

March 11, 2015

To: The Honorable Representative Margaret Doherty, Chair  
Representative Lew Frederick, Vice Chair  
Representative Sherrie Sprenger, Vice-Chair  
Representative Greg Barreto  
Representative Jodi Hack  
Representative Susan McLain  
Representative Carla Piluso  
Representative Jeff Reardon  
Representative Carl Wilson

Re: Support for HB 2955, Increased Civic Education for Teachers

Ms. Chair and Members of the Committee:

As a 6th grade language arts and social studies teacher at East Sylvan Middle School, I encourage you to support House Bill 2955, which will increase civic education for teachers.

I have gathered several great ideas at the Civics conference, but my favorite was a Mock Senate Hearing lesson. Students engage in a short reading on a current topic, such as racial profiling, and are given roles, based on a profile of a character. They are then asked to “testify” according to the beliefs of their character in front of a panel of senators, also students, on the issue, town hall style. This method can be adapted to any curriculum. What I love is how students

- Are engaged in the content
- Connect to the perspectives of their character
- Are challenged to see other perspectives
- Think deeply about a topic
- Love learning this way

I have adapted the basic lesson idea to create a “press conference” question and answer session, in which “journalists” from various organizations question characters from *The Odyssey* about their motivations, feelings, and perspectives. We also conducted similar question and answer enactments in small groups, with the rest of the class watching, for our studies of the Qin dynasty in ancient China. Both of these lessons push students to think deeply about a topic in ways they would not do using methods that allow students to remain passive and potentially disengaged.

On my most recent visit to the conference I learned that I can bring students to Salem to testify on a particular issue, and that there is a schedule that enables me to give students the opportunity to study an issue, develop a position, and ultimately testify in front of actual legislators, allowing them to experience the empowerment of civic engagement. This kind of experience can be transforming for a young person; many just don't realize that a democracy depends on an informed and engaged electorate, and just as we teach our students literacy, basic knowledge, collaborative social skills for the workplace, self-advocacy and responsibility, **we also must expose them to opportunities to become engaged and informed citizens.**

The conference is always very inspiring to me. I have chosen only a couple of examples of useful ideas I have especially appreciated; there have been many more. I cannot say enough about how the conference re-energizes my thinking and positively impacts my curriculum choices. Of all the workshops I've attended during fifteen years of teaching, the Civics Conference is truly unique, valuable, and impactful.

Thank you,

Anne Larsen  
East Sylvan Middle School  
Portland Public Schools

2805 NE 28th Ave  
Portland OR 97212