California Three Rs
Rights, Responsibility, and Respect
A Project of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association and The First Amendment Center

Volume 6, Number 3        January 2009

Fostering Civic Virtue Through the Three Rs:
Rights, Responsibility, and Respect
By Margaret Hill, Director CA Three Rs Project

Is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks, no form of government, can render us secure. To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people is a chimerical idea.

James Madison

As the Founders clearly understood, America’s democracy is an experiment…an experiment based on ideals of liberty and justice that rely on an unflinching commitment to civic virtue and to ethical character. America’s commitment to inalienable rights requires that each member of the polity uphold these rights for all others, even the smallest minority. Knowing that American society even in the 18th c. was diverse ethnically, racially, religiously, and culturally, the Founders built a unified nation around principles of “liberty and justice” through a constitution that protects individual rights and binds Americans together as a people. Because of our diversity, the values that foster this unity are of necessity civic rather than religious or cultural. Preserving and expanding these democratic ideals for each new generation is the goal and fundamental task of public education. This task has been overshadowed in recent years by educational reform focused almost exclusively on reading and math. We have seen that civic engagement and responsibility, the school’s learning climate, and student motivation to learn have all suffered. The future of the nation requires us to refocus attention on the school’s role in fostering a reasoned commitment to democratic principles and civic virtue. The Three Rs of Rights, Responsibility and Respect are an important tool for educators to restore this civic purpose of schools.

How do the Three Rs serve this purpose? When educators, parents, and students truly understand the First Amendment principles of Rights, Responsibility and Respect they develop a new understanding of the meaning of citizenship. They come to see that the Constitution with its Bill of Rights provides a civic framework of rights and responsibilities that enable all of us to work together for the common good in public schools. This means that everyone in the school community recognizes freedom of conscience as an inalienable right for every person, even those with whom they disagree fundamentally. The First Amendment protects citizens from having religion thrust upon them in schools, yet the First Amendment also protects those who wish to privately practice their religion while in school.

An even more important aspect of the Three Rs is that it reminds us that in order to preserve these rights, all people have the responsibility to protect them for all others. This means that freedom of conscience for ourselves is a universal right joined to
a universal duty to protect that right for all others. This means that the public school educators, parents, and students, must uphold the right of religious liberty for students of all faiths or none.

But people being people there are bound to be disagreements over public school policy and curriculum. Students are often the pawns in these disagreements but can learn a great deal about democratic citizenship by understanding the rights of each group to argue for their positions. As Charles Haynes of the First Amendment Center has said, “The importance of recognizing the rights [of others] and realizing we are all a religious minority somewhere in this country are important. As for respect, debate is necessary. But it is how we debate that is more important.” Schools must model and reward civil discourse at times when faculty, students, and/or community are in the midst of conflict and struggling with differences. Individual educators and school leaders need to develop and review guidelines to make sure there were outlets for dealing with religious and cultural conflict. Best of all, they need to develop a Common Ground Task Force or Advisory Group in advance of conflict. This pro-active approach reinforces the importance of listening to opposing positions and ideas as an indication of respect. Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Schools, available from the First Amendment Center at <http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=3979> offers strategies for resolving conflict by finding common ground.

Students are just as capable of using these ideas as the adults on public school campuses. The advantages of helping young people do so far outweigh the time it takes to teach the principles. Schools can apply the “Rs” broadly and use these principles as a core component to a civics-based character education effort. Students familiar with the Three Rs come to see their value and use them to evaluate actions and behavior in literature and history lessons, but more importantly, on campus and in the classroom. Rob Wilson, First Amendment School principal in Modesto, has applied the First Amendment in his school as something to help students to become better citizens and to deal with differences and resolve conflict. The results of using the First Amendment as a learning tool far exceeded expectations. As these elementary level students grew in ability to examine issues and resolve conflict, they also began to take responsibility for their own learning and behavior and for making the whole school a fairer, better place for everyone. The school’s dramatic test score improvements have caused others to take the risk of broadening their school reform efforts from a top down reading and math focused curriculum to one that builds student and teacher efficacy. This approach has not only empowered students to manage behavior and influence policy at their school along with their teachers and administrators, it has shown them that American democratic values really work to make a better society. This is civic virtue in action.

