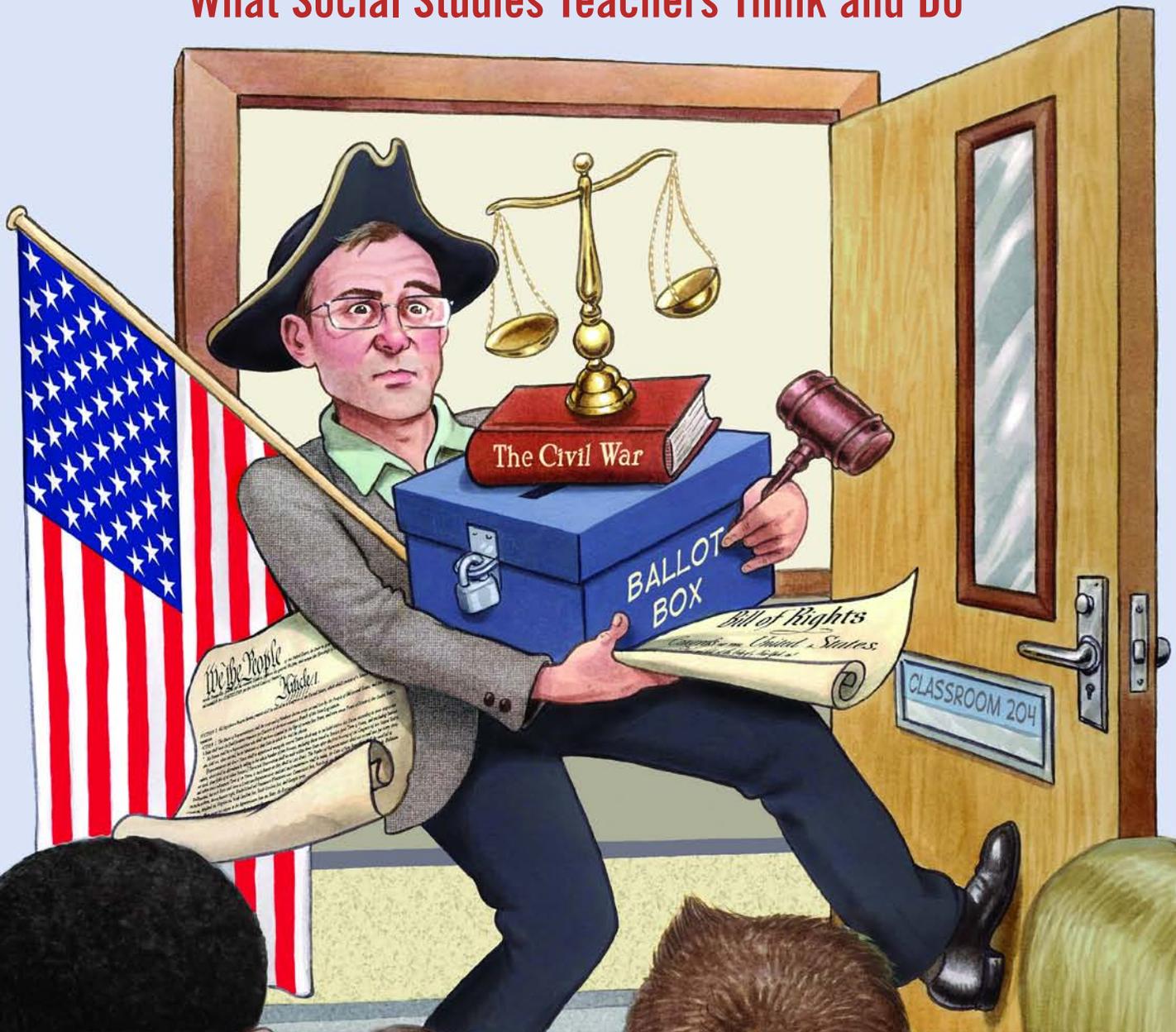


# High Schools, Civics, and Citizenship

What Social Studies Teachers Think and Do



Conducted by the FDR Group for the  
**AEI Program on American Citizenship**

Foreword by Frederick M. Hess, Gary J. Schmitt, Cheryl Miller, and Jenna M. Schuette



September 2010

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of FDR Group

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**American Citizenship**

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## Foreword

Notwithstanding all the studies and data on schooling today, one has to go back more than a decade—to the 1998 Public Agenda study *A Lot to Be Thankful For*—for a serious attempt to examine what parents think public schools should teach children about citizenship. The annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup poll on schooling has not asked questions about citizenship since 2000. When these questions were last addressed, respondents chose “prepar[ing] people to become responsible citizens” as the least important purpose of schooling—behind such goals as “enhanc[ing] people’s happiness and enrich[ing] their lives” and “dispel[ling] inequities in education among certain schools and certain groups.”

Given this paucity of research, the AEI Program on American Citizenship sought to investigate what our schools are teaching today about citizenship. To aid us in this effort, we turned to the teachers most directly charged with educating and shaping America’s young citizens—high school history and social studies teachers. And when it comes to finding out what teachers think, there may be no better research team in America than the pollsters/analysts Steve Farkas and Ann Duffett.

This report is based on the views, thoughts, and frontline observations of our nation’s high school history and social studies teachers. Farkas and Duffett surveyed more than one thousand public and private school teachers, and they conducted three focus groups with teachers in various communities across the country. What they found proved to be both surprising and predictable, somewhat reassuring but also unsettling.

In general, the report points to the fact that while teachers’ priorities and values largely reflect those of the general public, their efforts to convey that knowledge to students are falling short of their own

expectations. This lack of confidence would certainly appear justified, if the poor results of the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress are any guide. In marked contrast to their private counterparts, public school teachers believe that social studies is losing ground to other subject areas and that civics in particular is being neglected by their schools. And, finally, teachers appear uncertain about what the precise content of a proper civic education should be—emphasizing notions of tolerance and rights, while giving less attention to history, facts, and key constitutional concepts such as the separation of powers.

\* \* \*

First, the good news: the survey results are fairly promising in terms of public values and how teachers view America. They seem to reflect what most Americans would regard as a vision of responsible citizenship—with 83 percent of the teachers surveyed seeing the United States as a unique country that stands for something special in the world. At the same time, 82 percent of survey respondents say students should be taught to “respect and appreciate their country but know its shortcomings.” Despite all of the concerns about anti-American sentiment in schools of education, just 1 percent of teachers want students to learn “that the U.S. is a fundamentally flawed country.” This sounds, to our ears, like a near pitch-perfect rendition of what parents, voters, and taxpayers would hope for—schools where students learn that America is exceptional even as they learn about its failures.

Teachers working with immigrants and English Language Learners (ELL) voice a particular need to teach their students to appreciate America and its culture. Fully 82 percent of teachers believe it is

especially important to teach foreign-born students to value the United States and the meaning of citizenship, and 89 percent of teachers working with ELL students say the same.

Second, when asked what content, skills, or knowledge are most important, teachers rank the guarantees of the Bill of Rights at the top, whereas concepts like federalism and the separation of powers and key periods like the American Founding fare less well. Students appear to be receiving instruction on those things that embody a certain spirit of America, but not on how that spirit is translated into actual governance. Similarly, only 50 percent of teachers think it essential for students to know “economic principles like supply and demand,” and just 36 percent think it essential that they know facts and dates (like the location of the fifty states or the date of the attack on Pearl Harbor). This strikes us as a case of teachers setting a remarkably low bar for what they expect their students to learn.

Third, teachers’ observations of what students are and are not learning are disconcerting indeed. When asked whether they are “very confident” that students have mastered important content and skills, only 24 percent of teachers indicate that their students can identify the protections in the Bill of Rights when they graduate high school, 15 percent think that their students understand concepts such as federalism and the separation of powers, and 11 percent believe their students understand the basics of the free market.

Fourth, private schools may be better at fostering citizenship and civic virtues. Despite all the popular assertions that private schooling cannot serve public purposes, the data suggest that public and private educators have similar values and goals. At the same time, the nature of the private school environment appears to be more conducive to achieving these civic ends. Take this striking finding: 43 percent of private school teachers say that most students in their high school graduate having learned “to be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves,” compared with just 19 percent of their public school counterparts. Indeed, private school

teachers appear to be much more confident that their graduates are learning the things that both groups of teachers say they want students to learn.

Finally, social studies teachers feel marginalized in the testing era. Seventy percent of them say their subject is a lower priority because of pressure to show progress in math and language arts. More than four in ten blame No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for deemphasizing their subject. Of course, the reality is that NCLB has had far more of an impact on elementary and middle schools than on high schools, so teachers may merely see the law as a visible, convenient villain. Nonetheless, 93 percent of teachers want social studies to be part of their state’s testing system.

\* \* \*

In some respects, the survey’s key findings are not altogether unexpected. Over the last decade, and especially since the passage of NCLB, Americans have increasingly come to speak of education as “the new civil right.” This has usefully focused educators, advocates, and policymakers on student achievement and school records in preparing their charges for careers or entrance to college. However, this healthy emphasis on academic skills and training has come with the unfortunate consequence of devaluing civic education.

From the dawn of the Western tradition, as seen in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, education has been regarded as essential to the formation of good citizens and the cultivation of a proper attachment to the state. For American Founders Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, and Thomas Jefferson, one of the main functions of schools was producing democratic citizens. In Rush’s telling phrase, schools should mold “republican machines” who will support and defend their nation.

In recent decades, however, as education has come to be seen as the path to personal and professional advancement, the private purposes of schooling have been assigned higher priority. We see this crystallized in President Barack Obama’s oft-repeated goal to ensure that all students are

“college- or career-ready” by 2020. As the tangible economic benefits of schooling have become central to policy thinking, the teaching of citizenship has become increasingly peripheral.

When citizenship is spoken of today, it is often in a “transactional” sense—with citizenship understood as the basket of skills and attitudes (how to shake hands, speak properly, and be punctual) that will help students attend prestigious colleges and obtain desirable jobs. There was a temporary exception to this tendency following the attacks of 9/11, when politicians, teachers, and parents were briefly awakened to the importance of teaching students their privileges and responsibilities as American citizens. But the enthusiasm for this project soon waned and was quickly swept aside by the increased focus on proficiency and graduation rates.

Americans have entered the twenty-first century, an epoch punctuated by debates over immigration, religious tolerance, and the role of government, with their schools devoting remarkably little attention to the formation of sound democratic citizens. A focus on academic performance, along with concerns about provoking controversy, have in many places demoted talk of citizenship to assemblies, ceremonies, or the occasional social studies lesson.

We believe this report captures, from the perspective of teachers, these problematic trends.

This report is, however, only a beginning. Our hope is that this study will lead to a larger effort to rethink and reinvigorate the civic mission of schools. As history teaches us only too well, democracy is not self-perpetuating. If we believe good citizenship matters—if it is not just a means to help students graduate and get good jobs—then we need to value it. It should not be justified only in terms of student achievement, but because it is what holds this country together.

\* \* \*

Many people played important roles in developing this report. First and foremost, we thank our advisory board, including David Campbell, James W. Ceaser, Lily Eskelsen, Chester E. Finn Jr., Meira Levinson, Tom Loveless, Andrew Rotherham, and Jon Zimmerman, for their thoughtful guidance and feedback on the survey and its results. We are also grateful to the AEI publications staff and Sam Whitehead for their assistance in the production of this report. Finally, we thank the S. D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation and Gordon and Adele Binder for the financial resources that made this study possible.



## Executive Summary

“History is who we are and why we are the way we are,” said David McCullough, perhaps America’s most celebrated popular historian. From a nation’s history, to its economic structure, politics, and constitutional order, a teacher can inspire appreciation or revulsion, mindless conformism or gratuitous agitation, boredom or wonder. Social studies teachers are uniquely positioned to frame and inform students’ outlook about the nation, to tell the story of who we are.

This study revolves around an essential question: what are teachers trying to teach our youth about citizenship and what it means to be an American? The findings are based on a national, random sample survey of 866 public high school social studies teachers, an oversample survey of 245 Catholic and private high school social studies teachers, and three focus groups. Social studies teachers are excellent sources of information for this type of research. They are in the trenches, and they can report not only on their own attitudes, priorities, and behaviors, but also on what is actually happening in high schools and school districts.

Here is what we learned:

***Teacher attitudes and values appear to be in step with those of ordinary Americans writ large.***

- Fully 83 percent of teachers believe that the United States is a “unique country that stands for something special in the world”; 11 percent see it as just another country, no better and no worse than others. Likewise, in a 1998 survey of the general public, 84 percent of respondents said that “the U.S. is a unique country that stands for something special in the world.”

