A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT TO FORM A TASK
FORCE TO REVIEW CIVICS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS AND TO PROPOSE AN
IMPROVED CURRICULUM TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE
RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENSHIP.

WHEREAS, national polls have recorded historic lows in
popular trust for all three branches of the federal
government; and

WHEREAS, there is abundant evidence of a low level of
understanding of the United States constitution, the United
States' system of government and American history in general;
and

WHEREAS, the 2010 civics assessment of the national
assessment of educational progress of the national center for
education states that only twenty-seven percent of fourth
graders, twenty-two percent of eighth graders and twenty-four
percent of twelfth graders achieved test results at or above
the proficient level in civics; and

WHEREAS, the national assessment of educational progress
civics assessment measures the civics knowledge, skills and
dispositions that are critical to the responsibilities of
citizenship in the constitutional democracy of the United
States; and

WHEREAS, the blueprint for the assessment recommends
that the assessment should be organized around three main components: civic knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills and civic dispositions; and

WHEREAS, the civic knowledge component draws heavily on the national standards for civics and government and covers a broad range of content that forms the basis for fundamental understanding of civic life, politics and government; the foundations of the American political system; government established by the constitution to embody the purpose, values and principles of American democracy; the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs; and the roles of citizens in American democracy; and

WHEREAS, the intellectual skills component covers those skills of mind and action that allow individuals to apply civic knowledge to good effect by identifying, describing, explaining, analyzing, evaluating, taking and defending positions; and

WHEREAS, the component of civic dispositions refers to the traits of private and public character essential to the preservation and improvement of the constitutional democracy of the United States that include the following:

A. becoming an independent member of society;

B. assuming the personal, political and economic responsibilities of a citizen;

C. respecting individual worth and human dignity;
D. participating in civic affairs in an informed, thoughtful and effective manner; and

E. promoting the healthy functioning of the constitutional democracy of the United States; and

WHEREAS, in recent years, civics education in schools across the country has been on the decline; and

WHEREAS, prior to the 1960s, courses encouraging students to explore their roles as citizens and discuss current issues were common, while today such classes are rare; and

WHEREAS, civics education instead is typically rolled into a course about the United States government with little time devoted to exploring how students can participate in the democratic process, according to a recent survey from the national center for learning and civic engagement; and

WHEREAS, public trust in government is at only eighteen percent, and voter participation has reached its lowest point since 1996; and

WHEREAS, without an understanding of the structure of government and the rights, responsibilities and methods of public engagement, civic illiteracy and voter apathy will continue to plague American democracy; and

WHEREAS, educators and schools have a unique opportunity and responsibility to ensure that young people become engaged and knowledgeable citizens; and
WHEREAS, New Mexico social studies standards as part of high school graduation requirements are already guided by New Mexico statutes and administrative codes that call for competence in the subject of social studies, but those standards fall short of the knowledge and confidence required to fulfill the vital functions of citizenry at this challenging time for the state and country;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that for the health of democracy and to maintain a vibrant, active community that will participate knowledgeably in government for the creation and maintenance of a society that reflects the values of equality, liberty and justice for all on which the nation was founded, the public education department be requested to convene a civics education task force to determine how to improve civics curriculum in New Mexico schools; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the civics education task force be composed of the following members or the designees of those members:

A. a representative of the public education department appointed by the secretary of public education, to serve as chair of the task force;

B. representatives from or experts on the three branches of the government of New Mexico: the executive, the
legislative and the judicial;

C. representatives from or experts on the three branches of the federal government;

D. legal experts focused on civics and constitutional law;

E. ethics experts;

F. historians specializing in civic history;

G. teachers who have demonstrated innovative methods of teaching civic engagement, such as mock trials and mock elections;

H. county clerks and others involved in elections; and

I. citizen organization leaders dedicated to raising civic awareness and participation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the civics education task force seek the input of nationwide experts from institutions such as the national assessment of educational progress, the center for civic education, the national conference of state legislatures, the national center for state courts and other local, state, county and municipal stakeholders; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the civics education task force present a report of its activities and a draft of proposed curriculum for elementary and secondary schools in New Mexico that will address the need for more comprehensive and effective civics education to the appropriate interim
legislative committee by November 1, 2019; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this memorial be transmitted to the secretary of public education.