

THE GOALS OF CIVIC EDUCATION

We, the scholars and practitioners who have jointly produced this report, believe that the overall goal of civic education should be to help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives.

Competent and responsible citizens...

- **are informed and thoughtful.** *They have a grasp and an appreciation of history and the fundamental processes of American democracy; an understanding and awareness of public and community issues; an ability to obtain information when needed; a capacity to think critically; and a willingness to enter into dialogue with others about different points of view and to understand diverse perspectives. They are tolerant of ambiguity and resist simplistic answers to complex questions.*
- **participate in their communities.** *They belong to and contribute to groups in civil society that offer venues for Americans to participate in public service, work together to overcome problems, and pursue an array of cultural, social, political, and religious interests and beliefs.*
- **act politically.** *They have the skills, knowledge, and commitment needed to accomplish public purposes—for instance, by organizing people to address social issues, solving problems in groups, speaking in public, petitioning and protesting to influence public policy, and voting.*
- **have moral and civic virtues.** *They are concerned for the rights and welfare of others, are socially responsible, willing to listen to alternative perspectives, confident in their capacity to make a difference, and ready to contribute personally to civic and political action. They strike a reasonable balance between their own interests and the common good. They recognize the importance of and practice civic duties such as voting and respecting the rule of law.*

We recognize that being a competent and responsible citizen is not easy. It can take courage, sacrifice, and passion to be civically and politically engaged. Engagement is especially difficult for disadvantaged young people, who lack resources and are often discouraged from participating. Thus, an essential goal of civic education is to provide skills, knowledge, and encouragement for all students, including those who may otherwise be excluded from civic and political life.