

**Commission on Civics Education**  
**Monday, June 5, 2006**  
**The Virginia Historical Society**  
**Richmond, Virginia**  
**10 a.m.**

**Meeting Summary**

The Commission on Civics Education, established by House Bill 1769 as an advisory commission in the executive branch of state government, held its third meeting on June 5, 2006.

**Members Present**

Carmela C. Bills  
Dr. Stephen G. Bragaw  
Thomas C. Coen  
Dr. Sheila G. Hill  
Glen H. Hoptman  
The Honorable Frederick M. Quayle  
The Honorable William Roscoe Reynolds  
The Honorable Beverly J. Sherwood  
J. Westwood Smithers, Jr.  
Ginger Stanley  
The Honorable Robert Tata  
Kathryn Willams

**Members Absent**

Stephen Adkins  
The Honorable Kenneth C. Alexander  
Dr. Sean T. O'Brien  
Kenneth S. Stroupe, Jr.  
The Honorable R. Lee Ware, Jr.

**Other Persons in Attendance**

The Honorable James H. Dillard  
Mary Jo Fields  
Damon Irby  
Michael Taylor  
Kendall Tyree  
Greg Werkheiser

**Ex-Officio Present**

Jean Bankos (Designee for The Honorable Timothy M. Kaine)  
Dr. Mark Emblidge  
Dr. Patricia I. Wright

**Ex-Officio Absent**

Jeremy Greenfield (Designee for The Honorable Bill Bolling)  
David E. Johnson (Designee for The Honorable Robert F. McDonnell)  
Dr. Barbara A. Perry

**Department of Education**

Betsy Barton  
Joel M. Dexter  
Dr. Beverly Thurston  
Dr. Linda Wallinger

**Welcome**

The Honorable Robert Tata called the meeting to order at 10 a.m. and completed the roll call. The minutes from the January 3, 2006, meeting of the Commission on Civics Education were approved.

## **Presentations and Discussions**

Glen Hoptman:

Presented a general overview of the progress that the commission has made and the challenges that it still faces in supporting civics education in Virginia. He also reminded commission members of the sub-committees and the topics that they have been assigned and called for a productive work session after lunch.

Dr. Peter Stearns:

- Presented an overview of civics instruction from a historical perspective:
  - Initiated as a response to immigration.
  - Focused on American values and institutions.
- Hypothesized five reasons why there is a current focus on improving civics education:
  - There has always been competition for class time.
  - There have always been challenges for civics education.
  - There has been a memorization approach to civics instruction.
  - Civics was caught between social studies and history education advocates.
  - Some groups see a conflict between civics content and their own personal experience.
  - There has been a disparity between an authoritarian approach to civics instruction and content that stresses liberty and participation of citizens.
- Offered three categories of recommendations:
  - Clearer links between civics/government and global events and institutions should be included.
  - The disparity between values like citizen participation and how such ideas are taught must be addressed. We should engage students directly by letting them influence decisions.
  - Civics teachers should focus more on problem solving and less on memorization. They should use controversy to prompt discussion.
- Emphasized the connection between assessment and decisions about curriculum.
- Noted the difficulty of increasing civics content when curricula are already crowded.

An extended discussion followed the presentation. There was general agreement with the ideas behind the presentation and specifically on the need to emphasize an active and engaging style of teaching for civics classrooms. The following suggestions were made to accomplish this goal:

- Have legislators and judges visit classrooms.
- Encourage more use of the General Assembly's Back-to-School program.
- Change training for future civics teachers to emphasize "hands on" approaches.
- Offer more staff development for current teachers.
- Have classes attend naturalization ceremonies and talk to new citizens.
- Include social studies and civics in particular in the No Child Left Behind program.

## Sub-Committee Meetings and Suggestions

- Instruction and Curriculum: (Carmela Bills, Tom Coen, and guest Kendall Tyree)
  - Define civics more clearly and relate it to other social studies disciplines.
  - Maintain the current situation with no end-of-course test for high school government.
  - Tie civics to current events.
  - Focus more on activities rather than format of lesson plans.
  - Use student input in making decisions about instruction and curriculum.
- Professional Development: ( Roscoe Reynolds, Ginger Stanley, Kathryn Williams, and Jean Bankos)
  - Coordinate training across grade levels.
  - Encourage collaboration among existing civics and civic organizations.
  - Conduct teacher-based and teacher-owned training.
  - Use Web site by providing:
    - Subject-area focused pages.
    - Resources for all teachers.
    - A lesson exchange forum.
- Civic Education: (Frederick Quayle, Beverly Sherwood, Stephen Bragaw, and J. Westwood Smithers)
  - Define the intended audience.
  - Create a clear infrastructure for distribution of information.
  - Decide on a realistic marketing approach.
  - Develop a mechanism that encourages and rewards participation.
- Service Learning: (Sheila Hill, Mark Emblidge, and Jim Dillard)
  - Develop guidelines for high school volunteer activities.
  - Include a service-based component in the *Standards of Learning* or other state policies.
  - Encourage employers to look for the Civics Seal when hiring.

A discussion followed over what the commission's next steps should be. Communication between the sub-committees was encouraged leading up to the next meeting and in helping to plan a fall conference. There was also a discussion of possible funding and spending alternatives. A September meeting will be scheduled.

## Adjournment

Vice Chairman Glen Hoptman adjourned the meeting at 3:09 p.m.