- Eighty-two percent of teachers think it is most important for high school students to “respect and appreciate their country but know its shortcomings.” Again, the general public agrees: in 2002, 90 percent said it was better to include the bad and the good—“warts and all”—when teaching American history.
- About 3 in 4 teachers (76 percent) say that high schools should impart respect for military service.

***Teachers may be setting too low a bar for what they expect students to know about American history and government.***

- Teaching facts is the lowest priority for social studies teachers when it comes to instruction in citizenship. Of the five priorities high schools may have around the teaching of citizenship, only 20 percent of teachers put teaching key facts, dates, and major events at the top of their list. Furthermore, it is the last of twelve items rated by teachers as absolutely essential to teach high school students: only 36 percent say it is absolutely essential to teach students “to know facts (e.g., location of the fifty states) and dates (e.g., Pearl Harbor).”
- Out of a list of twelve items, social studies teachers are most likely to say it is absolutely essential for high schools to teach students “to identify the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights” (83 percent).

- Other essential concepts of how the American political system functions garner less enthusiasm. Six in ten deem it absolutely essential for high schools to teach students “to understand such concepts as federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances” (64 percent) and “to be knowledgeable about such periods as the American Founding, the Civil War, and the Cold War” (63 percent).
- Are today’s high school students actually reading the nation’s keystone documents? When asked how close this statement comes to their view—“By graduation, virtually all students in my high school have carefully read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution”—56 percent of teachers say it comes close to their view, but 40 percent say it does not.
- Finally, teachers’ reliance on textbooks appears to be on the decline. Two out of three (67 percent) say they rely on them “less and less” in their classrooms.

***Teachers are not confident that students are learning.***

- The news is either extremely dire or mildly reassuring, depending on how one reads the data. If the “somewhat confident” and “very confident” categories are combined, 50 percent or more of teachers are confident that most students graduate from their high school knowing eleven of the twelve items concerning citizenship (see table 1).
- But if only the “very confident” responses are considered—that is, using a higher threshold—the results are grim. Across all items, no more than 24 percent of teachers say they are “very confident” that

most of the students from their high school have actually learned them before they graduate. For example:

- “To identify the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights”: 79 percent are confident when the “very” and “somewhat” categories are combined, but just 24 percent are “very confident.”
- “To have good work habits such as being timely, persistent, and hard-working”: 50 percent are confident when the “very” and “somewhat” categories are combined, but just 6 percent are “very confident.”

***Social studies teachers believe their subject area is not viewed as a top priority—and testing is partly to blame.***

- Forty-five percent say their school district treats social studies as “an absolutely essential subject area,” while 43 percent say it is considered “important but not essential.”
- More than four in ten (45 percent) say the social studies curriculum at their high school has been deemphasized as a result of NCLB, though 39 percent say it is “holding its own.”
- Seven in ten (70 percent) say social studies classes are a lower priority because of pressure to show progress on statewide math and language arts tests.
- Yet social studies teachers want to hop on the testing bandwagon: 93 percent say “social studies should be part of every state’s set of standards and testing.”

***Public and private school teachers share remarkably similar views when it comes to what it means to be an American and what students should learn about citizenship . . .***

- Public and private school teachers give remarkably similar rankings to these five possible priorities that high schools may have around the teaching of citizenship:
  - “Internalizing core values like tolerance and equality” (49 percent public versus 54 percent private rank it first or second in priority)
  - “Promoting civic behaviors such as voting and community service” (49 percent versus 44 percent)
  - “Instilling good work habits” (46 percent versus 41 percent)
  - “Understanding the key principles of American government” (38 percent versus 43 percent)
  - “Teaching key facts, dates and major events” (20 percent versus 19 percent)

***. . . but they differ enormously in their day-to-day experiences and their assessment of school atmosphere.***

- While just under half (45 percent) of public school teachers say social studies is considered an absolutely essential subject area in their district, two out of three private school teachers (68 percent) say this is true for them.
- Private school teachers are almost twice as likely to report having a great deal of control over what topics they choose to cover

and how quickly or slowly they move through the curriculum (86 percent versus 45 percent).

- Private school teachers report significantly higher levels of confidence that most students in their high schools learn what they are supposed to before they graduate. This confidence differential is especially stark on items pertaining to the implicit curriculum, such as teaching good work habits and respect for authority. For example:
  - “To have good work habits such as being timely, persistent, and hard-working” garners 31 percent “very confident” responses among private school teachers, compared with 6 percent among public.
  - “To be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves” garners 43 percent “very confident” among private, compared with 19 percent among public.
- Private school teachers are also more likely to report an overall more positive school atmosphere for conveying the importance of citizenship:
  - Their high school has a community-service requirement for graduation (82 percent versus 37 percent).
  - Their administration maintains a school atmosphere where adults are respected (88 percent versus 65 percent).
  - Their high school encourages involvement in student government and other issues-oriented clubs (91 percent versus 73 percent).



## Introduction

“History is who we are and why we are the way we are,” said David McCullough, perhaps America’s most celebrated popular historian. From a nation’s history to its economic structure, politics, and constitutional order, a teacher can inspire appreciation or revulsion, mindless conformism or gratuitous agitation, boredom or wonder. Social studies teachers are uniquely positioned to frame and inform students’ outlook about the nation, to tell the story of who we are.

This study revolves around an essential question: what are teachers trying to teach our youth about citizenship and what it means to be an American? The findings are based on a national, random sample survey of 866 public high school social studies teachers, an oversample survey of 245 Catholic and private high school social studies teachers, and three focus groups.<sup>1</sup> Social studies teachers are excellent sources of information for this type of research. They are in the trenches, and they can report not only on their own attitudes, priorities, and behaviors, but also on what is actually happening in high schools and school districts.

The terrain these teachers work in can be precarious. It is easy to imagine how parental sensitivities might be irritated enough by discussions of electoral politics, war, or social issues such as religion or abortion to bring them to the school door. This does not mean that social studies teachers try to denude lessons of the passions of politics and history. On the contrary, they appear eager to connect real-life events to their lessons as a way of sparking student interest. In this study, virtually all (94 percent) say they use controversies in current events as teaching opportunities; just 3 percent say they avoid them “as much as possible.”

Perhaps because they are aware of their communities’ sensibilities, the social studies teachers in our focus groups spoke disapprovingly about colleagues who pontificate in the classroom. Such teachers are seen not only as courting trouble, but also as violating a trust. In the survey, 35 percent say too many of their colleagues use their classes as a “soap box” to push personal points of view.

This report aims to answer some of the following questions:

- What is the personal orientation of social studies teachers toward their nation—and what do they try to convey to their students?
- What do social studies teachers believe are the key rights, responsibilities, and behaviors of American citizenship that high school students should internalize?
- What concepts and facts about the American political system and history merit learning—and how confident are teachers that most of the students from their high schools actually learn these concepts before they graduate?
- How have social studies subjects fared in the era of NCLB?
- How do public and private school social studies teachers compare in terms of their orientation, values, experiences, and goals?

## Finding 1: Appreciate the Nation; Recognize Its Flaws

### Know the United States Is a Special Place . . .

The broad sentiment high school social studies teachers hold toward citizenship—and the one they try to convey to their students—is that to be an American is to belong to a nation that is special but also has its share of flaws. This orientation, a sort of critical affection, seems to align with the sensibilities of parents and the general public.

Fully 83 percent of social studies teachers believe that the United States is a unique country that stands for something special in the world; 11 percent see it as just another country, no better and no worse than others. This finding is remarkably close to the results of a study of parents with children in public schools conducted over a decade ago.<sup>2</sup> In that survey, 84 percent said they believed the United States stands for something special in the world, while only 13 percent saw it as just another country, no better or worse than others.

[The United States] is the only country where Israelis and Palestinians can live neighborhood to neighborhood, there's no bombs going off, no rockets being fired. It is very unique here. We have such a mixture of people.

—New Jersey teacher

This appreciative sentiment carries through to concrete issues, such as how we should view the military. About three in four social studies teachers (76 percent)—and an even higher percentage of those who teach ELL students (84 percent)—say that respect for military service is something high schools should impart. This finding may be strongly influenced by current events and experiences that hit close to home. Sadly, in each focus

group conducted for this project, at least one teacher spoke about having a former student who had served in the military and been killed in the line of duty. Each used this experience to communicate to students the importance and value of military service.

I've already been to three student funerals who have died in the Marines. . . . Do it because it's something you truly believe in, because all three of the [funerals] I've been to have been for kids who truly believed that [service] was their way of being involved. It was an ideal, it wasn't cash, it was "This is what I should do."

—Arizona teacher

In the morning, if they have [the] Pledge of Allegiance or play the national anthem, I will not let a student sit down. . . . I've had various students who have gone into the military. I say [to students], "If anything, you are going to respect their service." . . . A month ago when one of my students died in Iraq . . . the whole school went out into the street. It had to be one of the greatest days in the school, because you saw the school come out and give thanks to that student for his service.

—New Jersey teacher

According to social studies teachers, most schools do signal the implicit message of loyalty to the nation during school activities. About eight in ten (79 percent) say it is typical for their high school to play the national anthem at schoolwide assemblies or sports and cultural events.

**. . . But Also Have a Critical Eye**

Yet even as America’s social studies teachers seek to foster attachment to the nation, they want students to know that the nation has sometimes fallen short of its ideals. Social studies teachers overwhelmingly (82 percent) say that it is most important for high school students to “respect and appreciate their country but know its shortcomings.” Few—only 11 percent—would rather their students simply absorb an uncritical “love of their country.” Once again, the orientation of teachers aligns with that of the public: only 9 percent of Americans say that when teaching history to students in middle and high school it is better to place the country in the best possible light; instead, 90 percent think it is better to teach the bad and the good, warts and all.<sup>3</sup>

I want them to feel pride in their country, but I also want them to recognize that there is definitely room for improvement, that we’re not perfect, but ideologically, we stand for something special and unique—ideologically.  
—Arizona teacher

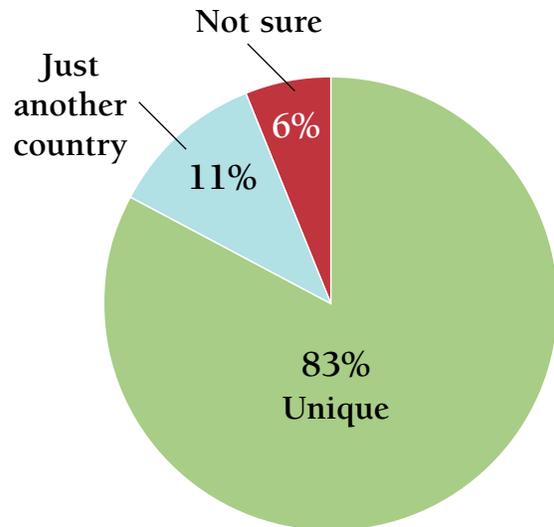
Even a third option that offers safely neutral ground drew few takers: only 6 percent want their students to “think of the U.S. analytically, without sentiment.” Virtually no teachers (1 percent) want students to learn “that the U.S. is a fundamentally flawed country.” In fact, throughout all our research with social studies teachers—including focus groups, phone interviews, and survey responses—we did not find a contingent of alienated teachers supremely disappointed in their country.<sup>4</sup>

**“Whose Agenda Is This?”**

In keeping with this eyes-wide-open sensibility, social studies teachers instruct their students to question what they read and listen to statements from authority figures with discriminating judgment, not mechanical acceptance. More than eight

FIGURE 1  
**IS THE UNITED STATES UNIQUE  
OR JUST ANOTHER COUNTRY?**

*Which of the following comes CLOSER to your own view about the United States?*



NOTE: Percentages for all figures may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or omission of answer categories. Question wording may be edited for space. Full question wording and complete survey responses are available in appendix 1. Small discrepancies between percentages in the text and figures are due to rounding.

in ten (84 percent) say the following statement comes “very close” to their own view: “Students must learn to critically evaluate information for credibility and bias—it’s a crucial citizenship skill.” Almost none (2 percent) disagree.

The questioning aspect is very important. In regards to critical thinking . . . you need to also view things from what agenda is this. I even teach my students, “Well, we are reading this. Do you think this is true? Do you think this point of view could be different for other people from another viewpoint?”  
—Virginia teacher

With so much peer pressure, kids tend to follow like sheep. . . . There's so much out there that's biased that they need to be able to sort through the material and actually come up with their own answers.

—Arizona teacher

I like them to question. Just because I am the teacher, that doesn't mean I am right, even if it is something factual. Question me. But do it properly. There's always a right way to question

somebody, including your parents. Don't just sit there.

