

TO: Mayor and Council  
Chair and Board

FROM: UBCM Presidents Committee

DATE: February 6, 2009

RE: **Opportunity to Advance Civics in School Curriculum**

At the December 2008 Presidents Committee meeting, members received a delegation from Anne Marie Goodfellow of the Law Courts Education Society of BC. She advised that the Society is assessing BC Social Studies curriculum for grades 7 through 12 to make recommendations for revisions in order to promote active citizenship among students when they graduate.

UBCM has always been an avid supporter of local government education. While previous efforts to promote greater public education about local government have met with limited success (ie. Local Government Awareness Program) we are encouraged the work that is presently underway by the Law Courts Education Society of BC. As noted, the Society is conducting the BC Law and Citizenship Curriculum Assessment Project in order to ensure that all students graduate from secondary school with the skills and knowledge necessary to be active citizens. The project is funded by The Law Foundation and supported by several BC government ministries. The following describes the initiative in further detail.

### **Project Goal**

To promote active citizenship by ensuring that upon secondary school graduation students have a good understanding of Canadian legal structures, processes of the justice system, their legal rights and responsibilities, and an appreciation of the rule of law.

### **What is active citizenship?**

Active citizenship is defined as citizens who understand the structure and operation of their political and justice systems, and actively participate in exercising their political, societal, and legal rights and responsibilities.

### **Why is this project necessary?**

In 2007 the Ministry of Education conducted a grade 8-12 Social Studies Curriculum Needs Assessment and identified issues that need to be addressed concerning law and especially citizenship in the current curriculum.

The assessment included interviews with social studies experts; a literature review of current research in social studies education; reviews of curriculum in all 10 Canadian provinces; and questionnaires for educators, students, parents, and other stakeholders regarding curriculum content.

**What are the issues?**

The assessment found that:

"Fewer than a quarter (22%) of educators feel that students have ample opportunity in required social studies courses to practice active citizenship, and many feel that the curriculum does not adequately help students feel connected to Canadian politics or develop the attitudes and abilities to be active participants in democratic society." (p.4)

"Fewer than half of parents feel that adequate time and attention are devoted to developing students' citizenship skills or that students acquire a good grasp of how government works in our country from the social studies grades 8 to 11 curriculum." (p.4)

**What is the curriculum assessment project team doing?**

It has assembled an advisory committee comprised of members from: BC Ministry of Education, BC Ministry of Attorney General, BC Ministry of Community Services, BCTF, BC Social Studies Teachers' Association, BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association, Canadian Bar Association, Provincial Court of BC, BC Civil Liberties Association, Local Government Leadership Academy, and the District of West Vancouver.

Local governments may provide feedback to the suggested enhancements at the project website, [www.bccitizenship.ca](http://www.bccitizenship.ca).

**How can local governments support this work?**

UBCM has indicated its support for this initiative (see attached letter) and individual local governments are encouraged to look at the website and provide their input as well. LGMA has also indicated its endorsement for the project.

As part of our support, UBCM has offered to develop a contact list of individuals within local governments that might be willing to act as a resource person for teachers who wish to have guest speakers on civics related topics, or take classes on field trips involving local government activities, such as council or board meetings.

If your local government is interested in participating please email your contact person to UBCM c/o Marie Crawford at: [mcrawford@civicnet.bc.ca](mailto:mcrawford@civicnet.bc.ca).

Thank you in advance for your support.

Att. (1)