



Equity In Civic Education

WHITE PAPER



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Executive Summary

Civic education has been a central purpose of schooling in the United States since the founding of this country. Although definitions of citizenship and participation have shifted throughout history, both ends of the US political spectrum have largely agreed on the importance of educating its citizens to know and participate in our particular form of governance.

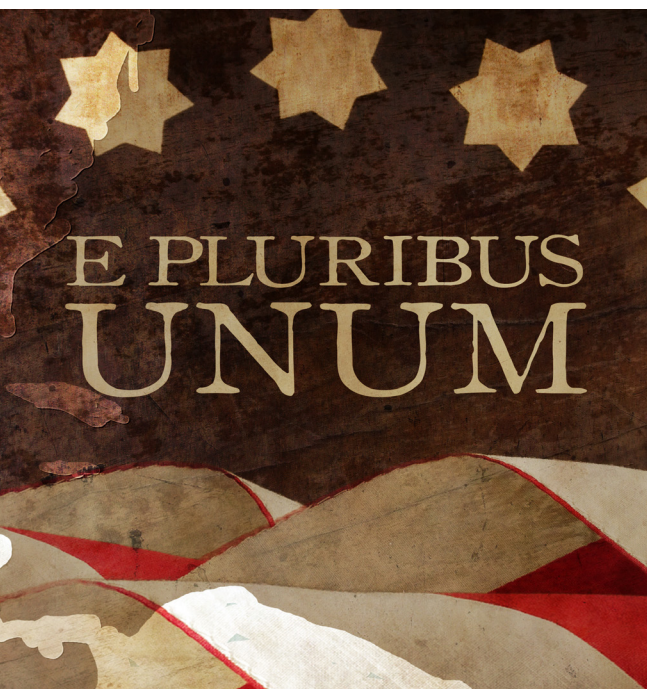
As civic educators, we are proud of the work we do to elevate young people's understanding of government and their engagement with the system. However, we also noticed that, much like the society we mirrored, we had an equity issue.

Especially in times of turmoil, the United States has looked to civic education as a way to help strengthen the health of our nation.¹ The social and political upheavals of 2020 are no exception. The COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed a global health crisis unseen in the modern era, causing massive disruptions to public life. At the same time, our ongoing work gained renewed urgency in the wake of the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, along with far too many other unarmed Black Americans at the hands of the police, has elevated public concern around racial inequity in our society, causing millions of people to reconsider their responsibility in combating systemic racism. All the while, groups of individuals are using misinformation and disinformation in virtual spaces to further incite fear and mistrust amongst the people. Regardless of one's partisan beliefs, there is a sense that our society is under attack. However, young people are showing us that they care about these issues of equity² and are willing to work for a better future. So how can the field of civic education, with a myriad non-profits, K-12 service providers, and educators, help young people both better understand the governmental system and tackle the unprecedented social challenges of the moment?

Long before COVID-19 curtailed public life, a group of civic educators (hosted by two of the leading civic education organizations in the United States: Generation Citizen and iCivics, with support from the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation) gathered to examine our role in the racial inequities that we see in our field. As civic educators, we are proud of the work we do to elevate young people's understanding of government and their engagement with the system. However, we also noticed that, much like the society we mirrored, we had an equity issue. Even though there are signs of a growing number of leaders of color within the field, a majority of non-profit civic providers still have predominantly white staff and leadership. They also work with a mostly white female teaching force to help educate an increasingly diverse student population, with outdated curricula that do not adequately reflect the lived experiences of all students. Recognizing that the field of civic education grapples with these types of power imbalances and issues of inequity, we wanted to scrutinize the work that we do and the vision of equity we have for the future. To learn from the field, we sought out civic education stakeholders (e.g., students, teachers, principals, researchers, and parents) across the nation to hear what they had to say about civic inequity. We present our discoveries and provide a few actionable suggestions in this white paper as insights into how to achieve more equitable civic education.

¹ See for example the progressive moment of the 1930s; the anti-communist policies of the 1950s; or civil rights education in the 1970s, etc.

² See <https://www.racialequitytools.org/act/strategies/youth-activism> for examples of youth-led racial equity projects.



A DEFINITION OF EQUITABLE CIVIC EDUCATION

True to the tenets of our democracy, we believe equitable civic education is inclusive, representative, and relevant; it promotes diverse voices and draws on students' lived experiences and perspectives in order to engage them in understanding social issues, the power dynamics that cause them, and the power that young people have to bring change. This means that equitable civics cannot just be about the structures and functions of government. Instead, a high-quality civic education program involves knowledge about how a civil society works, an understanding about one's place within that civil society, an awareness of how one can have an impact on their society, and, ideally, structured opportunities to put that knowledge, understanding, and awareness into practice (Lin, 2015).

At a bare minimum, this means being concerned with equality of civic access and civic outcomes. But it also means attending to a collective civic narrative that reflects the fullness and broadness of our diverse society instead of just highlighting the perspectives of some. It should include our triumphs, our failures, our strengths, and our weaknesses. And rather than only celebrating the ideals of what could be, it should include the struggles we have experienced (and continue to experience) in an effort to reach those ideals as a people. Instead of assuming we are already one united people, equitable civics takes to heart the motto of our nation, *e pluribus unum*—a perennial struggle to be one from the many. Whether it be the ideological battles between the men that ratified the Constitution, the bloodshed of the Civil War, our continual fight for racial equity, or our celebration of individual differences—we are a people striving to be one through different means and ideologies. At the best of times, our battles can lead to mutual understanding; at the worst of times, our conflicts are a squabble for power and dominance. Equitable civics recognizes and celebrates both of these continual conflicts and the desire to be united: Wearing our scars proudly lest we forget the lessons we learn through these struggles. *E pluribus unum* is not a given, it is a constant balance to be struck generation after generation. So how do we help the next generation prepare to take the helm? By engaging them and empowering them now.

SUMMARY OF TAKEAWAYS

In order for young people to take part in this process, they must not only understand our history and our present, but also be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage productively with our system of governance. From our work over the past 2 years, we have learned that to achieve more equitable civics requires the field of civic education (and its stakeholders) to thoughtfully and continuously reimagine the curricular and instructional goals of civics, provide curriculum and instruction that takes into account students' needs holistically, and construct coherent civic education programs with district and state

leaders. Later portions of this paper detail these findings in full, but for now, let us summarize some of these findings.

Through this process, we learned that parents, community members, and students care a great deal about the civic education of young people. They worry about the current state of civic education, noting especially the inequities that occur within existing programs. Participants of our listening tour events agree across the board that civic education should receive more resources, funding, and support from the district and state-level leadership. Similarly, they emphasized the importance of engaging students in relevant civic issues that reflect their lived experiences. Finally, there was overwhelming agreement on the need to ensure equitable access and distribution of experiential civic experiences for both youth and adults within a community.