—New Jersey teacher

Helping students develop a critical perspective is one thing; teaching them to actively contest the rules of the system is another. Most teachers do not think it is their role to teach the latter; just 37 percent consider it absolutely essential for their high schools to teach students to be activists who “challenge the status quo.”

## Finding 2: The Meaning of Citizenship: What Is on the Agenda

A large portion of the survey was dedicated to capturing what social studies teachers think they should convey to students. Given the chance to pick their teaching priorities, teachers indicate a broad agenda. From teaching principles of government, to fostering civic engagement, to instilling good work habits, they identify an array of important, contending goals. The results show that teaching the values and behaviors of citizenship attracts overwhelming support, while teaching cognitive elements fares less well.

“internalizing core values like tolerance and equality,” and another 46 percent say the priority should be “instilling good work habits.” A lesser percentage (38 percent) says it is to teach an “understanding of the key principles of American government.” The priority garnering weakest support is “teaching key facts, dates, and major events”—only 20 percent rank this as first or second in importance.

### A Full Plate

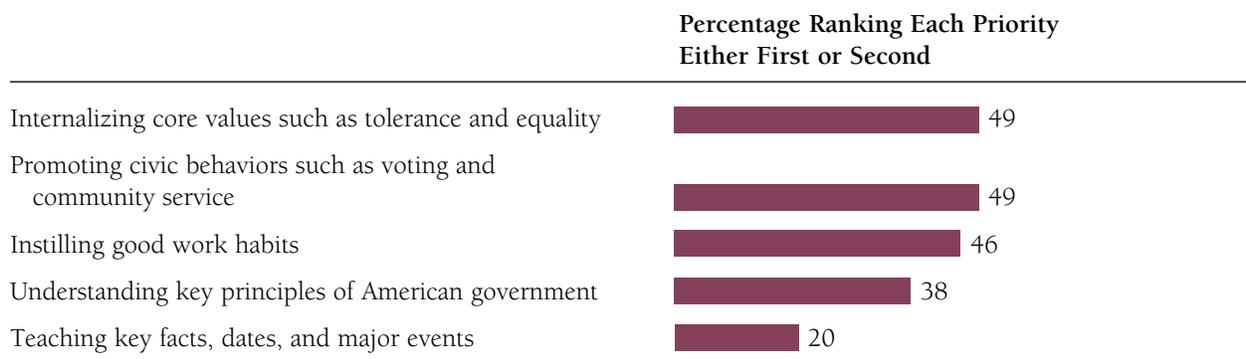
Asked to rank five broad priorities for what high schools should focus on vis-à-vis citizenship, nearly half (49 percent) of those surveyed give top billing to “promoting civic behaviors such as voting and community service,” ranking it first or second in importance.<sup>5</sup> The same percentage (49 percent) prioritizes

### The Responsibilities of Citizenship

The survey asked teachers to elaborate on this question: what are the specific characteristics, behaviors, and knowledge of citizenship you try to impart to your students? The list is long and thorough. Nearly eight in ten (78 percent) say it is absolutely essential to teach high school students “to embrace the responsibilities of citizenship such as voting and jury duty.”

FIGURE 2  
A BROAD AGENDA

*Please RANK the following five priorities that high schools may have around the teaching of citizenship in order of highest to lowest, with one being what you think should be the highest priority and five the lowest.*



I definitely think getting them educated to participate politically, rather than just going in and voting for somebody because they were the better-looking candidate. . . . I do have seniors and some of them are eighteen either when the school year starts or do turn eighteen over the course of that year, so I do encourage them to register to vote. . . . I offer extra credit.

—Arizona teacher

Another 86 percent say they make it clear to their students that they “expect them to read the news and stay informed about current events.” Interestingly, while large majorities of social studies teachers share this point of view, veteran teachers with twenty-plus years in the classroom are more likely to feel this way than newcomers (92 percent, compared with 78 percent of teachers with fewer than five years of experience).

Whatever’s current, in the news and on TV, I try to relate to that and bring some relationship to what they’re seeing inside the District [of Columbia] and in their communities themselves, on how they govern themselves, to try to get some identity. So that way they can feel part of society as citizens.

—Virginia teacher

We lost all of our state aid, so they are looking to cut extracurriculars and do a pay-to-play. And that very much affects the kids. So all of a sudden at the board meetings you see lots of students. We talk about voting for the budget, and how voting for your council members and mayor lots of times affects your life a lot more than voting for Obama. They have a responsibility to voice their concerns because it directly affects them.

—New Jersey teacher

By design or habit, public high schools promote a complementary atmosphere that reinforces the expectations of citizen behavior in a democracy. For example,

73 percent of teachers say their high school encourages involvement in student government, debates, and issues-oriented clubs and organizations.

Having elections for student government is really important and something that they participate in. All of our government classes require their kids to go to a teen court or go watch a court thing at least once a semester.

—Arizona teacher

We do field trips to New York so we can show them what the immigrant experience is as a citizen, becoming a citizen. We had a Baptist church come out and protest our school, so we actually led a counterprotest which was completely peaceful.<sup>6</sup> The kids were the ones who organized it. The kids did all of the banners, all the music. We actually try and make them citizens.

—Virginia teacher

A sizable majority (57 percent) want high school students “to see themselves as global citizens living in an interconnected world.” Much of the focus-group discussions on this point revolved around a world that is increasingly connected through technology and the Internet and the need for cooperation to deal with international issues such as the environment.

As one of their projects they have to pick a global issue as it pertains to anything. They can pick the green revolution, AIDS, we have one kid who picked Levis and how jeans have revolutionized trade. They have to apply it to a first-world, second-world, and third-world country.

—Virginia teacher

Fully 55 percent of teachers say, “Our high school encourages students to take personal responsibility for protecting the environment.” But a smaller proportion (43 percent) says it is absolutely essential to teach students “to develop habits of community service such as volunteering and raising money for causes.”

## Finding 3: The Implicit Curriculum

### Values and Work Habits

Those who study educational systems draw on the concept of the “implicit curriculum”: the expectations schools have for students that go beyond the content of textbooks and lesson plans. The findings from the survey and focus groups clearly show that teachers seek to impart certain behaviors and values connected to work habits, respect for authority, and acceptance of diversity.

#### “You’ve Got to Get the Job Done”

Teaching high school students “to have good work habits such as being timely, persistent, and hard-working” is prized by social studies teachers, with 80 percent calling it something absolutely essential for their schools to teach students. About three in four (76 percent) say that teaching students “to be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves” is also an absolutely essential goal at their high school. Another six in ten (60 percent) say the same of teaching their students “to follow rules and be respectful of authority.”

This focus on the implicit curriculum clearly helps high schools run well; one can imagine how chaotic schools might be if students routinely neglected their work, rejected the authority of adults, and bickered among themselves. But teachers also take on this mission because they want their students to carry values and habits into the outside world that will allow them—and their communities—to succeed. Indeed, some of the focus-group comments conveyed the impression that this sort of “knowledge” was far more important for teachers to communicate

to students than the understanding of formal concepts in social studies subjects.

I tell the kids, part of school is designed from an economic standpoint—you show up every day, you’re on time, you do what’s asked of you, and those are things that we value in our society. So that when you graduate, whether you go to college or whether you get a career, you show up to work every day, you work hard while you’re there, and you do what’s expected of you, and you follow rules. That’s what school is about . . . and hopefully you learn some things.

—Arizona teacher

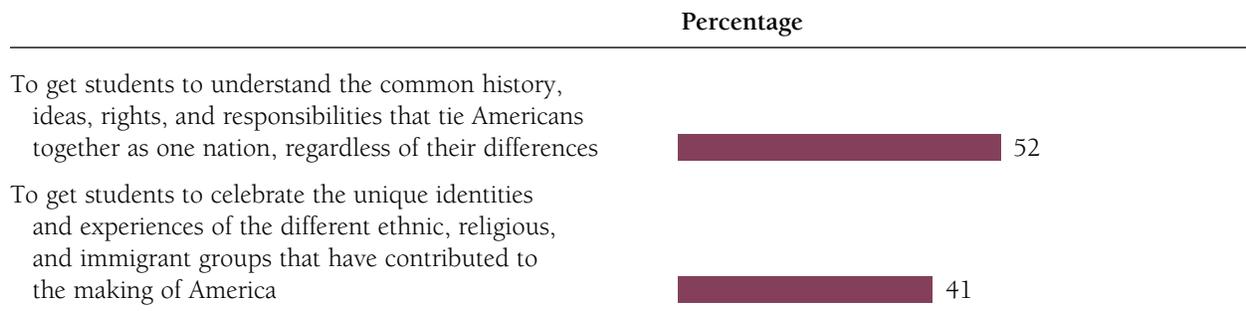
I have students working in groups. In reality after high school if they do get a job and you are in the business setting you will be working with people you don’t know. You may not like that person. But bottom line is you’ve got to get that job done.

—New Jersey teacher

These findings are especially intriguing because they echo research conducted on teachers over fifteen years ago. In a survey by Public Agenda, between 77 and 90 percent of teachers said it was absolutely essential for public schools to teach values such as “honesty and tolerance of others,” “the value of hard work,” and “good work habits such as being responsible, on time, and disciplined.” Only teaching “basic reading, writing, and math skills” drew greater support.<sup>7</sup> The priorities that teachers identify in this current survey apparently reflect long-standing, core beliefs among educators about what students need to know.

FIGURE 3  
THE TIES THAT BIND

Which of the following do you think is MORE important for high schools to do?



*E Pluribus Unum*

Schools have historically played another social role, one that is as much about fashioning a shared American identity among students from disparate cultures, religions, and nations as it is about teaching content. And high school social studies teachers take this mission seriously, especially when it comes to immigrant students. The vast majority (82 percent) believe it is especially important to teach foreign-born students to value the United States and understand the meaning of citizenship. Among teachers who teach ELL students, the percentage is even higher, at 89 percent.

But there is a widespread tension between the drive to impress upon students the ties that bind them as Americans and the desire to convey to them that differences are respected and accepted in American life. We asked social studies teachers a tough question, pitting the two goals against each other: by a 52 to 41 percent margin, they believe it is more important for high schools to get students to understand the commonalities “that tie Americans together as one nation” than “to celebrate the unique identities and experiences of the different ethnic,

religious, and immigrant groups.” For teachers of ELL students, the margin is virtually identical (53 to 39 percent). Responses to this question are close to being evenly divided. Judging from the focus-group discussions, most teachers probably would have chosen “both equally” had the option been offered.

On this issue, the focus-group conversations also hinted at the possibility of a contrarian strategy among teachers when they work with students who have roots elsewhere. When they feel that their students are not assimilating and are holding too tightly to another identity, they push harder on the commonalities of citizenship and on the appreciation of being American.

When I used to teach bilingual education, I felt like a lot of the students didn’t understand the country. I felt that it was very important for me to have to instill it in them. Because they are here, and they are trying to become Americans and not only assimilate, but I wanted them to understand why they should want to be an American.

—New Jersey teacher

## Finding 4: The Explicit Curriculum

### The Principles of the American System

Expert observers point to the important influence civic literacy has on the minds of Americans, especially in their regard for America's ideals and institutions.<sup>8</sup> Among the curricular priorities of social studies teachers, traditional civic concepts such as the guarantees of the Bill of Rights fare well. But there are some weak spots. Teaching cognitive knowledge such as historical facts and dates fares particularly poorly.

Out of a list of twelve items, social studies teachers are most likely to say it is absolutely essential for high schools to teach students “to identify the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights” (83 percent). In the focus groups, teachers reported their struggle to make constitutional rights concrete and relevant to students, hoping that would give the knowledge a better chance of penetrating.

I teach their individual rights, the Bill of Rights, search and seizure. Does the school have a right to search your locker? What are your rights as a student and as a citizen outside the school?

—New Jersey teacher

Part of being a good citizen is knowing your rights, knowing the laws. I really try to get across to them that ignorance is not an excuse. You can't be arrested and say, “Oh, but I didn't know that was against the law.” So I really try to teach them their rights. An informed citizen is a good citizen.

—Arizona teacher

Other essential concepts of how the American political system functions garner less enthusiasm.

More than six in ten (64 percent) think it is absolutely essential to teach students “to understand such concepts as federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances.” A similar proportion (63 percent) says it is absolutely essential to teach students “to be knowledgeable about such periods as the American Founding, the Civil War, and the Cold War.”

Economics appears to be the least compelling element of civic literacy. Just half (50 percent) of the social studies teachers surveyed consider it absolutely essential to teach students “to understand economic principles like supply and demand and the role of market incentives.” The focus-group conversations on this issue often centered on the importance of teaching students practical financial skills and acumen rather than economic theories and the differences between economic systems.

