

Statement to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service

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RE: Staff Memorandum, Civic Education

On behalf of the [National Council on Teacher Quality](#) (NCTQ), thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service's (Commission's) recent [Staff Memorandum: Civic Education](#) (Memorandum).

NCTQ is a nonpartisan research and policy organization led by the vision that every child deserves effective teachers and every teacher deserves the opportunity to become effective. To advance this vision, our team researches and analyzes [state-](#), [district-](#), and [teacher preparation program-](#)level policies that greatly influence the health of the teaching profession.

In general, the policy options set forth in the Memorandum are promising, and the considerations are appropriate. Specifically, we find the proposal's careful attention to leveraging existing tools (e.g., NAEP), coupled with an infusion of new resources (e.g., the Mobile Constitution Center) and incentives (e.g., establishing national award and recognition programs to honor excellence in civic education) to be particularly strategic. Given that students', schools', and communities' needs in regard to civics education differ across the country, this multi-faceted approach is most likely to be effective.

Concurrently, we urge the Commission to consider supplementing this Memorandum with provisions that attend to ensuring core civics education content knowledge and skills among the primary in-school factor influencing student learning and lives: teachers. At present, too few states require teacher candidates to demonstrate adequate knowledge of social studies and civics prior to entering the classroom. At the elementary school level, teachers often earn licenses based on general content knowledge that is not specific to all the core subjects they are expected to teach, including social studies. Currently, fewer than half of all states ([22](#)) require elementary school teacher candidates to pass a test explicitly assessing social studies content knowledge¹. Additionally, only [27 states](#) require middle school teacher candidates to pass a content knowledge test in each core subject they teach². At the high school level, when teachers are

¹ National Council on Teacher Quality. (2017). Content Knowledge national results. *State Teacher Policy Database*. [Data set]. Retrieved from: <https://www.nctq.org/yearbook/national/Content-Knowledge-75>

² National Council on Teacher Quality. (2017). Middle School Content Knowledge national results. *State Teacher Policy Database*. [Data set]. Retrieved from: <https://www.nctq.org/yearbook/national/Middle-School-Content-Knowledge-84>

assumed to be experts in their subject matter, states' expectations are even lower: only [four states](#) maintain licensing requirements for candidates to pass single-subject tests that do not exempt social studies and just [three states](#) require a single-subject test to add an endorsement area to a high school teacher's existing license³.

Accordingly, the Commission has an opportunity to use this Memorandum to encourage and incent states to maintain strong teacher preparation, licensure, and support policies in regard to social studies and civics. Such incentives and supports could include similar and related ones to those currently outlined in this Memorandum. For example, the Commission could modify its description of the proposed "federal grant program to support civic education initiatives" to indicate that such initiatives may include -- and may prioritize -- initiatives designed to ensure that teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills to successfully teach civics prior to entering the classroom. Additionally, the Commission could amend its description to "[d]evelop and distribute civic education resources and materials" to explicitly include and emphasize those materials designed to deepen and further teachers' civics education knowledge. Further, the Commission could add to its list of potential options by providing specific funding to research and analyze the relationship on key indicators related civics education, including: the relationship between a state's teacher licensure requirements regarding social studies and its students' performance on the civics NAEP. Given the outsize role that teachers play in students' learning and lives, we urge the commission to consider these changes.

Thank you for your consideration of the above. I hope that you will not hesitate to reach out to me directly if there is any additional information I can provide regarding this important initiative.

³ National Council on Teacher Quality. (2017). Secondary Content Knowledge national results. *State Teacher Policy Database*. [Data set]. Retrieved from: <https://www.nctq.org/yearbook/national/Secondary-Content-Knowledge-84>