Given that engagement with the system is a deeply personal process for students, we recognize the need for civic education, in conjunction with Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), to provide effective, coordinated strategies, programs, and practices that not only help students learn more about their role in our system of governance, but also address their needs holistically. The positive impact of SEL programs on students' behaviors and attitudes as well as increased social, emotional, and academic competence development shows that addressing the holistic needs of students is paramount to the success of any movement towards more equitable civics.

At the same time, it takes leadership and vision to provide a supportive environment to successfully prepare the whole child to take his or her place in the world as an informed and engaged citizen. To that end, we have learned that communities will be well served to develop and implement a comprehensive and coherent approach to achieving equitable civic outcomes, rather than leaving civic education to chance or the purview of individual teachers. Our report showcases one example of such a program; however, we recognize that communities differ and there is not one approach that works for all communities; therefore, each community should choose an approach that is aligned to their context and values.

In the following sections of this report, we present the rationale for conducting this work on Equity in K-12 Civic Education; the process of our work; lessons learned as outlined by our listening tour; and a case for systemic educational change. Finally, we close this report with some honest reflections about this process as well as concluding thoughts and recommendations to help move the field forward. We hope this paper serves as a starting place, however limited, for the field of civic education to grapple with its own equity challenges through further research, curriculum design, and providing professional development for teachers, administrators, and civic providers.



Making the Case for Equity in K-12 Civic Education

After decades of de-prioritization, civic learning is experiencing a resurgence. The increased attention on equity in K-12 civic education has been one aspect of that resurgence.

By equitable civic education, we mean: a civic learning experience that is inclusive, representative, and relevant; one that promotes diverse student voices and draws on students' lived experiences and perspectives in order to engage them in understanding social issues, the power dynamics that cause them, and the power that young people have about change.

By equitable civic education, we mean: a civic learning experience that is inclusive, representative, and relevant; one that promotes diverse student voices and draws on students' lived experiences and perspectives in order to engage them in understanding social issues, the power dynamics that cause them, and the power that young people have to bring about change. Equity in civic education is especially timely for the country's public life for a variety of reasons:

- Proliferation of policy efforts across the US. According to EducationWeek, more than 80 civics bills have been introduced in states across the country, which impacts how young people, teachers, and community members view the health and trajectory of our nation.
- Increasing commitment to racial equity in K-12 civic education by funders and civic education organizations in response to (1) exacerbated digital divides caused by the COVID-19 crisis, (2) socio-political unrest, and (3) youth-led protests during the summer of 2020 in response to policing issues; all punctuated by public attention to the 2020 presidential election cycle.
- Growing attention devoted to lived civics and racial equity amid demographic change in the country. In contrast to the nation's increasingly diverse student population, our teacher workforce does not adequately reflect student demographics, nor are students' voices always seen as additive to the civic learning process.

Working towards equity in K-12 civic education, ideally, entails a concurrent emphasis on both equity and equality. Civic education can ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive civic learning experience that provides a culturally relevant civic education, while also providing the foundational aspects of civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills requisite for informed, lifelong political participation. Civic learning that covers the origins and purposes of our nation's government institutions, speaks to the lived experiences of students, and is rooted in our complex history provides a powerful framework for students to think through, and work towards, a vibrant constitutional democracy. As the Federalist papers exemplified the founders' complex moment, civics today should prepare us to face the hard questions and conundrums of our current realities.

We hope an equity-oriented civic education might establish a renewed confidence that the United States' democratic experiment is worth deepening and developing, precisely because it holds so many differences, not in spite of them. We believe this confidence is a precondition for stewarding our country through what is not just political polarization, but often our mutual suspicion and resentment of one another. At a moment when both the idea and ideals of our governance are undergoing sustained challenges, revitalizing civic education—with an emphasis on equity—holds the potential to undergird an ethos of national unity without uniformity that is needed to ensure that all students, without exception, and without erasure, are prepared to steward our democratic experiment in the 21st century.





The Importance of Process

In the current polarized political landscape, civic education is tasked not only with helping young people understand how our government works, but also how to productively engage in dialogue when disagreements arise.

The first act of this Equity in Civic Education field-building initiative consisted of organizing a racially diverse national steering committee, composed of civic education organizations, social-emotional learning experts, youth organizers, and academic researchers.

The collaborators on this project came together because we were concerned about the former, but quickly found ourselves navigating and practicing through the latter—which in and of itself, is a process worth noting. Since equity is at the forefront of this project, we sought out to engage different stakeholders, voices, and perspectives on this work.

The first act of this Equity in Civic Education field-building initiative consisted of organizing a racially diverse national steering committee, composed of civic education organizations, social-emotional learning experts, youth organizers, and academic researchers. In an effort to model the values we promote, we intentionally sought to organize an inclusive steering committee whose members would reflect the spectrum of perspectives, theories of change, and expertise within the civic education field. From April 2019 through October 2020, the committee held monthly meetings to discuss, plan, and implement targeted initiatives designed to define and advance equitable civic education in K-12 settings. Over time, the composition of the steering committee evolved: Some members cycled off due to capacity constraints, while others transitioned due to misalignment of goals and focuses; by contrast, new members joined the group, eager to address our nation's school-based challenges in addressing racial inequity in civic education.

To prepare the steering committee for its work, we engaged a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant in the early stages of the grant (i.e., Equity Meets Design). In July 2020, Equity Meets Design conducted one-on-one interviews with members of the committee, organizing conversations around a standardized set of questions designed to provide a problem-centered approach to naming, confronting, and solving for equity-oriented challenges in K-12 civic learning. Initial enthusiasm for the problem-centered approach waned over the course of the group's work, because the committee became more focused on balancing problems and solutions as a way to tackle equity issues in education.

Prior to COVID-19, and certainly after it, the steering committee discovered the benefits—and challenges—of sustaining group engagement virtually on a monthly basis. To best organize its work into manageable segments of discrete responsibility, the committee established a workflow structure for monthly steering committee meetings, complemented by three working groups. These working groups focused on curriculum and evaluation, stakeholder engagement, as well as systems change and education improvement. The curriculum and evaluation workgroup set



...we learned to practice democracy and civility together—in the hopes that our own journey and process will help guide others in the field who wish to take on this work.



out to address questions of equity in the academic literature, instructional materials, and overall civic learning experience; the stakeholder engagement group focused on the design and implementation of a seven-city listening tour (which became especially important once COVID-19's public health guidelines prevented us from organizing a national convening, as originally planned, in Montgomery, AL); and lastly, the systems change and education improvement group focused on ensuring that school-level and district-level change was incorporated into conversations and the practice of equity in civic education.

