



Monday, August 16, 2021

The National School Boards Association and local School Boards,

Thank you for the vital leadership role you play in ensuring schools empower all of our students to acquire the core American virtues and knowledge essential for citizenship in our racially diverse, multi-ethnic and pluralistic democracy. A peaceful and prosperous American future must be built on a shared understanding of our past that is accurate and truthful, but also celebratory and aspirational.

The prevailing narrative of racial grievance has been corrupting the instruction of American history and the humanities for many decades, but has accelerated dangerously over the past year. The most damaging effects of such instruction fall on lower income minority children, who are implicitly told that they are helpless victims with no power or agency to shape their own futures.

Also concerning are the results from the National Center of Education Statistics' 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Alarming, only 24 percent of eighth graders performed at or above [NAEP Proficient](#) standards for the Civics assessment and only 15 percent did so for the History assessment. These dismal achievements in gaining an understanding of democratic citizenship, government, historical facts and perspectives across time are low across all student backgrounds and virtually unchanged from the benchmarks established two decades ago.

Given these urgent crises, the undersigned submit this letter in the spirit of offering a resource and hopeful path forward for educating our children. We represent a nonpartisan and intellectually diverse black-led alliance of writers, educators, thinkers, and activists focused on solutions to our country's greatest challenges in education, culture, race relations, and upward mobility.

The Woodson Center's *1776 Unites* initiative stands in unqualified opposition to any curricula that depict America as irredeemably racist; teach that the legacies of slavery, racial segregation, and other appalling crimes are insurmountable; or fail to provide examples from history of black achievement against the odds. We ask that your schools instead adopt curricula that, rather than completely reject our founding values, instead embrace the ideas of family, faith, and entrepreneurship that have enabled all Americans – *including black Americans* -- throughout history to move from persecution to prosperity, and will continue to do so for generations to come.

We propose including in your schools' offerings the Woodson Center's *1776 Unites* curricula, which map to Social Studies, English and Social/Emotional Learning standards. *1776 Unites* offers authentic, motivating stories from American history that show what is best in our national character and what our freedom makes possible even in the most difficult circumstances.



The curricula maintain a special focus on stories that celebrate black excellence, reject victimhood culture, and showcase the millions of African Americans who have prospered by embracing their country's founding ideals. The lessons have been downloaded more than 17,000 times across all 50 states.

The Woodson Center's *1776 Unites*' curriculum is grounded in essential American values, upholding:

Continuity, not rupture. *1776 Unites* confronts the realities of slavery and racism in American history while also recognizing them as betrayals of our founding's highest principles. Leaders like Thomas Jefferson are celebrated in our history *despite*, not because of, their personal and political failings. The struggle of Americans to rise and realize our own values is part of our story—and always has been.

Dignity, not grievance. While dealing frankly with the grim realities of racial segregation, *1776 Unites* also shows how black Americans have seized their own destiny and flourished despite harsh restrictions. As demonstrated by the development of nearly 5,000 rural schoolhouses overseen by Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald, these schools became sources of local pride and helped close the white-black learning gap.

Resilience, not fragility. Knowing the achievements of the past helps students better understand their responsibilities as American citizens. A lesson on the "Woodson Principles," which celebrate individual responsibility and strength in the face of adversity, asks students to draw vital support from family, faith, community, and participation in civic life.

Embedded within the achievements of American history are the tools of self-betterment and self-renewal that our country has always deployed on the journey to become a more perfect union. Our children deserve an authentic vision of that story, one that will help them to achieve their own human flourishing.

Teaching the next generation is a consequential privilege that we know you and the legions of teachers in our school systems take seriously.

We ask you, as stewards of public school systems around the country, to lead by example and embrace materials that will inspire the next generation, like those before them, to overcome challenges, achieve their goals, and live in a spirit of service to the common good.

We invite all those who are committed to quality education and fostering a genuine interest among our young people in how inspiring lessons from our past can inform our path forward to contact us at *1776 Unites* (educate@1776unites.com), and to view and download our free curricula at 1776Unites.com.

Respectfully yours,
The Members of The Woodson Center's *1776 Unites* Initiative



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