Sources:
National Council for the Social Studies, “Fostering Civic Virtue: Character Education in the Social Studies.”

California 3Rs Project
Winter-Summer Calendar 2009

February 7 - Buddhism in American History: Beliefs, Practices & Contributions
February 20 - Muslims in American History: From the Colonial Era to Today
February 21, March 14, and May 16 - Teaching About Religion in Public Schools
March 6 - Teaching About World Religions: Pitfalls and Promising Practices
April 25 - Darwin in the Schools: Science, Faith, and the 3Rs
May 7 (10 a.m. - 4 p.m.) - California Three Rs Planning Committee Meeting
May 7 (1:30 - 4 p.m.) - California Three Rs Advisory Committee Meeting
July 20-24 - Religion in American History Institute: What to Teach and How to Teach It
Teaching About Religion in Public Schools

Among the most challenging content in both the U.S. and world History-Science Content Standards is the extensive coverage of the beliefs, practices, and impact of religion in human history. In addition to this content, for which many have received little preparation, educators must also understand the constitutional issues related to how religion is addressed in public schools. This Saturday workshop series is designed to provide assistance in both these areas. The program will feature scholar sessions on the major religions covered in the Standards, paired with teacher discussions on how to apply this content in California’s religiously diverse classrooms in a constitutionally permissible manner. Professional development credit is offered.

Saturday, February 21, March 14, and May 16, 2009
8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Alameda County Office of Education, 313 W. Winton Ave., Hayward CA 94544
$150 fee includes morning refreshments, materials, and lunch all three sessions. Limited scholarships for registration fee are available. Optional university credit offered.

Content Topics

The Nature of Religion and the Legal Parameters for Teaching About Religion in Public Schools
Basic Beliefs and Historical Evolution of Judaism * Early Christian Beliefs and History
European Religious Reformations and Their Impact * History and Basic Beliefs of Islam
Basic Beliefs and History of Hinduism * Beliefs and Cultural Influences of Buddhism

Registration deadline is February 13, 2009. No refunds after deadline.
Questions? Contact Avi Black, H-SS Coord. Alameda COE, 510-670-4239, ablack@acoe.org

Name: ___________________________________________ School: __________________________________________

District: ____________________________ School Phone: ( ) ________ School Fax: ( ) ________

School Address: __________________________________________ City: ______________ Zip: ______

Email: __________________________________________

Method of Payment: Check (made payable to ACOE) ______ PO (PO #) __________

Mail registration coupon and fee to:  Avi Black, H-SS Coordinator, Alameda COE
313 W. Winton Ave., Hayward, CA 94544
Phone: 510-670-4239
Common Ground Resources:
First Amendment Center, 2007.
This book has guidelines on how to handle a wide range of issues related to religious liberty and public schools.

This is an up-to-the-minute resource with current issues and court cases. A PDF version of *Finding Common Ground* is available here.

For **California Three Rs program information, contact**...
Dr. Margaret Hill, California 3Rs Project Lead, Department of Educational Leadership & Curriculum, California State University San Bernardino, 5500 University Pkwy., San Bernardino, CA 92407
(909) 537-5459, [mhill@csusb.edu](mailto:mhill@csusb.edu)

For **First Amendment religious liberty information, contact**...
Dr. Charles C. Haynes, Senior Scholar, Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, 555 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington D.C. 20001 Tel: 202/292-6293 [chaynes@freedomforum.org](mailto:chaynes@freedomforum.org)

For **information on teaching about world religions, contact**...
Dr. Bruce Grelle, Director, Religion and Public Education Resource Center, Department of Religious Studies, California State University, Chico, 400 West First Street, Chico, CA 95929-0740,
(530) 898-4739, [bgrelle@csuchico.edu](mailto:bgrelle@csuchico.edu)

Sign up to receive the **Three Rs Bulletin** and program announcements electronically at [mhill@csusb.edu](mailto:mhill@csusb.edu) or see [http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/score_lessons/3rs/index.html](http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/score_lessons/3rs/index.html)

---

Dr. Peg Hill, Director
California 3Rs Project
Dept. of Educational Leadership & Curriculum
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA 92407