In the first quarter of 2020, Generation Citizen and iCivics elected to bring in additional leadership, subject matter expertise, and capacity to the field-building initiative. Particular attention was given to the stakeholder engagement working group, retaining a research assistant to conduct a literature review of equity in K-12 civic education, and to facilitate a clear connection between strategic objectives and project management systems for the work. As both the grant cycle and working relationships within the steering committee matured, the grantee partners worked to ensure that diverse perspectives of the steering committee were captured, leveraged, and elevated as a part of the decision-making process. We conducted several surveys of the steering committee, and the resulting feedback helped shape agendas for steering committee meetings, the content of the listening tour questions, and to some degree, feedback on the white paper as well. Additionally, the three working groups merged into two in order to streamline the process: "stakeholder engagement" remained and the "systems change and education improvement" and "curriculum and evaluation" working group merged into the "white paper working group".

Overall, the process has been one of deep reflection and discussion for the individuals involved in the project. Even though there were disagreements about goals and agenda, we learned to practice democracy and civility together—in the hopes that our own journey and process will help guide others in the field who wish to take on this work. The process had moments of frustration, disagreement, and self-reflection; however, the underlying ethos and objectives of the Equity in Civics education project remained: (1) to build a sense of shared destiny among the wider civic education field, as well as the member organizations of the steering committee; (2) to provide a roadmap and catalyst for school-level and district-level prioritization of equity in K-12 civic education; and (3) to prepare students for informed, civic participation that is grounded in resilience and a deeper understanding of United States' complex history. The remainder of this report showcases the lessons we have learned as well as future opportunities for research and collaboration we have gleaned from this process.



Listening Tour

The listening tour of the Equity in Civics education initiative is, in many ways, a core component of our collective work. Gabrielle Lamplugh, Education Director of the David Mathews Center for Civic Life, chaired the Stakeholder Engagement working group and provided leadership for the conception, design, and implementation of the tour.

Harvest, AL
Chicago, IL
Salina, CA
Boston, MA
Waco, TX
Albuquerque, NM
Austin, TX

We launched the listening tour in February 2020 with an in-person event in Harvest, AL. Following the advent of COVID-19 and the resulting public health guidelines of social distancing in March, we made the decision to shift all remaining tour events to online virtual sessions. The remaining stops took place virtually in the following cities: Chicago, IL; Salina, CA; Boston, MA; Waco, TX; Albuquerque, NM; and Austin, TX.

We prioritized geographic diversity across seven regions, spanning the Northeast, Midwest, Southwest, West, and South. Additionally, we sought to work in districts of varying sizes and compositions: both with communities in large, metropolitan school districts like Chicago, IL, as well as communities in smaller, more rural districts like Harvest, AL, with other sites somewhere between those two polarities. To ensure engagement of a diverse range of participants who might be impacted by the real-world consequences of equity in K-12 civic education, we focused on recruiting students, parents, and educators for all seven listening tour events. In many instances, district leadership and staff constituted a fourth segment of participants.

For ease and standardization of process, steering committee member organizations, project co-conveners (Generation Citizen and iCivics), and close partners of those groups served as the host organizations for the listening tour in various regions. Host organizations assumed primary responsibility for participant recruitment, event promotion, conversation facilitation on the theme of equity in schools, and composing event summary case studies (see the [Appendices](#) for these summary reports). The project co-conveners provided a uniform menu of resources to all host organizations: (1) a planning guide consisting of a run of show, (2) a set of possible outcomes, and (3) an overview of the Equity in Civic Education project and its objectives. Details of these resources can be found in the [Appendices](#). Furthermore, gift cards were used to both incentivize and recognize participation of attendees, while Generation Citizen and iCivics provided technical assistance to all host organizations.

Recruitment from regional host organizations utilized existing social networks of students and teachers, but also, in some cases, district leaders. This sampling method yielded participants who were familiar with the host organization, experiential civics, and had an interest in advancing racial equity in civic education to some degree. However, the process meant that the project may not have engaged stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, teachers, or district leaders) with less exposure to, or interest in, equitable K-12 civic education. Given that the context of each location influences stakeholder experiences, the host organizations have included legislative



When students gain a strong sense of belonging and safety in learning about and working on civic issues, civics can strengthen families and the whole community.

and district context information for each city in their summary reports (see the [Appendices](#)). Below are snapshots from each of the events, along with key lessons learned from the listening tour.

LISTENING TOUR STOPS

Harvest, Alabama: February 24, 2020

Occurring prior to COVID-19 restrictions, Harvest, Alabama was the only stop on the listening tour to be conducted in person. The event was facilitated by the David Mathews Center for Civic Life (DMC), a non-partisan, non-advocacy non-profit in Montevallo, Alabama. Two listening tour stops were conducted: (1) a morning session at the Harvest Volunteer Fire department (with 17 attendees: 6 educators, 7 parents, and 4 students); (2) and an evening session at Harvest Elementary School (with 9 attendees: 4 educators and 5 parents).

Chicago, Illinois: July 2, 2020

With 16 students, 12 educators, and 5 parents participating in the Chicago virtual stop on the listening tour, participants were divided into two student groups; two educator groups; and one parent group. Focus groups were facilitated by Mikva Challenge staff who led the group through 8 priority questions, followed by an additional 4 questions as time permitted in the 90-minute session. Focus-group facilitators documented common themes and transcribed the conversations to the best of their ability while also facilitating the conversations.

Salinas, California: July 20, 2020

Hosted by the Civic Engagement Research Group (CERG) at the University of California, Riverside, there were 26 people who attended the session for Salinas, CA. The group included 4 district staff members, 5 teachers, 7 parents or family members of students in the district, 4 high school students, and 6 community members and partners to the district. We invited approximately 60 people but turnout may have been impacted due to the event happening during the summer and the stresses surrounding COVID-19. As such, we were unfortunately not able to capture the voices of any school site administrators or middle school students.

Boston, Massachusetts: August 16–19, 2020

In Boston, the Center for Character and Social Responsibility (CCSR) at Boston University, reached out to network leaders in PK-12 Education, Youth Serving Community Based Organizations and Parent Groups. With their support, we were able to set up five group-specific virtual meetings that included: 12 community-based organizers; 4 post-secondary students; 4 educators, 24 secondary students, and 5 parents.

Waco, Texas: August 18, 2020

The virtual listening tour stop in Waco, Texas was hosted by faculty from the School of Education at Baylor University, where they recruited students, parents, and teachers from their summer iEngage program, primarily through email outreach. The session consisted of 4 parents, 4 students, 4 educators, and 3 post-secondary students.

