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## **Hirsch Attributes Complacency, Drift Away from Academic Content for Steep Decline in Students' Knowledge of Civics: Says Specific, Content-Based Curriculum Needed to Reverse the Trend**

**BOSTON** – National education standards expert E.D. Hirsch attributes a dramatic decline in American students' knowledge of civics over the last half-century to a simple failure to teach it that has resulted from complacency about the proper function of schools in a democracy in a transcript released today of *The Sacred Fire of Liberty*, an event featuring Professor Hirsch and former Clinton administration education advisor Andrew J. Rotherham.

“American schools were designed to develop critical thinkers and able citizens in the context of a republican government that is precariously dependent on the loyal sentiments of its people,” said Hirsch at the event, which was co-sponsored by Pioneer Institute and Democrats for Education Reform.

But as concerns about the stability of the nation subsided over time, complacency set in. Since the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the Nation's Report Card, was established in 1970, it has only probed 12<sup>th</sup> grade civics knowledge three times, with declining results. “It would be the first thing Madison and Lincoln would have wanted to probe,” says Hirsch.

Complacency about the proper function of schools in a democracy resulted in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century drift toward so-called progressive education and a less content-based curriculum. The decline in knowledge of civics is part of a long-term decline in knowledge of all academic subjects, according to Hirsch. In the post-war period, the United States has fallen from the first to the third quartile of nations measured in reading; between 1978 and 1988, the science knowledge of American students fell from seventh to 15<sup>th</sup>.

The most precipitous declines occurred between 1960 and 1980. Since then, scores have largely remained flat.

Hirsch says that reversing the declines will require replacing the fuzzy anti-curricular movement with a definite, highly specific, content-based curriculum.

In his remarks, Rotherham, now co-founder and partner at Bellwether Education, a non-profit organization committed to improving educational outcomes for low-income students, called Hirsch's ideas “profoundly egalitarian.”

Massachusetts was scheduled to implement passage of a U.S. history MCAS test as a graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2012, but the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education postponed the requirement in 2009, claiming they couldn't find the \$2.4 million to score the tests.

“With Massachusetts receiving hundreds of dollars from the federal government for education, the idea that it cannot find \$2.4 million to reinstate the U.S. history MCAS requirement just doesn’t stand up to scrutiny,” said Pioneer Institute Executive Director Jim Stergios. “After all, the history requirement is the law. The architects of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act understood that testing will make history a priority for educators.”



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