

The Debate About Algebra for 8th Grade Students

By Diane Trautman

I cringe at much of what passes for television entertainment these days. It's sad to watch people flaunting their flaws for the fleeting attention of strangers. Even more painful are the clips in which Jay Leno exposes the civic ignorance of young adults who can't answer basic questions he poses such as "Do you know what the Gettysburg Address is?" and "What is located at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue?"

Civic education was the central purpose of education as envisioned by those who established our system of free public education. What has happened to derail that purpose?

According to The Center for Civic Education, we lack a sustained, systemic attention to civic education in our schools. It has been diminished due to a shifting focus on math, science, and reading, and as a result of inadequate policy support and implementation, insufficient curricular requirements, and lack of teacher training and professional development. Civics and government, the Center argues, should be treated as an interdisciplinary subject on par with other core subjects. Through its Campaign to Promote Civic Education, the Center's mission is to "promote an enlightened and responsible citizenry committed to democratic principles and actively engaged in the practice of democracy in the United States and in other countries."

Concerned citizens may take action by getting involved with the Center or encourage their school board members and state legislators to act upon the civics education resolution adopted by the California State PTA in 1996. Parents can talk to their children about our history, our system of government, our laws, and the issues that we face and they will encounter as adults.

We can all demonstrate our civic responsibility simply by voting. On November 3, voters in the Santa Clarita Valley will have the opportunity to select members of school boards and, in Newhall, the independent water board. This is a good opportunity to sit down with your son or daughter, read the candidates' statements and literature together, and talk to them about the qualities you look for in the people you elect to office. As with other subjects, they will pay attention to what they believe is relevant in our lives and theirs.

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