Albuquerque, New Mexico: August 27, 2020

The event in Albuquerque was hosted by the SouthWest Organizing Project, with 20 total participants in attendance: 4 students; 6 educators; and 10 other district or community leaders. They sent emails to their existing listserv and used their social media accounts to solicit participants as a way to gauge interest among their constituents.

Austin, Texas: September 1, 2020

Generation Citizen and Children's Defense Fund TX co-hosted the central Texas listening tour event, with over 80 invites sent out to both organization's respective networks, resulting in 37 participants attending the virtual event. The breakdown of stakeholders who attended the event includes 4 teachers, 10 community leaders/supporters, 8 parents/guardians, and 15 students.

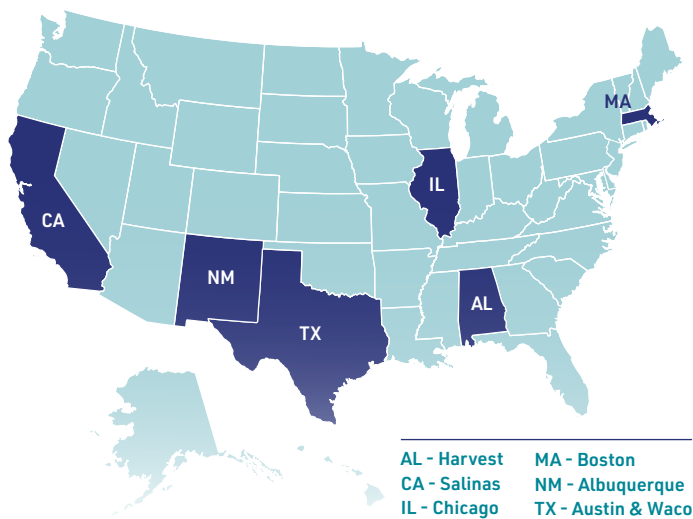
THEMES AND LESSONS FROM THE LISTENING TOUR

Since the design and sampling criteria of our project were somewhat narrow in scope, it limits the generalizability of the findings outlined here. As a result, we elevate the following key themes and insights from the listening tour as provisional lessons, worthy of consideration, piloting, and early stage implementation in their own right, but also needing further research and refinement. Ideally, the highlighted themes may serve as organizing principles for further research and work by practitioners. Additionally, these themes were informed by host reflections in early October 2020, where all host organizations convened virtually to discuss insights, challenges, and takeaways for further examination across their regions, stakeholder groups, and the prevailing civic education policy frameworks in their respective states, districts, and participating school partners.

Across all sites, the events resulted in a number of recurring themes: student voice, parent engagement, prior interest or exposure to equity in K-12 civic education, commitment to centering the lived experience of students, district-level commitment to civic education (staff, resources, stated mission, etc.), and state-level commitment to civic education (education department policy, state standards and curricular frameworks, relevant civics legislation, etc.). These themes are coded against each of the listening tour stops, to enable

pattern recognition and cross-regional comparison and analysis. These themes did not appear prominently, or to the same degree, in each listening tour region, but aspects of them emerged in virtually all case studies. The methods and data used for this process, as well as more details on each theme, can be found in the [Appendices](#). Here we highlight some of the more prominent themes.

Participants from different sites conveyed, using different terms, the importance of cultivating a classroom, school, and community where all students can have a strong sense of belonging and safety as they learn and engage in their communities. Some participants voiced this as a need for more culturally responsive/affirming curricula and pedagogy, while others presented the idea as learning about relevant issues for their communities. A majority of our participants believed that when students gain a strong sense of belonging and



safety in learning about and working on civic issues, civics can strengthen families and the whole community. We believe this goes beyond what has been historically conceived of as “civics,” a content-heavy discipline that has little to do with creating a community or learning about civic life by participating in it. The idea of cultivating schools as a site of civic engagement for the entire community needs further attention.

Similarly, parents, students, and other stakeholders acknowledge that students can impact policies and community challenges. However, too often adult stakeholders fail to value and embrace youth recommendations or see the contribution of young people. This was one of the most dominant themes across communities. Participants believe that if young people feel unheard and undervalued, their civic learning is impeded. They also expressed the importance of providing students of diverse backgrounds and dispositions with an opportunity to develop, find, and use their political voice. Some named

examples of transformational experiences where students found their voice through relevant and culturally-responsive experiential civics.

There was also broad consensus about leveraging parents and community organizations as assets in civic education. Put another way, participants thought that schools should be a site of community engagement in and of itself. For instance, some thought that schools can offer spaces for drop-in office hours where students and families can come and connect with community resources and engagement opportunities or learn about issues within the community. Others thought that parents are an underutilized resource when it comes to supporting civic education. Parents, when informed and prepared, could facilitate important conversations about current and local events at home and model civic engagement. Participants across communities noted that in many cases, parents should be regarded both as learners and teachers. Community organization representatives in attendance unanimously supported experiential civic education and expressed willingness to collaborate. In one community, a county education leader was able to create a coalition of stakeholders that include community members to meet monthly to discuss civic education opportunities.

The lack of infrastructure and policy support to teach civics in powerful and equitable ways was very apparent to participants in some of the communities. In some communities, participants spoke directly from their experience with lack of support, such as not finding out about civic opportunities for their children (lack of investment in school-family connection), not having experiential civics anywhere in the curriculum (possibly related to a lack of investment in capacity building), and not being sure that passing a citizenship test would really prepare young people for civic life (a policy that defines civic competency narrowly). We believe that a challenge to identifying areas of viable change in the civics landscape is that community members lack skills and agency to name the root causes (e.g., lack of state funding and policies that limit civics) and to advocate for better resources. Instead, many stakeholders felt that civics should be better but were unable to articulate how it should change and which problems should be tackled.

Overall, the listening tour showed us that community members, students, and parents have opinions about the state of existing civic education, and the assessment of what exists is not good. Our sampled stakeholders seem to want (1) more civic education, earlier; (2) more equitable civics and experiential experiences; (3) more relevant civics in terms of culturally-responsive teaching; (4) more collaborative efforts that involve the community and parents; and (5) more district and state support in ensuring high-quality equitable civics is available to all.



Education Improvement and Systems Change

As noted by the listening tour findings, administrative and policy supports are important components to ensure that students experience equity-centered civic education.

Civics is like a sport with many team players; it needs an integrated approach that includes parents, students, educators, administrators, and out-of-school partners.

