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Executive Director, NCHE

July 16, 2014

Ms. Margo Anderson  
U. S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave. SW, Room 4W311  
Washington, DC 20202-5930

Dear Ms. Anderson:

The National Council for History Education (NCHE) appreciates having an opportunity to respond to the Supplemental Priorities and Definitions for Discretionary Grant Programs proposed by the Secretary of the Department of Education. We are deeply concerned about the erosion of history's place in the curriculum and the damaging consequences for students, teachers, and our nation that inevitably flow from it. Unfortunately, the Secretary's proposal does nothing directly to address that erosion or its consequences.

Although history is defined as a core academic subject under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), over the past dozen years it has rarely been treated as one. We have seen much greater emphasis placed on English Language Arts and mathematics education as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Common Core State Standards. Education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) has also become a recent point of emphasis, best illustrated by Proposed Priority 7. It is not NCHE's position that promoting education in these other subjects is not vital; rather, it is our view that promoting education in history is no less vital to the well being of the United States.

Recent studies demonstrate the degree to which American society has become polarized along partisan lines. Indeed, one such study published by the Pew Research Center indicates that substantial numbers of Americans now regard members of political parties other than their own as a "threat to the nation's well-being." One needs simply to view the nightly news to see that civil dialogue is increasingly rare in the civic arena. STEM education may produce better-equipped workers, but if they are politically poisoned, disillusioned, or indifferent, our society will be in very deep trouble.

History education is uniquely able to put our society's political schisms into meaningful context, as well as enable students to explore the shared values, institutions, and other commonalities that have historically bound us together as a people. In addition, when properly taught, history entails much more than a recitation of events and personalities – it is an intellectual undertaking that involves students in posing questions and finding, analyzing and reporting the evidence needed to answer them. History education equips students with the critical thinking skills that will enable them to escape the "ideological silos" and "partisan echo chambers" that plague our current civic life. Education in the related social sciences of geography, economics, and civics (all designated as "core academic subjects" under ESEA) complements and amplifies the benefits of history education.

The National Council for History Education therefore proposes that the following priority be added to the Secretary's proposal:

*Proposed Priority – Promoting History, Geography, Economics, and Civics Education.*

- a) Funding innovative history and civics education projects that target under-served school populations (as outlined in the Sandra Day O'Connor Civic Learning Act of 2013);
- b) Supporting replicable, research-based professional development models for history, geography, economics, and civics teachers that emphasize the promotion of enhanced content and pedagogical knowledge;
- c) Implementing history, geography, economics, and civics projects that employ new technologies so as provide multiple authentic experiences for students and increase their propensity to participate in civic life;
- d) Funding projects that foster school/community partnerships while enhancing students' civic knowledge and skills;
- e) Encouraging states to develop clearer and higher standards of learning in history and related social sciences.

The National Council for History Education recognizes the amount of work by Department of Education staff that went into the Proposed Supplemental Priorities and is grateful for the opportunity to comment on them. Please contact Justin Jakovac, Executive Director of NCHE, at [Justin@ncche.net](mailto:Justin@ncche.net) with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



Dale Steiner, Chair  
Board of Directors  
National Council for History Education