming, among other things, the illegitimacy of a common cultural heritage.

MindShift, the always thought-provoking website sponsored by KQED in San Francisco, recently published an article about Scott Seider’s book Character Compass: How Powerful School Culture Can Point Students to Success. The article explains how Seider determined which character education strategies had the greatest success: “Seider gave students at all three schools a character survey at the beginning of the school year and again at the end with questions meant to measure empathy, integrity (strengths he defines as moral character), perseverance, daring/courage (which he defines as performance character), social responsibility and school connectedness (which he defines as ethical character).” Seider found that perseverance and school connectedness produced the best results.

Marc Tucker, president of the National Center for Education and the Economy, is another eloquent advocate for a broader approach to public education. In a blog, he explains why economic preparation is not enough:
But I want much more than that [education for jobs]. I want graduates who have a good command of the great sweep of history, who not only know what happened at critical junctures in history but who understand the interplay of factors that produced those turning points and can draw from that understanding of history the implications for the conflicts and choices the United States must now deal with. I want students who understand how and why liberty and freedom developed in some societies and not others, how fragile that achievement can be and what it takes to preserve freedom and democratic government when it is under attack. I want students who are not only familiar with the greatest works of art that humans have ever created, but have also gained the skills needed to create art and play music themselves. I want students who are good not just at solving problems someone else has defined for them, but who can frame problems for themselves in forms that make those problems solvable. I want graduates who will take the initiative and get it done without the need of detailed supervision. I want students who are good team members and good leaders. I want students who know the difference between right and wrong and who will do what is right whether or not anyone is looking. I want students who can think for themselves, who can think out of the box, who can look at a complex problem and solve it by bringing to bear an angle of vision on that problem that is fresh and original. I want graduates who are eager to learn from others but not cowed by authority. I want graduates who are not afraid to be wrong, but who work hard at getting it right. I want students who are not only tolerant of others who are different but who value those differences. I want graduates who set high standards for themselves and never give up until they reach them. I want students who are ambitious but will stop to help others who need help. I want graduates who think of themselves not as consumers but as contributors.

The idea of broadening educational goals has become much more widespread. If we were to use all three goals of education as the drivers of school improvement efforts, our approach to building better schools would shift dramatically. Recognizing that the true measures of success go beyond scores on tests has significant implications. It means we must adopt proven strategies to upgrade curriculum, enhance classroom instruction, rethink assessments, and altogether re-envision accountability.

Recent Developments


BBS Companion Article

**The Big Picture**

*Have High Stakes Testing and Privatization Been Effective?*

Reference Notes
Goal 2: Active Civic Participation


iCivics. https://www.icivics.org/


Goal 3: Leading a Full Life