I don't think there has been a real push or concentration on economic knowledge or economic teaching to make these kids understand not only the theories behind it, but also practical applications in their own lives. They're going to need to understand how to do things better than their parents did. That's so important. Credit cards? They need to understand it so they're not making the same mistakes possibly that their parents have made.

—Arizona teacher

### Knowing the Facts: The Least Important Goal

The American public's ignorance of basic facts regarding their government, geography, and history has alternately entertained and embarrassed the nation. Surveys routinely demonstrate that such blank spots

FIGURE 4  
FACTS RANK LAST

For each item below, please indicate: how important do you think it should be for your high school to teach students this? Use a one to five scale where five is “absolutely essential” and one is “not important at all.”

Concept	Absolutely essential (%)
To identify the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights	83
To understand concepts such as federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances	64
To be knowledgeable about periods such as the American Founding, the Civil War, and the Cold War	63
To understand economic principles such as supply and demand and the role of market incentives	50
To know facts (e.g., the location of the fifty states) and dates (e.g., Pearl Harbor)	36

are systematic, with one recent study of seventeen-year-olds finding that fewer than half could place the Civil War in the correct half-century.<sup>9</sup> The results of the current study suggest this is no accident.

Teaching facts is the lowest priority for social studies teachers when it comes to instruction in citizenship. Of the five priorities high schools may have around the teaching of citizenship, teaching key facts, dates, and major events is at the bottom (20 percent). Furthermore, it is the last of twelve items rated by teachers as absolutely essential to teach high school students: only 36 percent say it is absolutely essential to teach students “to know facts (e.g., location of the fifty states) and dates (e.g., Pearl Harbor).”

Nor is it certain that today’s high school students are actually reading the nation’s keystone documents. When asked how close this statement comes to their view—“By graduation, virtually all students in my high school have carefully read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution”—56 percent of teachers say it comes close to their view, but 40 percent say it does not.

Finally, teachers’ reliance on textbooks appears to be on the decline. Two out of three (67 percent) say they rely on them “less and less” in their classrooms (including 62 percent of social studies teachers who

self-identify as Republican and 68 percent who self-identify as Democrat). This is interesting given that some of the harshest battles in the field have been over claims of ideological bias in textbooks.<sup>10</sup>

There’s a focus on getting away from textbooks more. In my district, it’s project-based learning. There’s more of a focus on that than when I went to [education] school, when it was textbook, workbook, definitions. They want to see interaction, debates, group work.

—New Jersey teacher

The textbook is kind of secondary; if there’s something that’s really kind of dull and boring and I want to get through it, that’s when we read the textbook.

—Arizona teacher

### But Facts Die Hard

Although they have various explanations for why teaching facts is not at the top of their priority list, teachers recoil when given a chance to abandon this  
(continued on page 21)

## Priorities and Confidence by Subgroup

Teachers prize some instructional objectives over others. As the overall findings show, for example, teaching the values and behaviors of citizenship tends to be absolutely essential to large numbers of social studies teachers, but teaching the more cognitive elements on the list less so. Such preferences inevitably have an impact on a teacher's teaching style, approach, and emphasis. This raises the question: how do various subgroups of the teaching population differ in their priorities for what is important to convey to high school students?

### Key Subgroups

Table A2 (on pages 52–53) reports the “absolutely essential” and “very confident” findings from the battery of twelve elements of citizenship that schools may teach high school students. It includes ten subgroups of the social studies teacher population and compares the following five pairs:

- **Positive versus Negative School Atmosphere**  
 (“Positive” includes teachers in schools that meet all four of the criteria below. “Negative” includes teachers in schools that meet zero or one.)
  - The administration maintains an atmosphere where the rules and the authority of adults are respected.
  - The school encourages involvement in student government, debates, and issues-oriented clubs.
  - The school has a community-service requirement for graduation.
  - It is typical to play the national anthem at school assemblies or events.
- **High versus Low Civic Behavior**  
 (“High” includes teachers who meet all

four of the criteria below. “Low” includes those who meet zero or one.)

In the past twelve months:

- Has contributed money to a candidate, political party, or organization
- Has contacted a newspaper or magazine to express an opinion
- Has worked with other people in the neighborhood to fix a problem or improve a condition
- Has NOT bought something because of conditions under which the product is made or because disliked conduct of company that produces or provides it

- **School Made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) versus Did Not Make AYP in Previous Year**
- **Title I versus Non–Title I**
- **Percentage of Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch**

### Key Findings

There are many important points of similarity and difference depicted in table A2. What follows is a selection of some of the key findings.

#### Positive versus Negative School Atmosphere (Columns 1 and 2)

There appears to be a positive relationship between school atmosphere and teachers' confidence that students are learning what they are supposed to. On most items (nine out of twelve) there are no  
*(continued on the next page)*

*(continued from the previous page)*

statistically significant differences between these two groups of teachers in their priorities for what schools should try to convey to high school students. In stark contrast are the disparities in their levels of confidence in whether the students from their high school graduate having mastered each item. Here, on nine of the twelve items, teachers in schools with a positive atmosphere are far more likely to be “very confident” than their counterparts.

It is, of course, impossible to say whether a school’s environment alone would cause such large differences in teachers’ confidence levels—or, for that matter, in actual student achievement—but it appears to be a factor. We know from the survey findings that teachers in schools with a positive school atmosphere are far more likely to say they have “a great deal of control” over the topics they cover and the pace of their instruction (53 percent versus 35 percent), which could be a contributing factor as well.

#### **High versus Low Civic Behavior (Columns 3 and 4)**

As might be expected, on most items that measure civic habits and behaviors, teachers who are highly civically engaged in their private lives stand apart from their less-engaged colleagues. They are more likely to prioritize things such as the responsibilities of citizenship, global citizenship, and habits of community service. They are also far more likely to want to convey to students the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and the value of personally taking action to correct inequalities or wrongs in the political system. Interestingly, teachers who score high on the civic-behavior measure are less likely to prioritize one of the behavior-focused elements on the list: following rules and being respectful of authority. On the cognitive elements, they are either more or equally likely to consider them “absolutely essential” when compared with their peers who are less civically engaged. These two

groups show virtually no substantive disparities in confidence levels regarding student learning, but teachers who are civically active are consistently more likely to emphasize the importance of civic action and responsibility to their students.

#### **School Made AYP versus Did Not Make AYP (Columns 5 and 6)**

We use “School Made AYP” as a proxy for higher-quality high schools where student achievement is generally strong, and “Did Not Make AYP” as a proxy for weaker high schools. We found virtually no differences between these two groups of teachers, either on their priorities around teaching citizenship or on their confidence levels for whether students have mastered the information. We know from the survey findings that teachers in schools that have not made AYP are more likely to think that social studies has second-class status and that pressure from NCLB and statewide tests in math and language arts have been pushing social studies to the back burner. But what we see in table A2 is that social studies teachers—regardless of the AYP status of their school—want to convey the same underlying concepts to their students and are equally likely to be confident (or not confident) that their students are learning.

#### **Title I versus Non–Title I (Columns 7 and 8)**

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently reauthorized as NCLB) defines a set of programs that provides funds to schools and districts with high percentages of students from low-income families. Generally speaking, Title I is used here as a proxy for the socioeconomic status of the schools’ student populations. In the comparison between teachers from Title I and non–Title I schools, we found no substantive differences, either in teachers’ priorities or confidence levels. This suggests that social studies teachers—regardless of the prosperity

of the students they teach—tend to share similar values vis-à-vis the teaching of citizenship.

Findings from the survey suggest other similarities between these two groups of teachers. Both are equally likely to say that their school district treats social studies as an absolutely essential subject area (45 percent for both). Majorities of both say that what they think is most important to get across to students about citizenship is “to respect and appreciate their country but know its shortcomings” (78 percent and 85 percent, respectively). They also believe it is more important for high schools to get students to understand the commonalities that tie Americans together (54 percent and 51 percent, respectively) than to celebrate their differences (40 percent and 42 percent, respectively).

### Percentage of Students Receiving Free/Reduced-Price Lunch (Columns 9 and 10)

Finally, we compared teachers in schools with a low percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch (50 percent or less) to those in schools where most students are on the lunch program (51 percent or more). In essence, we used this as another proxy for students’ socioeconomic status; maybe this would prove to be a more precise gauge than the Title I designation described above. But again we found no substantive differences between the two groups of teachers when it comes to priorities around teaching citizenship or confidence levels regarding the actual learning that should take place before students graduate from high school.

(continued from page 18)

mission altogether. Asked which of two statements comes closer to their own view about expecting students to memorize facts and dates, 77 percent say it still has an important place because “there are some things that students should know off the top of their heads.” Only 19 percent say memorization is “ineffective and unnecessary—especially since it’s so easy to retrieve information using technology.”

I think it’s okay in some instances, memorizing and knowing things. Because when you have a kid who can’t find New Jersey on a map, there’s something wrong with it. . . . I need to know that North Carolina is above South Carolina. There’s no East Carolina.

—New Jersey teacher

I do think there is a certain body of facts that might not be bad for everyone to know. There are things I remember—I can tell you when I learned them, in fourth or fifth grade. It’s a balance.

—Virginia teacher

There may be some generational differences vis-à-vis the importance of memorization—owing perhaps to the technological savvy of a generation who grew up in the Internet era as opposed to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* era. Newer teachers (those with fewer than five years of teaching experience) are more likely to discount the importance of memorizing facts and dates, compared with teachers who have twenty or more years in the classroom (23 percent versus 15 percent). They are also more likely to say that textbooks are becoming “less and less important” in their classrooms (72 percent versus 59 percent).

### Conceptual versus Factual Knowledge

America’s social studies teachers are more likely to prize knowledge of concepts and principles than knowledge of facts, and this is not an oversight. It is part and parcel of their theory of education that posits: 1) facts and dates are quick and easy to look up using today’s technology, so there is less need to waste time on them; 2) concepts and principles are far more memorable, while stand-alone facts are

quickly forgotten; and 3) asking students to memorize facts is certain to turn them off to social studies while experiential learning will engage them.

Of course I'm smarter than a fifth grader. But because I didn't talk about what an octopus does today and I haven't had octopus learning in the past twenty-five years, if you stopped me on the street and said tell me all about what they eat, I don't feel like I'm stupid because I don't know. It's not something ingrained in my head. It goes back to the concept versus the fact. The facts will fall by the wayside but that's why we do the whole idea of conceptual and schematic learning.

—New Jersey teacher

The fact that they instantly can get information

now on Google—"Why do I need this guy standing up here talking to me about what happened in 1776 when I can Google it and have that information there instantly? I don't need to know any facts."

—Arizona teacher

On the other hand, some might feel that support levels for teaching conceptual knowledge should be far higher than they are. These observers might argue that such foundational concepts as federalism and separation of powers deserve "absolutely essential to teach" percentages that are closer to the 80 or 90 percent range than the 60 percent they garner in this survey. Moreover, if America's youth are ever going to learn the principles of governance and economics, it will happen in school.

## Finding 5: Are High School Students Learning?

### First Look

The teaching agenda of the country's social studies teachers is certainly ambitious. From the principles of government to the responsibilities of citizenship to the habits and sensibilities of adulthood, teachers say there is a lot their high schools try to get across to students. But how much of it penetrates? We asked teachers how confident they are that most of the students from their high school actually learn the twelve concepts of citizenship—very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not confident at all (see table 1).

The news is either extremely dire or mildly reassuring, depending on how one reads the data. If the “somewhat confident” and “very confident” categories are combined, 50 percent or more of teachers are confident that most of their high school's students graduate knowing eleven of the twelve priorities—not a bad evaluation. In general, the more teachers deem something important to teach, the more confident they are that most of their high school's graduates learned it. For example, while 83 percent believe that identifying the protections listed in the Bill of Rights is absolutely essential, 79 percent are confident most students have mastered this by the time they graduate. Similarly, while 60 percent believe it is absolutely essential to teach students to follow rules and respect authority, 61 percent are confident that most of their high school's students learn this by graduation. The glaring exception is teaching good work habits, such as being timely, persistent, and hardworking. While 80 percent of teachers think this is absolutely essential

to teach, only 50 percent are confident that most of their graduates have learned it—a significant gap.

### Second Look

But one could make the case that it is misleading to combine the two categories (“very confident” and “somewhat confident”). To get a realistic read on what students are learning, it might be more appropriate to focus solely on the “very confident” response—the higher threshold—because it implies greater assurance. In other words, there is too much room for doubt when a teacher says, “I am *somewhat* confident *most* of the students in my high school have learned this.”

If one looks at the data with this tougher threshold in mind, the results are indeed grim: across each of the twelve items, only between 5 and 24 percent of teachers say they are “very confident” that most of the students in their high school graduate with that knowledge. To give two examples, only 24 percent are “very confident” that most students can identify the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, and only 6 percent are “very confident” that students graduate with good work habits.

