

CARNEGIE-KNIGHT TASK FORCE
CARNEGIE-KNIGHT INITIATIVE ON
THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM EDUCATION

NEWS RELEASE

Embargoed for:
January 12, 2007, 12:01 a.m.

Contact: 301-652-1558
Carol Schadelbauer or Bethanne Fox,
carol@burnesscommunications.com
bfox@burnesscommunications.com

**Survey Finds “Teaching to the Test” has Negative Impact
On Use of News in Classrooms: Carnegie-Knight Task Force
Urges More Emphasis on Civics Education**

*Three out of four teachers blame mandatory testing for their inability
to make greater use of news as a teaching tool*

Cambridge, MA., January 12, 2007 — The intensive time required to “teach to the test” -- to prepare students for mandatory testing in the nation’s public schools -- is stealing time away from students to discuss and study the news, and ultimately become educated about and engaged in their country and their world, according to a new report, released today by the Carnegie-Knight Task Force based at Harvard University. The report is based on a national survey of 1,250 civics, government and social studies teachers in grades 5 through 12.

The Carnegie-Knight Task Force, launched in 2005, is a group of America’s leading scholars on journalism dedicated to research on policy and education issues.

While 90 percent of teachers surveyed said they fully or partly agree that “news in the classroom is one of the best ways to get students interested in a class and its subject,” only nine percent of teachers agreed fully that “news in the classroom is one of the best ways to prepare students for mandated standardized tests.”

The survey also finds that nearly 75 percent of teachers who say they are using news less often in the classroom, cite mandated standardized tests as the reason. They say that preparing for the tests takes time away from the classroom discussion of news.

Many teachers surveyed continue to try to use news in their classrooms because, they say, recent news events such as the war in Iraq and global terrorism are so important that students need to be aware of them. But these teachers are not guided by school policy, but rather choose to incorporate news on their own, according to the report.

The report, *Mandatory Testing and News in the Schools: Implications for Civic Education*, is the first of several reports from the Carnegie-Knight Task Force, whose research arm is based at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics & Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The report examines the use of daily news in the classroom and how this use is affected by standardized testing.

The teachers surveyed for this study were randomly sampled from Market Data Retrieval's list of more than 30,000 social studies, civics, and government teachers and were contacted through the Internet over a two-month period in the fall of 2006. Each respondent was contacted up to three times in an effort to obtain a high response rate.

"Our findings raise troubling issues about the status of civic education in America," said Thomas Patterson, Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press at Harvard University, who directed the survey and prepared the report. "Unfortunately, the preoccupation with standardized tests is reducing the time that teachers would otherwise give to exposing their students to the world of public affairs through the news."

The use of news in classrooms is considered an extracurricular activity today, according to the report, and tends to be employed only as standardized test preparation permits. The report references the National Council for the Social Studies research which says that the use of news in the classroom helps children develop their ability to make informed and reasoned decisions as citizens and teaches them about their government and the world in which they live.

Not surprisingly, news is used markedly less --roughly 15 percent less--in schools with high numbers of poor or non-English speaking students. Students in these underperforming schools are taught by teachers pressured to improve their schools' overall results on standardized tests. But the authors argue that "if disadvantaged children are the most likely to benefit from instruction promoted by standardized tests, they would also benefit from a vigorous civic education."

The report offers some recommendations, including these:

- Experienced teachers who have learned how to use news in the classroom without compromising testing imperatives should share their skills with less experienced teachers
- School administrators should actively encourage use of news in classrooms
- State policymakers may want to place greater emphasis on civic education in the schools while avoiding the standardized tests that would encourage rote learning at the expense of the critical thinking skills that are basic to sound citizenship.

"News is a vitally important tool for teaching, and without it, we may be compromising all of our children's ability to grow up to be citizens who are productive, involved in making informed decisions and participants in our democracy," said Alex S. Jones, director of the Shorenstein Center and a member of the task force.

The Carnegie-Knight Task Force is one element of the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education. It focuses on developing a vision of what journalism schools can be at major universities. The Task Force aims to carry out research and create a platform for educators to speak on policy and journalism education issues. All these efforts grew out of a partnership involving the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the deans of four of the nation's leading journalism schools -- Orville Schell, Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley; Nicholas Lemann, Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University; John Lavine, Dean of the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University; Geoffrey Cowan, Dean of the Annenberg School of Communication, University of Southern California -- and Alex S. Jones, Director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Carnegie-Knight Task Force members are Orville Schell, Nicholas Lemann, John Lavine, Geoffrey Cowan and Alex Jones.

Carnegie Corporation of New York is a philanthropic foundation created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding among the people of the United States. For more information about the Corporation, go to www.carnegie.org. The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promotes excellence in journalism worldwide and invests in the vitality of U.S. communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. For more information about Knight Foundation, go to www.knightfdn.org.

The full report can be accessed on January 12, 2007 at www.shorensteincenter.org

###