Therefore, the steering committee tasked the Education Improvement and Systems Change Working Group (EISCWG), chaired by Shawn Healy (McCormick Foundation) and Hardin Coleman (Boston University), to determine how schools and educational systems might better support equity in civics. EISCWG was charged to build a framework for understanding how civic education and social and emotional learning programs, grounded in equity, could contribute to improved educational and pro-social outcomes for all children. Since the initial convening, the group met in a virtual format six times to think through, and to articulate, such a framework.

A systems approach became a focus of the steering committee because we recognized that equity-focused civic education, like SEL, requires long term changes and structures that will ensure its sustained success. In many ways, civics is like a sport with many team players: it needs an integrated approach that includes parents, students, educators, administrators, and out-of-school partners. Since civic education involves so many moving parts, to make it more equitable, equity needs to be tracked and guaranteed across these various elements. Furthermore, the needs and wants of a district matter a great deal to what actually occurs in schools. This means that we must pay attention to systemic levers and help create structures that support equitable civics on all levels of the education ecosystem. This section of our report provides an overview of a few existing state-wide civic readiness initiatives, an example of successful attempts at implementing comprehensive civic education programs that had a positive impact on academic outcomes and school culture, and potential ways forward for replicating such work.

SOME EXISTING INITIATIVES THAT FOCUS ON SYSTEMS CHANGE

When we talk about systems, we mean the state legislation, judicial guidelines, state standards, and other various school or district-level policies that combine to dictate and influence a students' learning experiences—all before they enter a classroom or interact with a teacher. The civic readiness models for Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, and New York demonstrate that states are at very different stages in developing civic education initiatives that aim to secure equitable civic learning opportunities for young people. The foregoing states were chosen for review due to each state's prioritization of education for democratic knowledge and participation. These states are not singular in their emphasis in civics, but their attention and capacity assigned to the issue is noteworthy and distinctive. In analyzing the civic readiness models for each of these states, we focused on three themes: (1) a school's



civic ethos; (2) the extent to which states emphasize the importance of an open classroom environment where students are encouraged to talk about politics; and (3) the extent to which curricula reflects the lived experiences of students.

Five of the six states emphasize the importance of fostering a strong civic emphasis at the school-level by encouraging students to participate in school governance (materials from Colorado do not explicitly mention school-level civic learning opportunities). Kansas extends these initiatives to include parents by encouraging schools to adopt participatory budgeting initiatives where the broader community gets a say in how the school allocates its resources. However, only one of these states, Illinois, provides metrics to gauge the success of these initiatives. More specifically, Chicago Public Schools measures how students evaluate their schools' policies. Recall that students who perceive their schools' policies as fair are more likely to participate in civic processes later in life (Berkman, 2020). New York and Arizona appear to be developing metrics to gauge success of these programs, but they currently are not in place.

Five of the six states emphasize the importance of bringing current events into the classroom (materials from Colorado do not explicitly mention the importance of discussing current events and political issues in the classroom). Three states (Arizona, California, and Kansas) emphasize the "Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning" guidebook in addressing this topic, with four of the six practices (i.e., direct instruction, discussion, service learning, and simulations) embedded in the middle and high school course requirements. Illinois measures the effectiveness of these initiatives but does not address any racial inequities. Chicago Public Schools collects data from students regarding whether they engage in conversations of this kind in their classrooms.

Overall, race and racial inequity do not seem to play a central role in the curricula reviewed for each state. This is particularly troubling from an equity lens since the literature shows that culturally responsive teaching, which centers what young people already know, can be particularly empowering for young people of color. At the same time, even though they do not address race explicitly, Chicago Public Schools and the state of Kansas do at least talk about resources that engage with culturally responsive teaching more. On the bright side, five of the six states (Arizona, California, Illinois, Kansas, and New York) have experiential civic learning initiatives in place that are akin to youth-led action research, which is shown to be empowering for young people from marginalized backgrounds. New York's curriculum stands out for its media literacy initiatives, which attend to both the consumption and creation of knowledge and information, and Colorado addresses environmental concerns comprehensively.

ONE CASE STUDY: DEMOCRACY SCHOOLS

The Illinois Democracy Schools Initiative (Healy, 2020) is focused on supporting secondary schools to prepare their students more effectively to be engaged and effective citizens (which is one outcome of a focus on whole child development). The project found that there are five common elements needed to sustain a school-wide commitment to civic learning: (1) *vision and leadership*; (2) a strategically designed *curriculum* that incorporates effective approaches to civic learning; (3) an approach to hiring practices, performance reviews and *professional development* that assert and support the importance of effective civic learning; (4) *school-community connections* that provide opportunities to involve the community in the school and vice versa; and (5) a *school climate* that nurtures and models civic dispositions such as personal responsibility, student engagement in decision-making, and mutual respect and tolerance. Healy (2013) found differences between Democracy Schools and similarly situated high schools on measures of vision and leadership, a strategically-designed curriculum incorporating proven civic-learning practices, staff development, school climate, and school-community connections.

Preliminarily, students in the program increased their knowledge of their own demographic group as well as their interest in and skills at becoming civically engaged. However, there are variations in outcome by race with Black and Latino students being less interested and efficacious about civic engagement than their Asian and white peers. While school climate continues to be an important aspect of creating positive civic environments for youth, we believe much more needs to be done to center students' race, ethnicity, culture, and identity in the curriculum. An analysis of disaggregated data from Democracy Schools showed that the school climate experienced by Black and Latino students compared to white and Asian students was discernibly different even inside the same buildings. This means that the environment alone cannot solve issues of equity and more attention needs to be placed on shifting existing civic narratives. If schools are mini polities, adverse experience with civics among students of color may predict lower levels of civic efficacy.

Seider's (2012) investigation of high performing schools that claim to have a character education program found that it was the comprehensive nature of the programs and the integrity with which the programs were implemented, not necessarily their substance, that determined impact. To create the conditions for children to flourish, for the whole child to develop, schools and communities must come together to a) develop a shared vision for the civic skills they want all of the children in their community to acquire; b) recruit, prepare, and support the professionals in their community (both within schools and in the communities (e.g., community-based organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club); c) develop and implement a curriculum that the community will use to meet its needs; d) develop and implement a system for tracking the impact of the

program and be prepared to make evidenced-based changes; and e) commit to a comprehensive approach to creating the conditions that will allow children to flourish.