Ultimately, one is inclined to caution against a surfeit of optimism or pessimism. In the survey, only 18 percent of social studies teachers are “very confident” that most graduates from their high school embrace the responsibilities of citizenship such as voting and jury duty; combined with the “somewhat” category, a total of 65 percent are confident. In reality, 48.5 percent of citizens eighteen to twenty-four years

old voted in the 2008 presidential election<sup>11</sup>—supporting neither the best- nor worst-case scenario.

Meanwhile, the 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress concluded that two out of three American students in grades four, eight, and

twelve have at least a basic knowledge of civics. But the bad news is that the proportion of students scoring at proficiency levels or higher has never surpassed 30 percent, regardless of the year or grade level tested.<sup>12</sup>

TABLE 1  
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS OF CITIZENSHIP

*For each item below, please indicate:*

*a) How important do you think it should be for your high school to teach students this? Use a one to five scale where five is “absolutely essential” and one is “not important at all.”*

*b) How confident are you that most students from your high school have actually learned this by the time they graduate?*

Concept	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident	Very and Somewhat Confident Combined
To identify the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights	83	24	79
To have good work habits such as being timely, persistent, and hardworking	80	6	50
To embrace the responsibilities of citizenship such as voting and jury duty	78	18	65
To be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves	76	19	74
To understand such concepts as federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances	64	15	69
To be knowledgeable about such periods as the American Founding, the Civil War, and the Cold War	63	15	72
To follow rules and be respectful of authority	60	12	61
To see themselves as global citizens living in an interconnected world	57	9	52
To understand economic principles such as supply and demand and the role of market incentives	50	11	51
To develop habits of community service such as volunteering and raising money for causes	43	14	57
To be activists who challenge the status quo of our political system and seek to remedy injustices	37	5	37
To know facts (e.g., the location of the fifty states) and dates (e.g., Pearl Harbor)	36	7	56

## Finding 6: Social Studies Is Not Viewed as a Top Priority—and NCLB Is Partly to Blame

A substantial portion of social studies teachers believe their subject area is not viewed as a top priority. Forty-five percent say their school district treats social studies as “an absolutely essential subject area,” but 43 percent say it is “important but not essential.”

Teachers place much of the blame at the feet of NCLB and the concomitant pressure of making adequate yearly progress (AYP). More than four in ten (45 percent) say the social studies curriculum at their high school has been deemphasized as a result of NCLB, though 39 percent say it is “holding its own.” Seven in ten (70 percent) say social studies classes are a lower priority because of pressure to show progress on statewide math and language arts tests—with 40 percent saying this comes “very close” to their view.

[Social studies classes] are not a priority because we’re not on AIMS [Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards]. Social studies is the only subject out of the four core subjects that is not on the test. So it’s always the bottom of the barrel.

—Arizona teacher

A few teachers suspected that in tough financial times, their positions would be endangered because history classes are more likely to be seen as expendable.

When they have to shorten positions and get rid of people, social studies will probably be one of the first ones. You get rid of the electives. You’ve got to keep your math, your English. . . . For your AYP, you’ve got to be passing that math.

—Virginia teacher

### Not Making AYP

As one might expect, the impact appears greater in schools that struggle under the standards and accountability system. High school teachers in schools that did not make AYP during the previous school year are more likely to say social studies takes a backseat. Only 38 percent of them say their district treats social studies as an absolutely essential subject area, compared with 49 percent of their colleagues. Teachers in schools that did not reach AYP are more likely to say that the social studies curriculum has been deemphasized as a result of NCLB (56 percent versus 42 percent), and they are more likely to say that pressure to show progress on statewide math and language arts tests has made social studies a lower priority (77 percent versus 68 percent).

One New Jersey teacher whose school was struggling said:

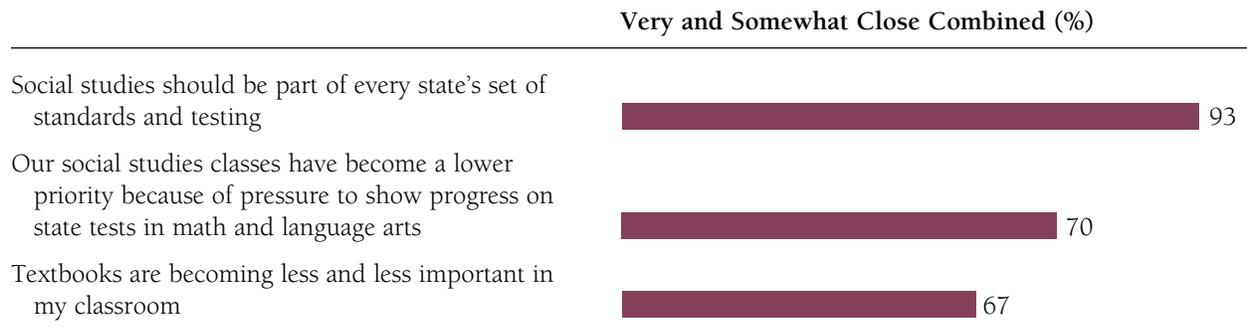
The administrators are always pushing the testing. . . . If they are sometimes prepping for the English or math exam, they might have a prep session and take [a student] out of [social studies] class.

And the students get the message, said another teacher in the same focus group:

When I was in a very diverse school, there was a big emphasis on NCLB. They hadn’t met AYP in nine years. You want to pass, you want to pass. The students become very test-oriented. They came in sometimes, “Well, I’m not tested in social studies.” They knew, so—“Let me just get past this. I have to focus on English. My scores are not that good.”

FIGURE 5  
TESTING AND TEXTBOOKS

Here are some statements about high schools and social studies in general. How close does each of the following come to your own view?



### NCLB as a Straw Man?

But to some extent, NCLB may be catching attitudinal flak for standards and accountability policies that have been evolving at the state level for many years. Indeed, some of the focus-group discussions suggested confusion among teachers about the origins and consequences of testing—was this test or another mandated by the state, the federal government, or the district? Sometimes, they did not know.

Some studies have also suggested that nonreading and nonmath classes have not been getting short shrift in recent years—and that whatever decline has occurred began before NCLB. A study by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University concluded that the curriculum has not narrowed consistently and that the trend largely predates NCLB.<sup>13</sup>

### If You Can't Beat 'Em . . .

Yet even as social studies teachers bemoan the negative effects standards and testing could have on their high schools and their subject matter, they want to hop on the testing bandwagon. Virtually all, in fact, want social studies to be part of their state's testing

system—93 percent say “social studies should be part of every state's set of standards and testing,” with 78 percent saying this comes “very close” to their view.

It is a paradox: even as teachers routinely complain about how their states implement standards and testing, they clamor for their subject to be included. They believe that is the surest way to restore a subject's proper place in the hierarchy. In the Arizona and New Jersey focus groups, for example, teachers talked about the imminent expansion of their states' standards and exams to cover social studies, sensing it was an inevitable progression. But on another level, they looked at it as a positive signal—to students, administrators, the community, and themselves—that the subject they think is crucial will finally be recognized as such. Their logic is crystal clear: if we want to matter, testing is a must.

### Student Apathy: The Not-So-Hidden Problem

Still, it would be foolish to suggest that if not for state standards and NCLB, students would be easily engaged in social studies, hungrily absorbing the lessons of history and the ideals of their nation. Teachers say that it is stubbornly difficult to get students

excited about social studies. Almost six in ten teachers (58 percent) acknowledge that “even using the best teaching techniques, it’s often hard to get my students to be enthusiastic about social studies.”

I think there’s that chunk of the population, I think every school’s got it, the kids aren’t really connected. They don’t feel like they are a citizen in their community. . . . The government isn’t important to them or it’s not affecting them. I don’t think they really care about how it works.

—Virginia teacher

The persistence of this “indifference quotient” is especially humbling given what teachers say they are doing to energize learning in the field they love. For one thing, hands-on learning exercises—the idealized

pedagogical tool—are relatively commonplace. More than half of teachers (53 percent) say they routinely implement project-based learning, 73 percent say their schools encourage debates and issues-oriented clubs, and 86 percent say they bring current events into class lessons. And yet the complaint that too many students are unengaged holds.

One has the sense that with or without testing, social studies teachers would be struggling to create a widely shared sense of excitement about the forces that govern politics, society, and human history. And the schools of education may not be helping much, according to teachers. Forty-one percent believe the schools of education do a pretty good job of preparing social studies teachers to teach in real-world classrooms, while 51 percent think the education schools “fall short.”

## Finding 7: The Public-versus-Private Comparison

A unique component of this study is the inclusion of an oversample of private high school social studies teachers, enabling us to compare their orientation, values, experiences, and goals with those of public high school teachers.<sup>14</sup> Private schools are often a party to education policy debates. While some see them as a threat to public schools, others wonder whether a democratic education necessarily means a public education. The question we ask: are the two groups different in their reported values and experiences?

Both groups of social studies teachers share remarkably similar views of what it means to be an American, what students need to learn, and even how to teach. But they differ enormously in their actual day-to-day experiences. What stands out about private high school teachers is not so much the teachers themselves but the climate of the schools in which they work.

Private high schools appear to have advantages in social studies instruction: the subject appears to be more valued; the schools appear more likely to encourage the learning of civic behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes; and student motivation and teacher autonomy appear more robust. But we cannot tell the extent to which these advantages reflect the “you need to opt in, you could get kicked out” nature of private schools, the possibility that family support and reinforcement is stronger, or the differences in the socioeconomic status of families.<sup>15</sup>

### Similar in Values and Goals

Social studies teachers in public and private high schools hold virtually identical values about America’s place in the world and what they want

their students to know about our nation and their identity as Americans. More than eight in ten teachers believe the United States is unique and “stands for something special in the world” (83 percent of public and 82 percent of private). Eleven percent and 8 percent, respectively, think that the United States “is just another country whose system is no better or worse” than any other.

Moreover, when asked to name the most important thing to pass on to their students about the United States, vast majorities (82 percent of public and 85 percent of private school) choose wanting their students to “respect and appreciate their country but know its shortcomings.” Only handfuls of teachers think it is most important for their high school students either to “love their country,” “think of the U.S. analytically, without sentiment,” or “know that the U.S. is a fundamentally flawed country.”

A ninth-grade teacher in a Catholic high school in New Jersey captured this sentiment:

My room is red, white, and blue. I promote—if love is too strong a word—respect of country. I believe in this country and that the rights you have are not the rights you have in other countries. . . . I also highlight some of the injustices by our own government.

Public and private school teachers share civic values as well. Seventy-six percent of both groups say that the statement “respect for military service is something high schools should impart to students” comes close to their view. Similarly large proportions agree that “it’s especially important to teach foreign-born students to value the U.S. and understand the meaning of citizenship” (82 percent of public and

77 percent of private). And both groups are almost identically divided on whether it is more important for high schools to get students to understand the commonalities that tie them together as Americans (52 percent of public and 50 percent of private) or to celebrate their own unique identities, ethnicities, and religions (41 percent for both).

### Shared Definition of Citizenship

Instilling core values and promoting civic behaviors are the components of citizenship that high school teachers prioritize—whether private or public. The two groups gave remarkably similar rankings to the five priorities high schools may have around the teaching of citizenship. For private high school teachers, the top vote-getter is “internalizing core values like tolerance and equality” (54 percent), followed by “promoting civic behaviors such as voting and community service” (44 percent). These two priorities tied at 49 percent among public school teachers. “Instilling good work habits” got 46 and 41 percent of the vote among public and private school teachers, respectively. About four in ten picked “understanding the key principles of American government” (38 percent of public and 43 percent of private).

At the bottom of the priority list for both groups is “teaching key facts, dates, and major events” (20 percent of public and 19 percent of private). The importance of factual knowledge also ranks at the bottom of the list of twelve “absolutely essential” items for high schools to teach, again true for both groups of teachers. Given the reputation Catholic schools have for being taskmasters for memorization—whether it be of multiplication tables or spelling—some may find it surprising that factual knowledge ranks so low among these private high school teachers.

### The Confidence Differential

The two groups of teachers are closely aligned in how they define citizenship. The differences—and

many large ones exist—begin and end in what actually happens on the ground in their schools and classrooms. It starts with how important and valued teachers feel their subject is. While just under half (45 percent) of the public high school teachers surveyed say social studies is considered an absolutely essential subject area in their district, two out of three private high school teachers (68 percent) feel this is true in their districts.

More important, they differ vastly in their estimation of success: private high school teachers report significantly higher levels of confidence that most students in their high schools graduate having learned what they were supposed to. This confidence differential is especially stark for the implicit curriculum—things like teaching good work habits and respect for authority.

