

# **Citizenship in Education Curriculum in the State of Michigan**

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**Members of the committee I thank you first for your service to your communities and to your state. The willingness to serve in office is one of the few requirements a government by free men over themselves and Benjamin Franklin once said, "Serving God is doing good to man, but praying is thought an easier service, and therefore more generally chosen." I am grateful for your spirit of self-sacrifice that has motivated your service to your fellow man.**

**"The discharge of political duties appears to them to be a troublesome impediment which diverts them from their occupations and business. If they are required to elect representatives, to support the government by personal service, to meet on public business, they think they have not time, they cannot waste their precious hours in useless engagements.... These people think they are following the principle of self-interest, but the idea they entertain of that principle is a very crude one; and the better to look after what they call their own business, they neglect their chief business, which is to remain their own masters." - Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy In America vol. 2, page 141**

**Written in the middle 1830's, Tocqueville's insight revealed a citizenship deficit that is even more pronounced in our present era. While there are reasons for it (the mistrust of politicians and government in general or the complexity of a government too large and powerful to comprehend), the challenge is clear: We must instill in our posterity a resolve to do their part as citizens by teaching them both the rights and the obligations attached to citizenship. As Thomas Jefferson warned, "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance."**

**I have been invited to address this committee on the topic of teaching citizenship in our state's public school system. I bring no more credentials than those of a citizen who has endeavored to learn the better examples and ideals of those who have gone before me. But those examples and ideals are profound and my belief is that their study and imitation will produce superior citizens of not only our state, but our homes, families, neighborhoods, communities, cities and country.**

**The teaching of citizenship is a noble vocation. The good citizen behaves as an informed member of his family, his neighborhood, his community, his city, town or state and of his nation. He is guided by the principles of that greater body of which he is a supporting member. Indeed, here in the United States the First Principles established by our Founders were not lightly asserted. They were gleaned from the writings of the deeper thinkers of Western Civilization.**

**The first principles applied by the founders include individual liberty, rule of law, property rights and limited government. Ours was intended to be a form of government in which the individual generally governed himself within broad parameters to protect those same rights for his neighbors. In such a liberal form of government self-discipline is an essential ingredient. As Benjamin Franklin stated, 'The more vicious and corrupt the manners of the people, the more needful they are of masters.'**

He was cautioning us that our liberty is dependent upon our ability to govern first ourselves. If we allow our passions to carry us away we are enslaved by them and we will shortly be governed by force. That is why the early leaders of our nation repeatedly encouraged the teaching of virtue to harness the vices residing in the darker side of man's nature.

So to determine what ought to be taught in the curriculum regarding the teaching of citizenship we ought to examine the principles which constitute the spirit and the word of the canon to which we as citizens pledge our allegiance. These principles anchor us in steadfast truths which have been tried through the ages and found reliable. 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. These truths, expressed in the Declaration of Independence and codified in the United States Constitution, guide our minds and our hearts in forming our allegiance to the nation from which these principles stand. Most states have modeled their own constitutions after our national constitution, and lesser governments in counties, cities and townships have looked to them in constructing their own political charters and arrangements. To be a good citizen is to share in a creed that articulates by what principles we organize ourselves to live peaceably with one another, secured by our mutual assurances of respect, defense and support.

We enjoy in the United States a cheap citizenship, requiring only that we abide the laws, pay our taxes in support of our government, and participate in the duties of jury service and voting. Little more is expected of us and we expect little more of ourselves. As aforementioned, serving in public office is required of a small number of the whole citizenry. At various times in our nation's history we have required military service for male citizens but at all times it has been a small part of our total population. While some have paid the price of blood to protect and preserve the blessings of liberty in our country many others have suffered no more than the burden of taxes to support our country. The expectations of self-sacrifice are not high among us.

President John Kennedy once famously said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." That statement reminds us that self-sacrifice is a prerequisite to a free nation. And self-reliance is a prerequisite to a free people.

Self-reliance is born of diligence and perseverance, two of the Cardinal Virtues and these countervailing to one of the Seven Deadly Sins – sloth. There was a time when most school children could recite both the vices and the virtues but today few adults can recall more than one or two. So we ought to recognize that a return to teaching the virtues in character development is foundational to teaching responsible citizenship, without which no free government can survive.

President John Adams addressed the officers of the Militia of Massachusetts in a letter October 11, 1798: "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other. Without virtue in the manners of the people political office holders must contend with incessant demands for benefits favoring one faction at the expense of others. Likewise, without virtue in our elected officials the brokering of privileges to interested parties of every stripe will serve the servants rather than the people.



