

POSITION STATEMENT ON CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION VOTE 2017
Central New York Council for the Social Studies

It is typically the goal and standard practice of social studies educators to encourage our students and community toward a robust and open democracy. We have an obligation to our students to provide them with opportunities to learn about our government and to allow for differing opinions to emerge through sound study, debate and exercise of the democratic process. This year's discussion of the ballot vote to re-open New York's Constitution through a Convention must be no exception to that standard. Many see it, on the surface, as a significant opportunity for historic and democratic enterprise to happen in real-time. However, CNYCSS feels strongly that the possibility of a Constitutional Convention is in fact a potential distortion of our ideals and poses a direct threat to the very institution that fosters our democracy, public education.

Those who seek a Constitutional Convention have a political agenda, they do not operate merely on the principle of transparency and citizen participation. One of their objectives is to dismantle protections for educators, like tenure, that nurture social studies teachers' ability to engage in civic dialogue with students, without fear of political or professional reprisal. Supporters of the ballot measure also argue that they will use the opportunity to improve ethics in Albany, but it is clear that many would-be delegates to the Convention are representatives of the very special interests that currently corrupt Albany's legislative process. Rather than raise the voices and concerns of our poorest, most marginalized students, the Convention will drown out the neediest among us, and codify in real terms the will of those who already enjoy the greatest political and economic power for another 20 years. Students and teachers will be put in a weaker position by the revisions to the Constitution, making it even harder for public education to instill civic skill and pride in New York's next generation.

It is for these reasons principally that CNYCSS Board encourages you to consider voting "no" on this proposition. We recognize that each of us is entitled to vote our own conscience in these matters, but our collective ability to best perform our job and fulfill our and our students' dreams is at stake. Despite being an "off-election," it is vital that we show up and make our will known. As social studies professionals, we encourage you to discuss this important decision in your school and community, but please take time to inform yourself about the issue and to present all dimensions to your students for their consideration.

Democracy WILL be served by thoughtful debate and by a full exercise of our rights as voters in this important question.