As an illustration, let’s look at the “very confident” (more rigorous) category for select items on the list (see table 2). “To have good work habits such as being timely, persistent, and hardworking” garners 31 percent among private high school teachers, compared with 6 percent among public. Another example: “To follow rules and be respectful of authority” garners 29 percent among private school teachers, compared with 12 percent among public. Those two examples may seem prosaic, but another may be more provocative: 43 percent of private school teachers say that most students in their high school graduate having learned “to be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves,” compared with 19 percent of their public school counterparts. This confidence differential occurs for all but one item out of twelve. What explains it?

The well-known arguments—family and student demographics, the culling-out option that private schools have but public schools do not—may explain it all. But other differences, reported below, must be considered as well because what stands out about private high school teachers is not so much the teachers themselves, but the climate of their schools and the autonomy they are given.

TABLE 2  
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS OF CITIZENSHIP, PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE

For each item below, please indicate:

a) How important do you think it should be for your high school to teach students this? Use a one to five scale where five is “absolutely essential” and one is “not important at all.”

b) How confident are you that most students from your high school have actually learned this by the time they graduate?

Concept	Public		Private	
	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident
To identify the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights	83	24	81	33
To have good work habits such as being timely, persistent, and hardworking	80	6	80	31
To embrace the responsibilities of citizenship such as voting and jury duty	78	18	74	28
To be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves	76	19	82	43
To understand concepts such as federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances	64	15	74	29
To be knowledgeable about periods such as the American Founding, the Civil War, and the Cold War	63	15	75	32
To follow rules and be respectful of authority	60	12	59	29
To see themselves as global citizens living in an interconnected world	57	9	67	24
To understand economic principles such as supply and demand and the role of market incentives	50	11	48	17
To develop habits of community service such as volunteering and raising money for causes	43	14	67	54
To be activists who challenge the status quo of our political system and seek to remedy injustices	37	5	35	13
To know facts (e.g., location of the fifty states) and dates (e.g., Pearl Harbor)	36	7	35	19

### Standards and Autonomy

Social studies teachers in private high schools report having more authority over what, when, and how much they teach. The vast majority of private school teachers (86 percent) say they have a great deal of control over what topics they cover and how quickly or

slowly they move through the curriculum, compared with only 45 percent of public high school teachers.

Moreover, private school teachers are more likely to say they can routinely implement hands-on, project-based learning into their practice (69 percent, compared with 53 percent of public). They are  
(continued on page 32)

## Party Identification and Social Studies Teachers

It makes sense to test the notion that the personal political partisanship of teachers would lead to differences in the lessons they value and the ideas they wish to communicate. Although we find a fair number of such differences, they are typically differences of degree, not kind. The first observation is that the political-party identification of social studies teachers is quite similar to that of a cross-section of Americans. In our survey, the Republican-Democrat split is 32 percent to 51 percent, with 12 percent declaring themselves Independent (another 5 percent describe themselves as something else). A 2009 Gallup analysis of the party identification of Americans shows a 39 percent to 53 percent split, with 8 percent Independent.<sup>16</sup> Thus, we observe a recurring theme in this research: when comparisons with the general public are available, they suggest that the attitudes and values of social studies teachers are in step with those of ordinary Americans.

### How to Feel about the Nation

The overall sentiment most social studies teachers want to pass on to high school students is that the United States is a unique country that stands for something special in the world—but teachers who identify as Republican say so in greater numbers than their Democrat counterparts (91 percent versus 79 percent). While the vast majority of both groups want their high school students to “respect and appreciate their country but know its shortcomings,” Democrats are more likely to say so than Republicans (86 percent versus 77 percent). Republican teachers, for their part, are more likely to want their students simply to “love their country” (20 percent versus 6 percent). A concrete manifestation of these differences emerges over teaching respect for military service—91 percent of Republican teachers versus 67 percent of Democrats believe this is something high schools should impart to students.

### The Lessons Schools Should Teach

When asked to choose from among five priorities high schools may focus on when teaching citizenship, Democrat social studies teachers are more likely than their Republican peers to prioritize core values like tolerance and equality (58 percent versus 39 percent); Republicans are more likely to prioritize understanding the key principles of American government (45 percent versus 34 percent).

Significant differences also emerge when teachers are asked to evaluate the importance of twelve teaching goals, and they are the type of differences one might expect. On one side, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to value teaching students to be tolerant, to be global citizens, and to be activists who challenge the status quo. On the other side, Republicans are more likely to value teaching students to be respectful of authority and to know facts and dates. But these are differences in degree (see table A1). For example, most Republican teachers agree with most Democrat teachers that it is absolutely essential to teach students to be tolerant of people who are different from themselves, but the Democrats have a larger majority (86 percent versus 63 percent). Likewise, most Democrat teachers agree with their Republican peers that it is absolutely essential to teach students to follow the rules and be respectful of authority, but the Republicans have a larger majority (70 percent versus 55 percent).

### A Shared Identity

Party identification also influences some of the differences in teachers' views about fashioning a shared U.S. identity among students from disparate cultures. Republican teachers are somewhat more likely to prioritize assimilation. A larger proportion of Republicans than Democrats, for example, say it is

*(continued on the next page)*

*(continued from the previous page)*

especially important to teach foreign-born students to value the United States and understand the meaning of citizenship (88 percent versus 77 percent). And a greater proportion of Republican teachers say it is more important for high schools to teach students to understand the commonalities that tie Americans together (58 percent Republican versus 47 percent Democrat) than to celebrate their unique identities (39 percent Republican versus 44 percent Democrat). Again, these differences are significant but not overwhelming.

*(continued from page 30)*

far less likely to say, “Even using the best teaching techniques, it’s often hard to get my students to be enthusiastic about social studies” (43 percent, compared with 58 percent of public).

Some private school teachers in the focus groups talked about favorite topics—for example, ancient history—that are not particularly relevant to students and thus are somewhat more difficult to teach, but that they think are interesting and important.

What’s great about teaching World is starting with ancient history, and you can see what the Greeks did with government, what the Romans did with government, and on into medieval history. You can see the development of nations. . . . It’s terrific basic knowledge to have, and it’s essential basic knowledge for any citizen to know. There are a lot of classical allusions in American government, and you miss them if you don’t know them. . . . In private school, we are not bound by [standards and tests] at all. We have Socratic seminars and primary sources, and sit around and talk about them for hours.

—Virginia Catholic school teacher

As a former public school teacher, I have taken a great pay cut and less health benefits for

### Political Partisanship in Schools

Republican teachers are more likely than Democrats to say that too many social studies teachers at their school use their classes as a “soap box” to push personal points of view (44 percent versus 29 percent). Republican teachers may be more alert to colleagues who cross ideological lines because they sense they are in the minority within the school. Still, even this finding aligns with the other differences discussed above: the distinctions are real but far from overwhelming. (For more comparison, see table A3.)

academic freedom and not teaching to a state test.

—Virginia private school teacher

I asked the principal about that, about autonomy, and she says, “Your classroom is your kingdom; you can do whatever you want.” . . . It comes down to this is my philosophy. . . . You know how to manage your class, you know how to make the most of your time.

—Arizona private school teacher

This is in stark contrast to public school teachers who grumbled about time pressures and pacing charts intended to insure they cover standards—at the expense of teaching important concepts in depth. Talking about the obstacle state standards can place on the teaching of history, a Virginia public school teacher said:

I am told what I have to teach and I only have this amount of time to do it. I have to make choices. . . . If there are only going to be three questions [on this unit], I don’t teach it as much. . . . In World History I, there are one or two questions asked about early Africa. Yet, about 30 percent of our population is African American. I think that’s a horrible thing.

Yet, while private school teachers do not have to answer to federal law in the form of NCLB, they do not eschew testing or standards.<sup>17</sup> The vast majority of private school teachers (83 percent) say they think social studies should be part of every state’s set of standards and testing—statistically equivalent to the 78 percent of public school teachers who feel the same way. As one teacher at a Catholic high school in Arizona said, “We try to take the state standards and beat them; we add stuff.”

**School Climate and the Implicit Curriculum**

On three out of four specific criteria that may be part of a school’s implicit curriculum, private school teachers are far more likely to answer in the affirmative. They are more likely to report that their high school has a community-service requirement for graduation (82 percent versus 37 percent); that their administration maintains a school atmosphere where adults are respected (88 percent versus 65 percent); and that their high school encourages involvement in student government and other issues-oriented clubs (91 percent versus 73 percent).

This atmosphere, common in private schools, seems to lend itself to more explicit teaching of values. Private school teachers are more likely to think it is absolutely essential “to develop habits of community service such as volunteering and raising money for causes” (67 percent, compared with 43 percent of public school teachers) and “to be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves” (82 percent, compared with 76 percent of public school teachers). Finally, more than eight in ten private school teachers (83 percent) say, “Our high school encourages students to take personal responsibility for protecting the environment,” compared with a much smaller 55 percent of their public school counterparts.<sup>18</sup>

One Catholic school teacher from New Jersey explained her school’s commitment to teaching values:

Every single classroom has four words in a very prominent place in the room: respect, discipline, prayer, and hospitality. It’s a very big part of our school’s identity. Those are qualities of citizenship. That’s not obviously a curriculum thing, that’s how we present ourselves to our students and to the outside world and what we

TABLE 3  
SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE, PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE

*For each question below, please answer yes or no.*

Question	——Yes (%)——		——No (%)——	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Is it typical for your high school to play the national anthem at schoolwide assemblies or sports or cultural events?	79	74	17	23
Does your high school encourage student involvement in student government, debates, and issues-oriented clubs and organizations?	73	91	23	8
Does the administration in your high school maintain an atmosphere where the rules and the authority of adults are respected?	65	88	30	9
Does your high school have a community-service requirement for graduation?	37	82	57	16

expect our students to look like in terms of their physical appearance and behavior.

A Catholic school teacher from Arizona described how he reacts to tardiness from his students:

I'll be a Nazi if you're not in the room by the second bell. You're late and I'll write you a detention. . . . If you've forgotten everything else I've taught you, you will be on time to work. . . . It [the overall high school climate] is just very disciplined. . . . [T]here's respect for others, and community service is required to graduate.

In contrast, a public school teacher in the same group talked about the lack of "an atmosphere of good citizenship" at her high school:

I don't think a single student throws away their own trash. . . . It drives me crazy. Literally, I go out and try to make people throw away their trash, and they just ignore me.

### **The Recipe: Disciplined Autonomy?**

It is a bit ironic: Catholic schools have a reputation for a regimented, no-nonsense school atmosphere, but they also give their teachers greater latitude when it comes to their instructional regimen and imparting values. The combination of enforced expectations of student behavior and professional autonomy appears to be a winning one, as far as this oversample of private school teachers (most of whom teach in Catholic schools) is concerned. Public high schools may or may not be able to replicate this combination, but the comparison is an interesting one.

## Conclusion

Reassuring research findings seldom grab headlines, but at least one incontrovertible piece of good news from this study deserves attention: America's high school social studies teachers cherish their nation and make it a point to convey this sentiment to their students—especially those who are new to the country. Their attitude is not one of simplistic adulation. As teachers of history, they know the nation has not always lived up to its values, and they want their students to know this, too. “Respect the nation but know its shortcomings” is their guiding principle. Coincidentally or not, this is exactly the orientation parents and the general public want from schools. This congruence between teaching professionals and citizens in general is also good news.

Less reassuring is the news that public school teachers generally lack confidence that their students are learning what they are supposed to. Judging by their responses, the teaching profession still has a long way to go. It is hard to get students excited by the subject matter. The increased reliance on technology and project-based learning is not doing the trick. Downplaying the importance of names, facts, and dates for the sake of making learning more interesting is not

doing it either. Here the comparison with private (mostly Catholic) school teachers yields dramatic differences. Their goals—regarding democratic citizenship, behavior, values, and knowledge—are the same as those of public school teachers. But they appear to be getting better results. Is there something public schools can learn, or is the question itself too provocative to ask?

For their part, social studies teachers have their own provocative suggestion: they want to include social studies in the standards and testing regimen. The overwhelming majority of teachers (more than nine in ten) think social studies should be part of their state's set of standards and testing. Most have concerns about how statewide testing is implemented; most have a near-reflexive disdain for NCLB. But social studies teachers are nonetheless reaching for the promises of testing: their subject will matter more, students will take it more seriously, and parents and administrators will finally give it more attention, resources, and respect. These teachers' ambition is to ensure that the subject they care about will assume its proper place in public education today.