The citizens of each local community would do well to be informed regarding the tenets of the education provided to their posterity. The curriculum must include lessons on the form and function of our government at all levels local, state and federal. As much as possible this should be done from original documents rather than textbooks on the documents. We once taught in this manner until an entire industry of publishing textbooks was born of making shorthand from our founding documents. The Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution are shorter by far than much of the legislation produced in our modern era. A thorough reading of them could easily be attended in a semester or two. The Federalist and Anti-Federalist both instruct us on the tensions extant in the final form of a government of free men over free men. But few adults of our present day know of the wisdom and counsel contained in them. A sound secondary education on citizenship would include their study. It is in The Federalist, no 71 that Alexander Hamilton teaches us, 'When occasions present themselves, in which the interests of the people are at variance with their inclinations, it is the duty of the persons whom they have appointed to be the guardians of those interests, to withstand the temporary delusion, in order to give them time and opportunity for more cool and sedate reflection.' It is one of a statesman's more difficult duties.

A superior education on citizenship teaches the duties attached to the rights bestowed by citizenship. As Felix Morley, the Pulitzer Prize winning journalist once wrote: 'A right, without an attendant responsibility is as unreal as a sheet of paper which has only one side.' Or, as Abraham Joshua Herschel, the Jewish philosopher expressed it: 'There are inalienable obligations as well as inalienable rights.' When we teach the Bill of Rights we ought to teach the countervailing responsibilities.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century educator, Horace Mann said, "Our present ills and blessings as a united people cannot be fully appreciated outside the context of the human experience of our ancestors which has brought us to our present place. "The experience of the ages that are past, the hopes of the ages that are yet to come, unite their voices in an appeal to us; they implore us to think more of the character of our people than of its vast numbers; to look upon our vast natural resources, not as tempters to ostentation and pride, but as means to be converted, by the refining alchemy of education, into mental and spiritual treasures—and thus give to the world the example of a nation whose wisdom increases with its prosperity, and whose virtues are equal to its power." Therefore a decent respect for the exertions of our ancestors requires a study of their struggle, a study of their example.

'They that cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' In the full context what Santayana taught us is even more powerful, for he said: "Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. When experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." It is in the reading of the defeats and glories of our ancestors that our posterity will be inspired to persevere in their own time and place in the continuum. Thomas Mann, a German refugee to the United States and an educator said, "We are not free, separate, and independent entities, but like links in a chain, and we could not by any means be what we are without those who went before us and showed us the way." It is in the study of the wisdom of the great thinkers among those ancestors that our young will become acquainted with the precepts that have secured for us the blessings we enjoy.

**Philosophy, love of truth, is the business of superior minds and deeper thinkers. But it is also the pursuit of wisdom and it is essential to duties of citizenship. It is in the study of the liberal arts: philosophy, literature, language and religion that we learn the humanities. The liberal arts will prepare our citizens to live life more richly by preparing them to apprehend more of the world around them using an informed discernment. It is in the study of the liberal arts that the citizen is guided toward a love of his neighbor, his community and his nation. Every good citizen would be first humane. He would early apprehend an affinity to his fellow man and his fellow citizen. He would use his knowledge and reason to evaluate the credentials and character of those seeking election to political office.**

**I began my remarks today with a quotation from Tocqueville, revealing the proclivity in the nature of Americans to shrink from civic duty unless shocked by crisis and roused to our nation's defense. It may be true that most of us would prefer to be left alone to attend to our own affairs and a large energetic government is no friend to the free man. But as wise men have written, just because we do not take an interest in politics does not mean politics will not take an interest in us. It is both the right and the duty of the citizen to inform himself and endeavor to participate in his government, applying the knowledge he has acquired by a superior elementary education and by his own supplemental effort. It is in the better curriculum on citizenship that we are inspired to do our duty as citizens.**

**Your inquiry into this important duty of us all, teaching citizenship to our State's youth, is sober work. It is work that begins in healthy homes and neighborhoods and radiates out into the communities. Therefore the role of the state is to support the efforts of those earnest parents, school board members, teachers, friends and families in our communities, supplying them with the training, books and other resources to first furnish their minds with the knowledge of these principles which their thinking will make them their own.**

**In closing I wish to leave you with a quotation of which I am particularly fond:**

**"The world about us is not merely ours. We possess it only because our predecessors appreciated and cherished it. We look at it through eyes that are not simply our own but to some considerable degree have learnt their vision from the eyes of others; The eyes of painters and poets, of craftsmen and farmers, and, more personally, of relations and friends who in our childhood, and since, have illuminated our ambience for us." - George Scott-Moncrieff, Scotland's Dowry**

**God bless and keep you in your work in this service to the people.**