

New York State Retired School Administrators and Supervisors
NYSRSAS

How We Ensure the Future of Our Democracy
Education is the Answer

We (NYSRSAS) are an organization of approximately 350 retired school administrators and supervisors concerned with the welfare of our country and how we educate our students to become more responsible citizens. What happened on January 6, 2021, was abhorrent and represented an attack on our democracy.

We have learned that many of the initiators as well as the perpetrators of the January 6th invasion of the Capitol were well-educated individuals. We ask ourselves why so many of our fellow citizens are convinced that the 2020 presidential election was “stolen,” especially when there was no credible evidence to support that position. Were they never taught to distinguish between fact and opinion to support their conclusions?

This prompts us to wonder if we need to do a better job of providing students with a clearer understanding of democracy and an appreciation for democratic values. We are aware that Civics, Citizenship and Government are incorporated into Standard #5 of the New York State Social Studies Curriculum. However, it may not be sufficient just to teach about government, civic values, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. At every grade level, students need to develop a sincere desire to become active citizens of our democracy. They need to experience situations in which they are required to make decisions related to all aspects of citizenship and government. It is not enough to know about elections. Students need to know how a democracy is enhanced through participation in the voting process and thwarted when voter suppression activities abound. They need to understand and care about how voter suppression impacts different groups within society and the far reaching effects it has on future generations. We maintain that it is insufficient to limit instruction to areas of civics, citizenship and government structure without equivalent emphasis on decision-making and involvement with real-life experiences. These may include developing guidelines for student government, and creating opportunities for political debates on issues pertinent to students at all grade levels.

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We believe that school curricula and student experiences should incorporate the following:

- Continued age appropriate study of the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and how they can be modified
- The study of how differences of opinions are constructively expressed and peacefully resolved in a democracy
- A firm understanding of and an appreciation for the multicultural nature of the United States and how democratic principles support a rich, multi-cultural mix
- An awareness of how the negative impact of racism is detrimental to society
- The influence print, broadcast and social media have on opinion formation, and how students must learn how to identify bias, distinguish fact from misinformation and make well informed decisions
- The importance of voting in a democracy while guarding against voter suppression and protecting the right to vote

We believe that all school personnel as well as the broader school community must be engaged in discussing the following questions:

- What is the role of school leaders in establishing an environment that celebrates the principles of democracy and one that fosters caring for and about each other?
- How can teachers best create a classroom atmosphere based on democratic values? What specific activities teach and enhance good citizenship?
- What can and should schools do to involve parents and community members to promote the study of democratic values?

It is the firm belief of the New York State Retired School Administrators and Supervisors that the events of January 6th demonstrated the fragility of our democracy. We call upon all members of the school community to take constructive and appropriate action to create a renewed emphasis on an expanded view of civics and citizenship education to make sure the events of January 6th never happen again.

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