The reason one school or community is successful in implementing comprehensive civic initiatives is a function, as Seider (2012) found, of the school or community's ability to develop and integrate a comprehensive and coherent program with consistency and integrity. It takes leadership and vision; well-prepared and well-supported educators; a high-quality curriculum; community engagement; and student engagement. It is not a situation where just the social studies/history teacher or department has sole province over the civic education program. To be successful at preparing the whole child to take his or her place in the world as an engaged citizen, each community will be well served by developing and implementing a comprehensive and coherent approach to achieving that outcome. Each community needs to choose an approach that is aligned to their context and values. Leadership in these efforts can come from anywhere in the community. Success will only come in the communities that make a comprehensive commitment to the work, engage in ongoing self-evaluation, and make changes to their approach accordingly. It will only be from such a community-oriented program that includes parents, youth, community-based organizations, schools (public, private, and parochial) that such a program will be equity-centered, effective, and self-sustaining.

HOLISTIC AND COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES

The Democracy Schools model showcases how civic education can be a tool for school transformation. The challenge, of course, is to replicate its gains at scale. Berkman's (2020) case study on the Illinois example can provide a guideline for how to increase access to high-quality civic education programs that are centered in equity. This is a study on an Illinois high school civics mandate and a district-wide system of implementation that supported a school's deeper commitment to youth civic development through the Democracy School model. The case study highlights examples of how high-quality civic education can help transform a previously failing school, leading to significant improvements in performance and student engagement. It also shows how programs like Democracy Schools can provide a lived civics curriculum that is relevant to the needs of the local population.

Berkman (p. 27) summarizes the takeaways from this successful implementation of civic education with the following:

1. For Implementation

- a. Get ahead of the game
- b. Assess what your state already has in place
- c. Determine a plan of action based on assessed needs
- d. Utilize partnerships
- e. Treat teachers as partners

- f. Have serious coordination
- g. Institutional support is important
- h. Resources matter
- i. Seeing is believing for a community and its leaders

2. For Professional Development

- a. Customize the professional development experience
- b. Show, don't tell
- c. Be careful with language
- d. Engage students in the process

3. Curriculum

- a. Make content local and relevant
- b. Be mindful of equity
- c. Politics matter

What was particularly relevant to our experience with the Equity in Civic Education project is the importance of collaboration among the adults to develop and implement a lived civics curriculum. This collaboration is an essential element of successful implementation and precedes the need for a particular curriculum. One way to guide successful implementation would be to use an improvement science approach to bring community-based networks that are focused on building, implementing, and sustaining equity-centered civic education programs.

Social and Emotional Learning

Additionally, there is growing evidence that programs with a focus on supporting character development, civic education, or social emotional learning have a significant and positive impact on student learning and the development of a student-centered school culture (Coleman, 2020). This means that the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) can provide relevant lessons to ensure that issues of equity are adequately represented in the resurgence in civic education.

SEL is defined as a process that creates learning experiences through which children, adolescents, and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020). Over the past 25 years, SEL has become an increasingly prominent feature in our education system. In recent years, calls for greater attention to issues of equity have become more pronounced, which has brought SEL into the forefront of educational reforms.

It is important to note at the outset that unlike civics, which is part of core academic content and is required in all 50 states, SEL is a more recent educational innovation that policymakers, educators, and researchers are working to get better integrated formally into the school experience of all young people. SEL is

rooted in a desire to provide effective, coordinated strategies, programs and practices that address all students' needs holistically. Early examples of this effort include the Comer School Development Project and the W.T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence which helped advance the notion that universal, strengths-based approaches to SEL that could benefit students of all backgrounds.

The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was established in 1994 as part of an effort to bring some coherence to overlapping subfields such as prevention science, character education, school-based mental health, health education, positive youth development and the like. CASEL has produced several meta-analyses that helped to synthesize the available evaluation research and establish an evidence base that has been pivotal to its field building efforts (see Durlak et. al., 2011; Taylor et. al., 2017). These efforts reveal that, across hundreds of experimental studies, well-implemented classroom-based SEL programs significantly reduced problem behaviors and attitudes and increased social, emotional, and academic competence development among participating children and youth. The positive impact of SEL programs on standardized test scores and other academic outcomes was essential to the uptake and expansion of SEL in states and districts across the country.

As state and district collaboratives are established across the country, CASEL offers technical assistance, coaching models, and a range of tools (e.g., a framework, theories of action for states, districts and schools) and resources (e.g., district and school guides, program guides and assessment guides) to support high-quality implementation of systemic SEL. Their theory of action advises districts and schools to (1) engage local stakeholders (educators, families and students) in a visioning and planning process, (2) support adult SEL, (3) select and implement an appropriate student SEL program/approach and (4) employ continuous improvement throughout this process. Much like collaborative civics, we advocate for systemic SEL (Mahoney et. al., 2020) which implies coordination among leaders and units at each level (state, district, and school) as well as alignment and synchrony across these levels. Some districts, such as Minneapolis Public Schools, have made substantial progress in coordinating human resources, professional development, curriculum and instruction, and research and accountability.

Moreover, as the field of SEL has grown, concerned scholars, caregivers, community stakeholders, and policymakers have raised questions about how to ensure that SEL is communicated and implemented with the intended asset-based frame that affirms the strengths, values, cultures, and lived experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Miscommunication or

poor implementation may lead to a misperception of SEL as a way to "fix" the behaviors or attitudes of children or as a means to offer greater social and economic advantages to those in well-resourced schools and communities. Adding to this challenge, opinions vary on the type of educational content and processes needed to fully develop young people's interests and potential in an increasingly complex global context. There have been several efforts to articulate and enact SEL approaches that address these considerations.

Much like the goals of this current project, CASEL conducted an Equity Field Report that shed light on the various ways in which some of our collaborating districts were addressing issues of equity in their own contexts. CASEL identified five key strategies and surfaced important questions for systematic inquiry of the substance and processes being deployed (Schlund, Jagers & Schlinger, 2020). Further, Jagers and colleagues (2019) engaged in a landscape scan to discern how best to have the intersecting issues of equity, adult SEL and the integration of academic social and emotional learning reflected in all aspects of our work. Since the CASEL framework for systemic SEL includes engaged citizenship as a long-term developmental outcome, we found it useful to interpret SEL as part of a civic socialization process.

CASEL asserted that *transformative SEL* represents a means to better articulate the potential of SEL to mitigate the educational, social, and economic inequities that derive from the legacy of racialized cultural oppression in the US and globally. Transformative SEL represents an as-yet underutilized approach that SEL researchers and practitioners can use if they seek to effectively address issues such as power, privilege, prejudice, discrimination, social justice, empowerment, and self-determination. In line with our equity in civics goals, CASEL argues that in order for schools to adequately serve those from underserved communities—and promote the optimal developmental outcomes for all children, youth, and adults—it must cultivate in them the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required for critical examination and collaborative action to address root causes of inequities.

