

Civic Education, Cyber-Style



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RESOURCES




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WHO'S MY LEGISLATOR

Civic education is:

- A) Not relevant today
- B) An easy A with a boring teacher to fulfill a high school requirement
- C) Virginia's Capitol Classroom

Correct answer: C

If you picked A or B, turn on your computer and visit the Virginia General Assembly's Capitol Classroom. Find out how engaging, interesting and just plain fun civic education can be—not to mention educational.

Inspired, conceived and run by four legislative staffers, the Capitol Classroom opens the door to a legislative world that embraces history—Thomas Jefferson designed the state capitol and modeled it after an ancient Roman temple in Nimes, France; emblems—the state dog is the foxhound, the beverage is milk, the bird is the Northern Cardinal; and civics programs—from NCSL's America's Legislators Back to School Program, to Project Citizen and internships for high school, college and graduate students. It also has virtual tours of the capitol, ways to find your assemblyman and senator, board games on how a bill becomes a law, and puzzles and activities, including a civics IQ test.

It's all designed to help kids—and adults—understand how representative democracy works. It represents a Virginia tradition that began with Jefferson himself—the idea that citizens have a responsibility to participate in their government. The Virginia General Assembly is committed to the idea and states it on its website:

"Active citizen participation is an integral part of a functioning representative democracy. Members of the General Assembly want and need citizen input when crafting laws. ...Your role in the democratic process of government does not end at the polls." By sharing their opinions, citizens help lawmakers resolve issues and evaluate proposals, the site adds.

Capitol Classroom clearly supports the commitment to educating citizens—from the youngest to the oldest. The General Assembly was recognized for its contributions to civic education when it received NCSL's Kevin B. Harrington Award for Excellence in Democracy Education. The four legislative staffers received special recognition for their role in making the website creative, appealing and a model of civic outreach. Bladen Finch is director of the Senate Page Program and civics coordinator; Nathan Hatfield is assistant clerk of the Senate; Jeffrey Finch is deputy clerk of the House; and Jay Pearson is director of the House Information and Communication Services. Together, the four organize, package and market the multitude of resources and programs promoting civic education on the site.