Education Commission of the States Releases Brief on Civic Engagement and Digital Citizenship

Schools could do more to engage digital natives in 21st century citizenship

Denver – The Education Commission of the States (ECS) released Civic Engagement through Digital Citizenship, the first of six Progress of Education Reform briefs that will be released in 2012.

Today’s learners are different from their teachers and previous generations of students. They use digital media more naturally and think about citizenship in fundamentally different ways. However, the education world largely has missed the opportunity to use digital media to teach citizenship and has not updated its learning experiences to address the new way these digital natives think about citizenship.

While today’s learners are more comfortable with various types of technology, some students are left behind due to issues of broadband availability, accessibility and affordability, as well as lack of education on how to use digital media. One study found that nearly 20% of students reported never receiving educational guidance on how to consume civic and political information online, and fewer than half reported receiving such opportunities “often” or “very often.” If policymakers do not address these factors, non-digital native youth, who are largely poor and minority, will continue to be less civically engaged than their digital native peers.

The brief also recommends that policymakers and education leaders carefully consider how technology usage policies might impact civic learning and civic engagement for this new generation. While well-intended, broad policies that forbid student use of Facebook, texting and other networking media during the school day effectively close off many suitable and worthwhile opportunities for civic learning, participation and activism.

The five-page brief recommends additional policies and practices that can be used to encourage youth to engage in active citizenship.

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ECS is the only nationwide, nonpartisan interstate compact devoted to education. ECS helps governors, legislators, state education officials and others identify, develop and implement public policies to improve student learning at all levels. A nonprofit organization, ECS was formed in 1965 and is located in Denver, Colorado.

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