In these ways, we believe that SEL dovetails nicely with efforts for centering equity in civic education. Ultimately, what we have learned is that more equitable and high-quality civics requires the collaboration of multiple stakeholders so as to attend to the needs of young people holistically. Very similar to findings from our listening tour, adult collaboration and support is a key component for more robust and equitable civic education. We hope our project marks the beginning of more and sustained collaborations across civic organizations.



Reflections

As mentioned earlier, this project has been a reflective process for all of the participants. Given that adult collaboration was a strong theme throughout our findings, it was important for us to document specific reflections and lessons learned about not just the field but the process itself, especially from leaders on this project.

During one of the last steering committee meetings, substantial time was set aside for attendees to reflect upon and name our experiences with this project and offer their insights via a brief survey consisting of three Likert-scale questions and three short-response items. What follows is a summary of our responses and reflections.

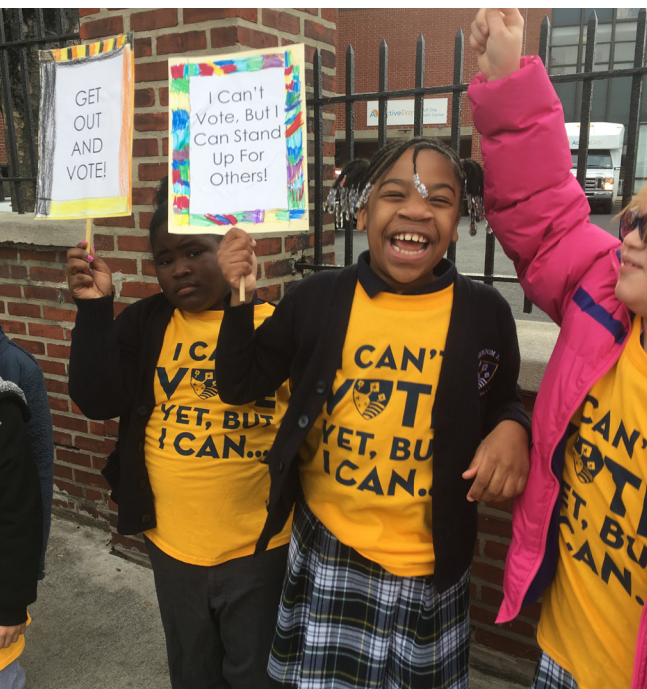
PROCESS VERSUS SOLUTIONS

A palpable theme through the reflections was a tension between the reflective process and creating actionable goals and solutions. As one steering committee member concisely summarized, "I think we should have spent more time focusing on the goals of the project and agreeing on a theory of change." To be sure, a lot of time was spent reflecting on and conversing about the issues of equity—a total of 18 months in all—with amorphous and shifting goals. As another member expressed, "I did not expect this project to go as long or be as difficult as I originally suspected and thought we would solve this problem [of] equity in civics." This extensive process caused some original members to leave the project, but also brought in others to the work.

This tension was present and discussed at multiple points throughout the project's duration. About halfway through the project, this reflective process and the deliberations surrounding its purpose became an integral goal of the project. Because a myriad of perspectives and approaches were present at the table, a consensus developed amongst steering committee members that actionable solutions would not be the sole focus of the project. Embracing this open-ended conclusion came more naturally for some members. As one mentioned in their reflection, "I continue to believe that the process is really important, and it should be happening internally (in each org.) and externally (between orgs.) as a way to build a self-enforcing accountability system." For others, it was a source of frustration. One member lamented, "If I could go back in time, I would have given our working group a stronger charge to develop an actionable project."

Ultimately, the steering committee was unable to construct and fully operationalize a tangible agenda for action that centers equity in civics, which resulted in some shifts in the original membership of the project. However, in the absence of an immediately actionable agenda for reform, the remaining members embraced the process and forged ahead with virtual listening tour stops and the drafting of this white paper as concrete strides toward recommending actionable steps designed to center equity in the civic education field.

"I continue to believe that the process is really important, and it should be happening internally (in each org.) and externally (between orgs.) as a way to build a self-enforcing accountability system."



A RACIAL JUSTICE MOMENT

Even though the project began prior to the racial awakening that is currently sweeping through our country, the murder of George Floyd served noticeably as an important milestone and catalyst amidst the landscape of this project. A handful of steering committee members acknowledge this in their reflections. As one member stated, "I don't think we could have predicted the laser focus on equity and race that the country is undertaking at the moment." The impact of this focus had clear implications for our work. As stated in another reflection, "The terms of debate changed while this project was ongoing as well (with the racial justice protests), and I think the field needs to continue to push in this direction in many different facets."

From ongoing discussion, it was clear that this transformative moment in US society provided the group greater license and urgency to push forward with an equity agenda. Most members felt this in their own organizational work as well as intra-organizational work. As one member expressed, "This work needs to happen urgently within the field. I can't think of anything more crucial right now, given the civic and racial reckoning in the country." Given the accompanying crisis of a global pandemic, as well as the fraught frenzy of a presidential election year, this realization, though welcomed, was overwhelming for the committee. Much like the rest of the country, the project sustained a noticeable lull during late spring of 2020, while the project and steering committee members adjusted course and then moved forward in earnest.

CONSIDERING OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

As with most fields, it is easy for members to think of themselves as belonging to a clearly defined discipline of scholars and practitioners who are advancing the same agenda. However, many steering committee members were pleasantly surprised by the energy and enthusiasm for civics coming from places that were not previously considered. As one member reflected, "I was surprised to learn how eager community-based organizations are to become engaged in this work." Consensus on this point was strong, as another member similarly reflected, "I did learn that commitment to equity [in civic education] can totally be found in places where I didn't initially expect."

This difference in disciplines was noticeable as another member remarked on the use of different terminology: "I learned that despite the lack of vocabulary, everyday teachers and parents care about this work." This realization will be

critical as this work leverages the centering of equity in *discussions about* civic education to building a *movement for* equity in civic education. As one member offered, "I think there are many small state and local organizations that are doing impactful work that have not been a part of the conversation." Moving forward, these groups will need to be courted and empowered to promote equity in civic education as a means of advancing their own interests, even if those interests go by another name.

CONSIDERING OTHER FIELDS

Similar to the revelation that other organizations and stakeholders have a role to play in transforming the civics field, a few steering committee members reflected on the need to embrace other disciplines, particularly the subject matter of social and emotional learning, or SEL. Both fields recognize that every teacher is responsible for the civic, social, and emotional health of their students. Or, as one steering committee member points out:

"I've learned that there are more dimensions to civic education than I initially could identify. For example, SEL will need to be integrated at all levels, especially younger grades, in order for our work to be successful. And this is a blessing since that provides an additional research base and set of passionate advocates who we can bring into our cause. They will undoubtedly protect their top priorities, as we will ours, but there is strength in numbers. And as we look to find more instructional time for our subject area, it would be wise to demonstrate how it can be easily integrated with other emerging priorities (i.e., digital literacy, SEL) and across subject areas (i.e., ELA, math)."