## Notes

1. Throughout this report, “teachers” refers to high school social studies teachers in public schools unless otherwise specified. “Social studies” includes subjects such as history, civics, government, economics, and geography.
2. Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *A Lot to Be Thankful For: What Parents Want Children to Learn about America* (New York: Public Agenda, 1998).
3. Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Ann Duffett, *Knowing It by Heart: Americans Consider the Constitution and Its Meaning* (New York: Public Agenda, 2002).
4. Social studies teachers also report that their education professors generally lack an anti-U.S. orientation: 22 percent say the education professors they have run across tended to be “overly critical of U.S. history and society,” 8 percent say they were “overly appreciative,” 50 percent say they “[struck] the right balance,” and 21 percent are not sure.
5. The ranking consists of the combined percentages for those choosing each item either as first priority or second priority.
6. In 2009, a small group of congregants from a small fundamentalist church picketed the school to protest the sexual orientation of the school’s namesake.
7. Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *Given the Circumstances: Teachers Talk about Public Education Today* (New York: Public Agenda, 1995).
8. *The Civic Mission of Schools* (Medford, MA: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE]; New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2003).
9. Frederick M. Hess, *Still at Risk: What Students Don’t Know, Even Now* (Washington, DC: Common Core, 2008), available at [www.aei.org/paper/27576](http://www.aei.org/paper/27576).
10. When the Texas board of education revised history standards in 2010, some historians expressed concern that textbooks would be rewritten to conform to ideologically driven changes and in turn influence textbooks across the country. See Michael Birnbaum, “Historians Speak Out against Proposed Texas Textbook Changes,” *Washington Post*, March 18, 2010.
11. *The Youth Vote in 2008* (Medford, MA: Circle, 2009).
12. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation’s Report Card: Civics 2006* (Washington, DC, May 2007), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/main2006/2007476.asp> (accessed September 17, 2010). The 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress in civics was administered to students from January through March. Results will be released in 2011.
13. Peter Levine, Mark Hugo Lopez, and Karlo Barrios Marcelo, *Getting Narrower at the Base: The American Curriculum after NCLB* (Medford, MA: CIRCLE, 2008), available at [www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/Narrowing\\_Curriculum.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/Narrowing_Curriculum.pdf) (accessed September 17, 2010).
14. “Private” refers to combined Catholic and other private school teachers’ responses. The two groups were combined; data analysis showed virtually no substantive differences between Catholic (n=166) and other private (n=79) high school teachers.
15. While the current survey cannot address these questions, other studies have found that differences between private and public schools on civic-education outcomes persist even when controlling for factors like socioeconomic status. See David E. Campbell, “Bowling Together,” *Education Next* 1, no. 3 (Fall 2001), available at <http://educationnext.org/bowling-together> (accessed September 20, 2010); and Patrick J. Wolf, “Civics Exam,” *Education Next* 7, no. 3 (Summer 2007), available at <http://educationnext.org/civics-exam> (accessed September 20, 2010).
16. Jeffrey M. Jones, “GOP Losses Span Nearly All Demographic Groups,” Gallup, May 18, 2009, available at [www.gallup.com/poll/118528/GOP-Losses-Span-Nearly-Demographic-Groups.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/118528/GOP-Losses-Span-Nearly-Demographic-Groups.aspx) (accessed September 20, 2010). The “leaners”—respondents who say they are independent but lean Republican or Democrat—are

combined with the party they lean toward.

17. Indeed, CIRCLE notes that private schools are not immune from the standards and accountability movement, and their practices and curricula have changed as a result. See Peter Levine, Mark Hugo Lopez, and Karlo Barrios Marcelo, *Getting Narrower at the Base: The*

*American Curriculum after NCLB.*

18. David Campbell has suggested a similar conclusion. He writes, “It seems that strong evidence has accumulated that private—particularly Catholic—schools are a private means to the very public end of facilitating civic engagement.” See David E. Campbell, “Bowling Together.”

## Methodology

*High Schools, Civics, and Citizenship* is based on a nationally representative, random sample of 866 public high school social studies teachers and an oversample of 245 social studies teachers from private high schools conducted in spring 2010. The margin of error for the sample of public school teachers is plus or minus 3 percentage points; for the oversample of private school teachers, it is 7 percentage points. The survey was preceded by three focus groups conducted in Arizona, New Jersey, and Virginia. The research was conducted by the Farkas Duffett Research (FDR) Group for the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

For this study, social studies teachers include teachers of the following subjects: civics or government, current events, economics, geography, history, law, minorities, social studies, state or local history, U.S. history, world history/culture, and Advanced Placement courses. The private school oversample includes Catholic school (n=166) and other private school (n=79) teachers. The report combines the results from the two groups; data analysis shows virtually no substantive differences between them.

### The Surveys

The sample was randomly drawn from a database of current high school social studies teachers (n=120,465) maintained by Market Data Retrieval, a subsidiary of Dun & Bradstreet that houses the most comprehensive database of names and school addresses of teachers available. Potential respondents were invited to participate in one of three ways: by e-mail, U.S. Priority Mail, or U.S. First-Class Mail. Each of these approaches yielded a different response rate as follows:

**E-mail.** A total of 14,300 teachers were sent invitations by e-mail. The first e-mail (n=7,150) was sent on May 17, 2010, followed by a reminder on May 19. A second e-mail (n=7,150) was sent on June 10, followed by a reminder on June 15. The number of individual teachers who opened the e-mail was 2,342; the number who completed the survey online was 793. The e-mail approach yielded a response rate of 6 percent (793 completes out of 14,300 sent) and a cooperation rate of 34 percent (793 completes out of 2,342 opened).

**U.S. Priority Mail.** A total of 1,500 teachers were sent invitations by U.S. Priority Mail. Priority Mail is more expensive than First-Class, but it has the advantage of a special envelope—large, thick stock paper colored red, white, and blue—so it is more likely to be noticed by its recipient. It also has a guarantee of arriving at its destination within two to three business days. The Priority Mail was sent on May 19, 2010, and it included a cover letter, the questionnaire, and a postage-paid return envelope. The number of teachers who returned the Priority Mail survey was 252. This approach yielded a response rate of 17 percent (252 completes out of 1,500 invitations).

**U.S. First-Class Mail.** A total of 550 teachers were sent invitations via First-Class Mail. The First-Class survey was sent on May 19, 2010, and a reminder survey was sent on May 28; the mailings included a cover letter, the questionnaire, and a postage-paid envelope. The number of teachers who returned the First-Class survey was 66. This approach yielded a response rate of 12 percent (66 completes out of 550 invitations).

The margin of error of the results from the sample of 866 public high school social studies teachers

is plus or minus 3 percentage points; it is plus or minus 7 percentage points for the oversample of 245 private high school teachers, and it varies for other subgroups depending on their sample size. Results also can be affected by nonsampling sources of bias, such as question wording and order. Steps were taken to minimize these, including extensive pretesting of the survey instrument and the randomization of answer categories in the online version of the survey instrument.

The survey was fielded and tabulated by Robinson & Muenster Associates Inc., of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The questionnaire was designed by the FDR Group, and the FDR Group is solely responsible for the interpretation and analysis of survey findings contained in this report.

### **The Focus Groups**

To help develop the questionnaire, three focus

groups with high school teachers from public and private schools were conducted, one each in Phoenix, Arizona; Englewood, New Jersey; and Fairfax, Virginia. The purpose of the focus groups was to gain firsthand understanding of the views of high school social studies teachers, develop new hypotheses based on their input, and design the survey items using language and terms these teachers were comfortable with. Quotes in this report are drawn directly from focus-group discussions. Participants were recruited to the FDR Group's specifications to ensure a proper mix of participants, and all groups were moderated by the FDR Group.

### **Characteristics of the Sample**

The following table shows the characteristics of the sample for both public and private high school social studies teachers.

TABLE 4  
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

	Public (n=866) %	Private (n=245) %		Public (n=866) %	Private (n=245) %
<b>College Major</b>			<b>Route to Profession</b>		
Economics	6	4	Education School	83	70
Education	34	26	Alternative Certification	13	19
History	62	64			
Political Science	19	21	<b>Sex</b>		
			Male	57	65
			Female	43	36
<b>Subjects Taught During 2009–2010 School Year</b>			<b>Political Identification</b>		
Civics/American Government	36	40	Republican	15	17
Current Events	11	16	Lean Republican	17	16
Economics	23	24	Democrat	31	26
Geography	18	17	Lean Democrat	19	24
History	33	40	Independent	12	13
U.S. History	50	50			
World History	39	46			
			<b>Locale</b>		
<b>Type of Students</b>			City	27	
Advanced Placement	37	48	Suburb	33	
English Language Learners	31	28	Town	14	
Special Needs	20	8	Rural	27	
None of These	32	33			
			<b>Region</b>		
<b>Number of Years Teaching</b>			Northeast	21	
1–4	15	14	Midwest	22	
5–9	20	18	South	40	
10–14	20	15	West	17	
15–19	16	12			
20 or More	29	42	<b>Title I Eligible</b>		
			Yes	36	
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			No	64	
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	< 1			
Black or African American	5	2	<b>Percentage of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch</b>		
Hispanic	4	2	0–25	43	
White	86	92	26–50	35	
			51–75	17	
			76–100	5	

NOTE: Many categories do not total 100 percent due to multiple responses, rounding, or the exclusion of some answer choices. Data for Title I Eligible, Locale, Region, and Free/Reduced-Lunch Eligible come from the National Center for Education Statistics. Private schools are not required to report these data.



# Appendix 1:

## Final Data

### National Survey of High School Social Studies Teachers

These findings are based on a national, random sample survey of 866 public high school social studies teachers, an oversample survey of 245 Catholic and private high school social studies teachers, and three focus groups. The surveys were conducted online and by mail between May 17 and June 21, 2010. The margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for public high school teachers and plus or minus 7 percentage points for private high school teachers. Complete survey findings in percentages are provided here. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Similarly, percentages in the body of the report may not perfectly match numbers in this appendix due to rounding. An asterisk (\*) indicates less than one percent.

The questions ask you to reflect on your experiences as a high school social studies teacher. *We know the answer choices may not perfectly capture your point of view.* Please choose the one that comes closest. At the end, you'll have a chance to share your thoughts in your own words.

1. Are you currently a high school teacher in a:

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>
n=866	n=245

2. Overall, would you say that your school district treats social studies as:

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	
45	68	An absolutely essential subject area
43	28	Important but not essential
12	2	Not that important
1	2	Not sure

For each item below, please indicate:

- a) How important do you think it should be for your high school to teach students this? [Use a one to five scale where five is “absolutely essential” and one is “not important at all.”]
- b) How confident are you that most students from your high school have actually learned this by the time they graduate? Keep in mind the limited time and resources many high schools have for social studies.

Item	Absolutely Essential for My High School to Teach Students This		Confident Most Students at My High School Have Learned This by Graduation [Net / Very]*	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
6. To identify the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights	83	81	79 / 24	84 / 33
9. To have good work habits such as being timely, persistent, and hardworking	80	80	50 / 6	83 / 31
12. To embrace the responsibilities of citizenship such as voting and jury duty	78	74	65 / 18	81 / 28
7. To be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves	76	82	74 / 19	86 / 43
5. To understand concepts such as federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances	64	74	69 / 15	84 / 29
4. To be knowledgeable about periods such as the American Founding, the Civil War, and the Cold War	63	75	72 / 15	88 / 32
10. To follow rules and be respectful of authority	60	59	61 / 12	87 / 29
14. To see themselves as global citizens living in an interconnected world	57	67	52 / 9	74 / 24
11. To understand economic principles such as supply and demand and the role of market incentives	50	48	51 / 11	71 / 17
13. To develop habits of community service such as volunteering and raising money for causes	43	67	57 / 14	91 / 54
8. To be activists who challenge the status quo of our political system and seek to remedy injustices	37	35	37 / 5	60 / 13
3. To know facts (e.g., the location of the fifty states) and dates (e.g., Pearl Harbor)	36	35	56 / 7	72 / 19

\* Net is combined responses for “very confident” and “somewhat confident.”

