



How Americans All® Can Help Reposition Education For the Global Age

August 2009

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July 2008

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Every nine seconds U.S. schools are in session, a student drops out of school. Even more disturbing, the school dropout problem shows no signs of abating—it will only worsen because of our new demographics. The minority population is more than 100 million strong and comprises more than a third of the nation's total population. Unfortunately, this population's children are most at risk of dropping out of school at the K–12 level. Most of these students do not drop out of school because they are “dumb” or because school is “too hard,” however. They leave because they are alienated, bored and frustrated.

Besides demographics, the lives of today's students are increasingly being shaped by the dynamics of technology, a global economy and environmental shifts. Yet few students understand how the world affects them or how their actions, as well as those of their community and nation, affect the world. Few recognize that the choices they make today will become the history of tomorrow.

Americans All® is an education resource program, first piloted in 1990 and currently in use in more than 2,000 schools and libraries. It uses historical context as a bridge to the modern era. When students see connections to their everyday lives, learning becomes more meaningful. An expanded version of this 10-year initiative is now ready for implementation nationwide. Educators recognize the value of the program as an important instrument to reposition education for the global age.

- **Students and teachers will have access to the instructional resources they need.**

Student instruction in history and civics is being given short shrift, because federal and state testing requirements are putting pressure on school districts to show progress in reading, mathematics and science achievement. The loss of instructional time in the core subjects of history and civics has significant ramifications for students, employers and the nation.

History and civics education lays the foundation for students' lifelong participation in our democracy and their competency to deal with global affairs. These subjects integrate knowledge with content from many disciplines—economics, geography, sociology and political science—to prepare young people to understand their communities, their nation and the world around them.

Moreover, history and civics education teaches students how to work comfortably with people from other cultures, solve problems creatively and think in multidisciplinary ways. These “soft” skills are ones that employers view as imperative for new hires but find lacking among high school graduates. The successful pursuit of higher education also depends on these soft skills. In addition, few young people graduate school with an understanding of even the simplest personal finance issues. This financial illiteracy can have serious repercussions later in life as they try to manage their money and credit, open a retirement account or buy a house.

The lack of history and civics instruction is having a negative impact on students’ education and is compromising their potential to become responsible citizens, productive employees and educated consumers. Results of tests and surveys conducted in the past few years reveal the disturbing consequences of our inattention to history and civics and of students getting an incomplete education. For example, a recent Common Core survey of 1,200 17-year-olds revealed that one in four of the high school students did not know who Adolf Hitler was. Less than half knew when the Civil War was fought.

New or enhanced classroom resources are needed to help fill the gaps created by efforts to comply with high-stakes testing requirements. Moreover, these instructional materials should support the state standards and curriculum frameworks that local districts use. Americans All® does just that.

- **Classroom resources will embrace inclusion and integrate multiple perspectives.**

Increased globalization renders the boundaries between domestic and international problems very porous. Addressing global problems requires a mindset and a disposition to interact peacefully, respectfully and productively with people all over the world. Americans All® instructional materials provide diverse and inclusive images of history that can be a catalyst for this type of tolerance and understanding.

In addition, an increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse student body requires more inclusive instructional materials that impart the social, economic and cultural contributions of the different population groups comprising our nation. Americans All® promotes school retention and graduation by making classroom instruction relevant to students’ lives.

The program’s emphasis on the peopling of our nation through the lens of diverse population groups is based on patterns of migration and immigration. Carefully planned learning activities engage teachers and students in comparative analysis of all groups simultaneously. These activities ensure sensitivity to the previously untold stories of women, working-class people and minority groups.

Results from the program’s implementation in ethnically and culturally diverse school systems confirm the efficacy of this approach. Students will develop a higher level of awareness and appreciation for the experiences and contributions of diverse groups. They will learn how to be effective with different people and in different settings. Their critical-thinking capacities—required for filtering today’s avalanche of information—will also be enhanced. Finally, students will foster and nurture strong self-concepts in an environment that frequently devalues individuals’ and groups’ life experiences.

