



Researchers Question Prioritizing “Patriotic Education”



An honor society for the nation’s most accomplished education researchers has clapped back against a Trump administration proposal to prioritize Department of Education grant funding for programs that promote “patriotic education.”

The U.S. Department of Education proposal [defined](#) “patriotic education” as follows:

[A] presentation of the history of America grounded in an accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling characterization of the American founding and foundational principles; a clear examination of how the United States has admirably grown closer to its noble principles throughout its history; and the concept that commitment to America’s aspirations is beneficial and justified.

In a five-page [statement](#) released last week, the [National Academy of Education](#) (NAEd) criticized the proposal’s hagiographic treatment of American history. Accordingly, it called for a more expansive definition

of patriotic education. The statement also discouraged the term “patriotic education,” proposing that it be changed to “civic education.”

Based on a recent [peer-reviewed synthesis report](#), the NAEEd argued that the administration “defines patriotic education too narrowly.” The authors write:

While foundational civic knowledge as well as appreciation for America’s founding traditions and principles are an essential basis for participation in America’s constitutional democracy, reflective patriotism is also a critical part of a healthy democracy. It prepares students to develop the capacity to embrace love for the United States while critically examining how its institutions function, including both successes and failures. This approach prepares students to engage with democratic processes through rational thinking rather than uncritical sentiment. This emphasis on critical thinking is essential as we live in a complex and highly interdependent world. The challenges we face and that our children will face in the future cannot be wrestled with simplistically.

In addition to urging the administration to emphasize critical thinking, Academy members called for it to “ensure that students’ understandings of civic, historical, and political traditions are inclusive of the rich cultural histories that comprise American society.” The statement continues,

While some argue that teaching our students about the challenges to the vision of democracy articulated in our founding documents will lead students to not love America – such as about slavery, the impacts on Indigenous communities in the expansion of the U.S. territory, the impacts of historical antisemitism, historical relationships with our bordering neighbor Mexico, the practices of Eugenics, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, or that women did not get the right to vote until 1920 – we argue just the opposite. Namely, that it is inspirational that we have a system of governance through which to peacefully challenge and transform these ethical dilemmas in our history. Supporting our students

in understanding how we have been able to wrestle with these ethical dilemmas not only gives hope, but helps students to understand their potential as civic actors. Problems do not go away because we ignore them.

The comment period for the proposed rule opened on September 17th and closed on October 17th. The rule, with possible modifications, will likely be adopted by the administration. But pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act, 5 U.S.C. § 553(c), the Department must review and evaluate comments, such as the NAEd comment, that raise significant issues related to the proposed rule.

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