15. When controversial issues from current events or your community make their way into your classroom, which does your approach TEND to be:

Public	Private	
3	5	To avoid these controversies as much as possible—there’s too much risk of offending parents or distracting the class from the curriculum
94	92	To use these controversies as teaching opportunities to get students engaged and to model civil debate and discussion
3	3	Not sure

16. When you teach, how much control do you have over the topics you cover and the pace of your instruction?

Public	Private	
45	86	A great deal of control
42	13	Some
13	1	Very little
1	*	None
-	-	Not sure

17. Here are five priorities that high schools may have around the teaching of citizenship. Please RANK them in order of highest to lowest, with one being what you think should be the highest priority and five the lowest. Enter number in box in rank order one to five. *[Percentage Ranking Each Priority Either First or Second]*

Public	Private	
20	19	Teaching key facts, dates, and major events—because school is the only place students will ever learn these things
46	41	Instilling good work habits—because that’s what students will really need to be successful, productive adults
38	43	Understanding the key principles of American government—because that’s what it takes to really understand our political system
49	54	Internalizing core values like tolerance and equality—because these values lie at the heart of who we are as a nation
49	44	Promoting civic behaviors such as voting and community service—because citizens must take active responsibility for their community and nation

18. Which of the following comes CLOSER to your own view about expecting students to memorize facts and dates:

Public	Private	
19	14	It’s ineffective and unnecessary—especially since it’s so easy to retrieve information using technology
77	82	It still has an important place—there are some things that students should know off the top of their heads without having to look them up
4	4	Not sure

19. Which of the following comes CLOSER to your own view about the U.S.:

Public	Private	
83	82	The U.S. is a unique country that stands for something special in the world
11	8	The U.S. is just another country whose system is no better or worse than other countries
6	9	Not sure

20. And which of the following do you think is MORE important for high schools to do:

Public	Private	
52	50	To get students to understand the common history, ideas, rights, and responsibilities that tie Americans together as one nation, regardless of their differences
41	41	To get students to celebrate the unique identities and experiences of the different ethnic, religious, and immigrant groups that have contributed to the making of America
8	9	Not sure

21. Which of these four things do you think is MOST important to pass on to your students about the U.S.? Is it a sense that they should:

Public	Private	
11	9	Love their country
82	85	Respect and appreciate their country but know its shortcomings
6	6	Think of the U.S. analytically, without sentiment
1	-	Know that the U.S. is a fundamentally flawed country
1	1	Not sure

Here are some statements about high schools and social studies in general. How close does each of the following come to your own view—very close, somewhat close, not too close, or not close at all?

Item	—Very Close/Net*—	
	Public	Private
26. Students must learn to critically evaluate information for credibility and bias—it's a crucial citizenship skill	84 / 98	91 / 100
25. Social studies should be part of every state's set of standards and testing	78 / 93	83 / 94
22. It's especially important to teach foreign-born students to value the U.S. and understand the meaning of citizenship	44 / 82	44 / 77
24. Respect for military service is something high schools should impart to students	44 / 76	43 / 76
23. Too many social studies teachers use their classes as a "soap box" for their personal point of view	11 / 35	12 / 39

\* Net is combined responses for "very confident" and "somewhat confident."

And here are some statements about YOUR OWN high school and classroom. How close does each of the following come to your own view—very close, somewhat close, not too close, or not close at all?

Item	—Very Close/Net*—	
	Public	Private
32. I make it clear to students that I expect them to read the news and stay informed about current events	44 / 86	44 / 85
30. Our social studies classes have become a lower priority because of pressure to show progress on state tests in math and language arts	40 / 70	12 / 29
27. Textbooks are becoming less and less important in my classroom	29 / 67	18 / 53
28. Even using the best teaching techniques, it's often hard to get my students to be enthusiastic about social studies	20 / 58	10 / 43
29. By graduation, virtually all students in my high school have carefully read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution	19 / 56	33 / 67
31. Our high school encourages students to take personal responsibility for protecting the environment	14 / 55	35 / 83

\* Net is combined responses for "very confident" and "somewhat confident."

33. What impact, if any, has the No Child Left Behind Act had on the social studies curriculum at your high school:

Public	Private	
45	9	Social studies has been deemphasized
39	20	Social studies is holding its own
5	3	Social studies is getting more emphasis
12	68	Not sure/Not applicable

34. Thinking about the schools of education and teacher preparation programs that you have experienced, do you think they do a pretty good job of preparing social studies teachers to teach in real-world classrooms or do you think they fall short?

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	
41	37	Pretty good job
51	47	Fall short
8	16	Not sure/Not applicable

35. Generally, in terms of their disposition toward the U.S., would you say that the education professors you have run across tend to:

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	
22	29	Be overly critical of U.S. history and society
8	5	Be overly appreciative of U.S. history and society
50	42	Strike the right balance
21	25	Not sure/Not applicable

36. When you teach, do you find that you can routinely implement hands-on, project-based learning, or are there too many obstacles standing in the way?

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	
53	69	Can routinely implement
41	25	Too many obstacles
6	7	Not sure

For each question below, please answer yes or no.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		<b>Not Sure</b>	
	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>
40. Is it typical for your high school to play the national anthem at schoolwide assemblies or sports or cultural events?	79	74	17	23	4	3
38. Does your high school encourage student involvement in student government, debates, and issues-oriented clubs and organizations?	73	91	23	8	4	1
37. Does the administration in your high school maintain an atmosphere where the rules and the authority of adults are respected?	65	88	30	9	5	3
39. Does your high school have a community-service requirement for graduation?	37	82	57	16	5	2

In the past twelve months have you:

Item	—Yes—		—No—		—Not Sure—	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
41. Contributed money to a candidate, a political party, or any organization that supported candidates?	41	38	57	62	1	1
42. Contacted a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion?	33	31	66	69	1	*
43. Worked with other people in your neighborhood to fix a problem or improve a condition in your community or elsewhere?	64	58	34	41	2	1
44. NOT bought something because of conditions under which the product is made or because you dislike the conduct of the company that produces or provides it?	65	64	33	34	2	3

45. What was your major in college? [Select all that apply.]

Public	Private	
6	4	Economics
34	26	Education
62	64	History
1	6	Philosophy
19	21	Political Science
7	5	Pre-Law
5	5	Psychology
6	6	Sociology
9	13	Something else
2	2	(volunteered) English/Literature
1	1	(volunteered) American Studies
5	5	(volunteered) Other Social Sciences

46. Which of these social studies courses did you teach during the current school year (2009–2010)? [Select all that apply.]

Public	Private	
36	40	Civics/American Government
11	16	Current Events
23	24	Economics
18	17	Geography
33	40	History
5	7	Law
6	11	Regional History (e.g., European, Latin American)
8	7	Social Studies (general)
5	3	State/Local History
50	50	U.S. History (1 or 2)

39	46	World History/Culture
8	6	Something else
9	8	(volunteered) Psychology or Sociology

47. And during the current school year, did you teach social studies to any of the following types of classes?

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	
37	48	Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate
31	28	Classes that consist predominantly of English Language Learners
20	8	Classes that consist predominantly of special-needs or learning-disabled students
32	33	None of these

48. Which BEST describes your route to the teaching profession:

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	
83	70	Education school
13	19	Alternative certification program
4	12	Something else

49. Including the current school year, for how many years have you been a high school teacher?

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	
15	14	1–4 years
20	18	5–9
20	15	10–14
16	12	15–19
29	42	20 or more

50. Are you:

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	
57	65	Male
43	36	Female

51. Do you consider yourself:

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	
1	*	Asian/Pacific Islander
5	2	Black or African American
4	2	Hispanic
86	92	White
5	5	Something else

52. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as:

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	
15	17	Republican
31	26	Democrat
17	16	Independent—lean Republican
19	24	Independent—lean Democrat

12	13	Independent—do not lean
5	4	Something else

53. As far as you know, did your high school meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act for the last school year (2008–2009), or not?

**Public**

68	Yes
22	No
10	Not sure/Not applicable

Mode

**Public**

**Private**

71	73	Online
29	27	Mail

Title I Eligible (from NCES)

**Public**

36	Yes
64	No

Locale (from NCES)

**Public**

27	City
33	Suburb
14	Town
27	Rural

Region (from NCES)

**Public**

21	Northeast
22	Midwest
40	South
17	West

Free/Reduced-Lunch Eligible (from NCES)

**Public**

43	0–25 percent
35	26–50 percent
17	51–75 percent
5	76–100 percent

## Appendix 2

TABLE A1  
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS OF CITIZENSHIP, REPUBLICANS VERSUS DEMOCRATS

*Using a scale of one to five where five is “absolutely essential” and one is “not important at all,” how important do you think it should be for your high school to teach students each of the following?*

Concept	—Absolutely Essential—	
	Republican	Democrat
To identify the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights	81	83
To have good work habits such as being timely, persistent, and hardworking	82	78
To embrace the responsibilities of citizenship such as voting and jury duty	78	78
To be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves	63	86
To understand concepts such as federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances	63	64
To be knowledgeable about periods such as the American Founding, the Civil War, and the Cold War	68	62
To follow rules and be respectful of authority	70	55
To see themselves as global citizens living in an interconnected world	41	67
To understand economic principles such as supply and demand and the role of market incentives	53	48
To develop habits of community service such as volunteering and raising money for causes	38	45
To be activists who challenge the status quo of our political system and seek to remedy injustices	23	43
To know facts (e.g., location of the fifty states) and dates (e.g., Pearl Harbor)	43	32

TABLE A2  
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS OF CITIZENSHIP AND KEY SUBGROUPS

Using a scale of one to five where five is “absolutely essential” and one is “not important at all,” how important do you think it should be for your high school to teach students each of the following? And how confident are you that by the time they graduate, most students from your high school have actually learned this?

	-1- Positive School Atmosphere		-2- Negative School Atmosphere		-3- High Civic Behavior		-4- Low Civic Behavior	
	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident
To identify the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights	86	<b>31</b>	81	<b>13</b>	<b>91</b>	22	75	23
To have good work habits such as being timely, persistent, and hardworking	87	<b>11</b>	79	<b>1</b>	78	5	78	5
To embrace the responsibilities of citizenship such as voting and jury duty	84	<b>23</b>	80	<b>11</b>	<b>84</b>	18	<b>72</b>	14
To be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves	<b>82</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>11</b>	80	19	76	17
To understand concepts such as federalism, separation of powers and checks and balances	70	<b>21</b>	63	<b>9</b>	<b>74</b>	11	<b>59</b>	13
To be knowledgeable about periods such as the American Founding, the Civil War, and the Cold War	<b>70</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>13</b>	72	14	63	16
To follow rules and be respectful of authority	60	<b>18</b>	56	<b>5</b>	<b>49</b>	8	<b>66</b>	10
To see themselves as global citizens living in an interconnected world	63	<b>13</b>	55	<b>4</b>	<b>69</b>	10	<b>54</b>	6
To understand economic principles such as supply and demand and the role of market incentives	54	12	48	9	<b>60</b>	17	<b>47</b>	11
To develop habits of community service such as volunteering and raising money for causes	<b>60</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>9</b>
To be activists who challenge the status quo of our political system and seek to remedy injustices	43	7	37	4	<b>59</b>	6	<b>29</b>	5
To know facts (e.g., location of the fifty states) and dates (e.g., Pearl Harbor)	37	<b>11</b>	33	<b>4</b>	36	7	35	8

NOTE: Statistically significant differences at the .05 confidence level are bolded.

<b>-5- School Made AYP</b>		<b>-6- Did Not Make AYP</b>		<b>-7- Title 1 School</b>		<b>-8- Non-Title 1 School</b>		<b>-9- Free Lunch &lt;=50 percent</b>		<b>-10- Free Lunch 51 percent+</b>	
Absolutely Essential	Very Confident	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident	Absolutely Essential	Very Confident
83	25	84	22	82	23	83	24	82	23	85	25
80	7	81	5	82	6	78	6	79	5	83	10
78	18	78	15	75	17	79	17	77	17	79	19
77	18	74	18	73	17	78	19	76	17	77	24
64	15	64	13	61	14	66	16	63	15	66	15
65	17	59	9	63	15	63	15	63	16	62	12
58	13	64	8	64	11	57	12	59	11	63	13
59	10	53	5	56	8	57	10	57	9	56	11
53	11	48	10	50	9	51	12	50	11	51	12
45	15	35	13	41	15	44	13	42	14	45	15
37	5	37	3	35	5	39	4	36	4	43	6
36	8	34	4	38	7	35	7	34	6	40	9

TABLE A3  
TEACHING VALUES, REPUBLICANS VERSUS DEMOCRATS

*Here are some statements about high schools and social studies in general. How close does each of the following come to your own view?*

Statement	—Very or Somewhat Close—	
	Republican	Democrat
The United States is a unique country that stands for something special in the world	91	79
“Respect and appreciate their country but know its shortcomings” is the most important concept to pass on to students about the United States	77	86
“Love their country” is the most important concept to pass on to students about the United States	20	6
Respect for military service is something high schools should impart to students	91	67
It is especially important to teach foreign-born students to value the United States and understand the meaning of citizenship	88	77
High schools should get students to understand the common history, ideas, rights, and responsibilities that tie Americans together as one nation, regardless of their differences	58	47
Too many social studies teachers use their classes as a “soap box” for their personal point of view	44	29
<b>Percent of Sample</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>51</b>

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