



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 5, 2011

American Students Struggle with Understanding of Civics

The *Christian Science Monitor* [reports](#): "The civics scores released Wednesday by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) had a few bright spots — particularly for fourth-graders and for Hispanic students. But overall they indicated relatively poor civics knowledge by students at all levels, and particularly among 12th-graders."

How poor? The *Monitor* summarized the dismal findings of the NAEP study:

Just 24 percent of high school seniors scored at a proficient level or above, a slight drop from the last civics test in 2006, largely driven by declining scores for 12th-grade girls. Just 4 percent of seniors scored at an advanced level, and 36 percent didn't even reach the most basic level.



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While 37 percent of white fourth-graders performed at or above proficient, for instance, just 12 percent of black students and 10 percent of Hispanic students scored at that level. At the lower end of achievement, the differences are just as stark: 13 percent of white fourth-graders scored below basic, compared with 38 percent of black students and 42 percent of Hispanic students.

According to the [San Francisco Gate](#), "Fewer than half the country's eighth-graders were able to identify the purpose of the Bill of Rights on the 2010 National Assessment of Education Progress. Most high school seniors couldn't identify a power granted to Congress by the Constitution or define the term 'melting pot.'"

The tests are comprised of a range of civics questions, requiring both multiple choice answers and short answers. The questions cover the foundations of the American political system, the role of American citizens in "democracy," and American foreign policy.

Commenting on the pathetic scores is retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who said, "Knowledge of our system of government is not handed down through the gene pool. What these scores tell us is that we're not doing well enough in educating young people about our government and how it works."

Likewise, Charles Quigley, the executive director of the Center for Civic Education, declared, "The NAEP results confirm the fact that attention to civics education in this country has been inadequate for some time. Educational policy is all too often focused on developing the worker at the expense of the citizen."

Attempting to understand the weak scores, Joseph Kahne, director of the Civic Engagement Research



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Group at Mills College in Oakland, California, indicates that perhaps students are not being provided adequate differentiation. "The need to focus on who is getting what learning opportunities is key," he explains. According to Kahne, students who are provided opportunities such as debate, service learning, and simulations, are far more apt to do well on such exams than students who are not.

Similarly, Quigley asserts, "Studies have shown that African-American and Hispanic students and those not planning to go to college receive fewer effective civics opportunities. This is ironic ... [given the] abundant evidence that when these students do receive these opportunities, they perform as well as anybody else."

Considering that a mere 68 percent of high school seniors were able to discuss political parties, elections, and voting in 2010, even though it was a significant election year, some believe that instructors are missing opportunities to instruct.

"When we don't teach our nation's youth about what it means to participate in a democracy [sic], it's not only a disservice to these young people, but to our country," said Heather Smith, president of Rock the Vote, a program that focuses on engaging America's youth in the voting process. "The most common reason why a young person in this country does not participate is because they don't know enough."

With the confirmed presence of Marxists working within the public education system, however, one wonders if it is an accident that American students are not receiving adequate civics education. After all, if students do not understand the value of the American Republic or the U.S. Constitution, they are less likely to protect and defend it.

According to the American Bar Association, the problem can also be traced to policymakers who are not treating civics as seriously as they should. ABA president Stephen Zack contends that "the C — for civics — is just as crucial to our future as a nation as are the three R's." But treating civics seriously does not necessarily mean that the treatment will be accurate. Obviously, the public schools, which are agencies of the government, will tend to display a bias in support of more and bigger government in their civics instruction. And the very fact that the public schools cannot teach about God means that they cannot teach the true definition of Americanism as expressed in our Declaration of Independence — that "we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights" and that governments are instituted to "secure these rights."



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