



Pioneer to Participate in U.S. History Competition for Students

“We the People” promotes U.S. history and civics education

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BOSTON, MA – Pioneer’s Center for School Reform Director, Jamie Gass, will join a distinguished roster of judges on Saturday morning, January 28th at the annual *We the People: the Citizen and the Constitution* state championship, where seven high school teams will compete to showcase their knowledge of American history and civics, at the Institute of Politics at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Gass has served as a statewide judge for many years, and for three years running he has represented Massachusetts at the national contest in Washington, D.C. “U.S. history and civics are the necessary foundation for citizenship,” Gass said. “It’s an honor to participate in a program that does such a great job of promoting them with students.”

Roger Desrosiers, Massachusetts State Coordinator for *We the People: the Citizen and the Constitution*, said “These subjects provide students with background knowledge and analytical tools that are universally applicable: A deep understanding of our history and the Founding Documents, a solid sense of one’s civic role in society, and an abiding interest in current events.”

Desrosiers taught social studies for 32 years at Millbury High School, served as past president of the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies (MCSS), and has been an adviser to the Massachusetts Department of Education.

The non-partisan and non-ideological *We the People* program, sponsored by the Center for Civic Education, was founded in 1987. Modeled on congressional hearings, each team prepares a series of oral arguments and responds to judges’ intense questioning on the historical, philosophical, and current political implications of the Constitution. Over 28 million students and 90,000 educators have participated.

We the People students learn about their government and make their own judgments based on a solid understanding of the Founding period of our government. Students develop a better appreciation of how the Founding principles are applied today, thus forming a greater knowledge as they develop their citizenship skills to demonstrate a healthy disposition toward our government.

Last April, President Obama and the Congress cut millions from the program’s funding, despite mounting evidence that American students’ knowledge of their government and civics is woefully inadequate. On the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress exam, only 12 percent of high school seniors scored at or above proficiency in U.S. history, lower than in any other subject tested.

According to the *Boston Globe*, Massachusetts is one of only nine states without a high school civics or government graduation requirement. School districts offer such courses as electives, but the state assessment system does not test students’ proficiency. As a result, other subjects receive more resources.

In 2009, the Massachusetts Department of Education suspended MCAS testing in history and social studies, which had been mandated as part of the 1993 Education Reform Act. Claiming it would cost \$2.5 million per year, state officials said they could not restore it in 2012 due to budget constraints. State and local taxpayers currently pay more than \$9 billion annually to fund K-12 public education.

Governor Patrick's recently unveiled FY13 budget proposal includes a \$165 million increase in education funding, including \$10 million for the community college system, an equal amount for a program to improve student performance in "Gateway Cities," and a \$145 million increase in Chapter 70 funding for school districts.

Pioneer Institute has actively supported rigorous, content-based academic standards that include U.S. history and civics instruction. In 2010, Pioneer held an event on the importance of a U.S. history-rich core knowledge curriculum that featured University of Virginia Professor *Emeritus* E.D. Hirsch, Jr., and Andrew J. Rotherham, former Clinton administration aide and co-founder and partner at Bellwether Education. For the transcript, please click on [*The Sacred Fire of Liberty*](#).

Pioneer also co-sponsored a conference in May 2008, "[History and Civic Education: The Learning of Liberty for Civic Life](#)," with the Projects in Civic Engagement at Boston University's School of Education. The event, featuring Pulitzer Prize-winning and Brown University historian Gordon S. Wood, focused on preparing students with a working knowledge of U.S. History for active citizenship.

Pioneer opinion pieces urging stronger instruction in American history and civics, and the restoration of the US History MCAS, have appeared in the *Boston Herald*, *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, *the Providence Journal*, *the MetroWest Daily News*, *the Lowell Sun*, *The Standard-Times* of New Bedford, *Fall River Herald News*, and other media outlets.

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