- **Classroom resources will be grade-level and state-specific.**

Schools will have access to newly created, grade-level and state-specific classroom resources. The instructional materials will be developed for and within each state, with funding and technical assistance from Americans All®. They will include information describing the social, economic and political experiences and contributions of ethnic and cultural groups represented among the state’s residents.

Classroom resources that are tied to specific grade levels are more effective teaching tools than are broad instructional materials that must be adapted and revised to accommodate students' capacity to learn. Teacher's guides provided by the program reinforce the grade-level approach.

Standard textbooks from national publishers and others are problematic because they are not always aligned with state curriculum frameworks, generally do not include multiple perspectives and often reflect the needs of states with large populations. Moreover, their unit price is frequently too high for limited school budgets to afford.

Schools will also have access through Americans All® to generic history and civics information, lesson plans and test questions and to professional development opportunities. In addition, schools will have access to classroom resources used nationwide.

- **Classroom resources will be available in print and electronic formats to accommodate students' interests and learning styles.**

Recognizing that students engage and learn differently, Americans All® will provide access to classroom resources in both print and electronic formats. The printed resources will be based on the electronic databases built for each state. These databases will support how each state teaches and tests history and civics at various grade levels. They will contain the social, economic and political history of ethnic and cultural groups comprising each state's population.

Standard textbooks used to teach history and civics are like encyclopedias in which facts follow facts and no sense of drama or story exists. Students discover that things happened, but rarely is it clear why they happened and whether it mattered. Often the result is that young people tune out the past. In contrast, narratives and visuals—as are manifested in Americans All® resources—engage schoolchildren and improve opportunities for student learning. They can foster research, interactions and activities that are relevant to students, their families and their communities as well as promote connections to art and architecture, literature and poetry and music and dance.

The electronic databases and embedded resource links will enable students and teachers to access the most current relevant information, rather than rely exclusively on textbooks whose content may be outdated or too broad. By providing a greater choice of screened and approved instructional resources and teaching materials, including text, audio and visual media, schools will also be better equipped to teach students with special needs.

The state-driven content of the printed resources and electronic databases will fully support state standards and curriculum frameworks. Moreover, that content, while designed to enable state testing in history and civics, will support the requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*.

- **A communications network will be established to share promising instructional strategies and best practices.**

To guide educators on using the classroom resources, Americans All® will support, for at least five years, state-directed professional development programs. In addition, instructional Web sites will help educators meet the requirements of standards-based accountability systems.

The program will also establish, for 10 years, a communications network that will include a biweekly electronic newspaper and national meetings. Educators and education leaders will learn about promising instructional strategies and best practices through these forums.

- **Sponsors can simultaneously support schools, invest in their community's future and enhance their social and economic standing.**

Individuals, businesses and service providers have always supported charitable causes within their community. Yet most sponsorship or co-branding opportunities have lacked a way for sponsors to realize revenue-generating or other bottom-line benefits. Americans All®'s unique financing strategy enables sponsors to simultaneously support schools, invest in their community's future and enhance their social and economic standing.

Sponsorship of \$300 is needed to afford a school annual access to Americans All® resources. These contributions will help ensure the funding needed to maintain and expand the program will be available for the next 10 years.

Through the Americans All® Heritage Honor Roll, individual sponsors can honor or recognize a parent, a grandparent, an athlete, a military hero or a family celebration, incorporating these individuals and events into the fabric of America's local history. Business sponsors can market their products or services through the Americans All® Business Registry.

- **The model is replicable in subject areas other than history and civics.**

Americans All® has achieved wide recognition and strong support at the federal, state and local levels. By helping to secure ongoing funding, the program will ensure that the resources and training necessary to teach the core subjects of history and civics are available to the nation's public and private K–12 classrooms. Without a solid grounding in this pillar of education, our students cannot assume their roles as responsible citizens, productive employees and educated consumers in our democratic society and in this global age.

Americans All® provides a program model, including a Web-based infrastructure, that is scalable and can later be applied to major elements of the social sciences field—economics and geography—as well as other important subjects, such as art, music, language, literature and world history. Furthermore, by relying on local community members and businesses to generate funding while providing benefits of interest to these sponsors, an effective model for supporting programs such as Americans All® will be demonstrated.