Across the reflection and feedback, there was clear enthusiasm for welcoming more disciplines into this work on equity in civics. As one member wrote, "I enjoyed hearing from a wide range of stakeholders, including community organizers, teachers, and organizations that are not civics-focused that have an influence on the space." Another member shared a similar sentiment, suggesting "it was really interesting to learn of the diversity of academic fields that are studying civics-related topics, and it was great to meet those connecting civics with SEL, Psychology, etc." Taken together, these reflections make it clear that promoting equity in civic education is challenging work and will require committed collaboration from more individuals, groups, and fields than those with the word "civic" in their title or name. However, we've learned that many of these groups are more than ready to work together to center equity in the civics landscape.



Conclusion

When iCivics and Generation Citizen began a field-building process to imagine what equity in civic education might look like in this country, there was no way to foresee the myriad of disruptions that would eventually occur in 2020.

While the project endeavored to bring together multiple organizations that work in youth organizing and civic education spaces to address issues of equity, the project became a soul-searching effort as much as a fact-finding mission to better understand what equity in civics means and to decipher potential ways to achieve it. Ultimately, the process was challenging, thought-provoking, and humbling for everyone on the project. We learned that the work of equity consists of both reflection and action; that it cannot be accomplished overnight; and that our nation's complex relationships with racism and economic disparities continue to cast shadows over gains we hope to claim in the civic education realm.

The past and current treatment of people of color in this country caused us to collectively reflect on the meaning of quality civic education for everyone. Specifically, it showed us that the civic education narrative in this country is in need of an update. The narrative needs to reflect not just the ideals we see in the Constitution and the boldness of the Declaration of Independence, but also the struggles of people like Sylvia Mendez and Geoconda Argüello-Kline for equal rights and representation. It is the combination of these ideals, their failings, and our constant striving towards unity without uniformity, that demands a sense of decency, empathy, and respect so that we might work together as a people. Moreover, the narrative must include the voices and actions of young people, if they are to share in the responsibility of preserving our collective society. To that end, we heard the voices of community members, teachers, parents, and students when they asked for more civic education in schools. But not just any type of civic education, one that provides knowledge, political acumen, diverse perspectives, honest conversations about past and current events, opportunities for developing skills and action; and most importantly, one that has the financial and organizational support of district and elected leaders.

In the end, high quality civic education is the ultimate measure of whether people have learned deeply about how our circumstances, experiences, knowledge, and participation can impact the world. And as a field, it is imperative that we help all young people develop the knowledge and skills (i.e., reasoning, discourse, problem solving) to engage with the world around them. We have taken the time to reflect and think deeply over the last two years about issues of equity in civic education, but it is now time for us and the field to get to work in earnest. To advocate for both more *and* more equitable civic education everywhere—a type of civics that helps young people situate their own experiences in our imperfect but

High quality civic education is the ultimate measure of whether people have learned deeply about how our circumstances, experiences, knowledge, and participation can impact the world.



aspirational system of governance. A type of civics that helps students recognize the power they hold as a collective. A type of civics that does not shy away from hard content or difficult conversations and teaches the values of civic friendship, as well as the skills to combat bias and misinformation. It is time to learn from the field of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) on how to educate students holistically—to marry civic duty and responsibility with the immediate needs and lived experiences of young people—especially when navigating conflicts that inevitably arise from our pluralistic existence. Finally, it is time to work with community leaders, teachers, schools, district leaders, and other organizations to give ALL students the type of civics they need and deserve for the 21st century. With conscientious self-reflection on the ways that we have fallen short of meeting our own definition of equity in civics, we hope to make good on these promises to work on creating more equitable civics for more students across the country.

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To help frame the work that needs to be done to revitalize civic education with a focus on equity, we provide the following recommendations of next steps for the field, its stakeholders, and potential funders:



POLICY

From both our listening tour and survey of the literature, it is evident that there is a need for more policies and more legislation that support civic education across the country. Even as more and more states pass mandates requiring some forms of civic education across the country, it seems many of these requirements are either not fully funded, supported, nor equitable in both their substance and enactment. This means that a concerted effort should be made to bolster civic education legislation both in number and in quality if all students are to have opportunities to engage with more equitable civics. At the same time, legislation is not enough. Other policy levers, whether specific to civics or not, such as state standards, as well as district and school-level policies need to better support and encourage equitable civic education.

While there are currently not many comprehensive policies that specifically call for equitable civic education, there are models in which the policy work to support civic education has already begun. For example, Massachusetts has provided a set of policy prescriptions that are accompanied by new standards

which place an emphasis on civics (Promote Civic Engagement, 2018). The legislation mandates two civics projects for every student in the state. At the same time, Massachusetts' History and Social Studies Framework contains language that attends to SEL, media literacy, and culturally responsive teaching. The framework also includes iterative K-12 lessons about how the rights of marginalized people have been taken away and fought for throughout history and today. By contrast, Utah has passed a bill for experiential civic learning that provides state-level funding for professional development, evaluation design, and district support to implement project-based civics. Illinois has made a large investment over several years in educator professional development and a "Democracy Schools" comprehensive civic education model. Ultimately, legislation, state requirements, and policies are only a first step in ensuring that equitable civics can happen in the classroom, which leads us to recommend more collaborations with district partnerships and research on civics curriculum, instruction, and professional development.



COLLABORATION

As mentioned above, policies and mandates can be only as effective as their enactment by the stakeholders and individuals involved. The cases of Democracy Schools and transformative SEL presented earlier in this report provide some examples for how district partnerships and collaborations can create a supportive environment for teachers, school leaders, and ultimately students to engage with civics in meaningful ways. We encourage civic organizations that are already building relationships with districts to strengthen them and imagine new ways to support district-wide and school-wide change so as to fully support teachers and parents in teaching students about their role in our shared governance. This may require the continuation of more listening tours—so as to better understand the needs of communities and various stakeholders—and in this project, we have provided a process and format for that work to continue in meaningful ways.

At the same time, in order for organizations to conduct this work effectively, we suggest they take the time and effort to reflect internally on their own equity stances, policies, and agenda. There are signs of progress that the field is beginning to take this internal examination seriously, as we see a new generation of leaders of color being elevated to lead in the field (e.g., Equal Justice Initiative, the Democratic Knowledge

It is time to work with community leaders, teachers, schools, district leaders, and other organizations to give ALL students the type of civics they need and deserve for the 21st century.

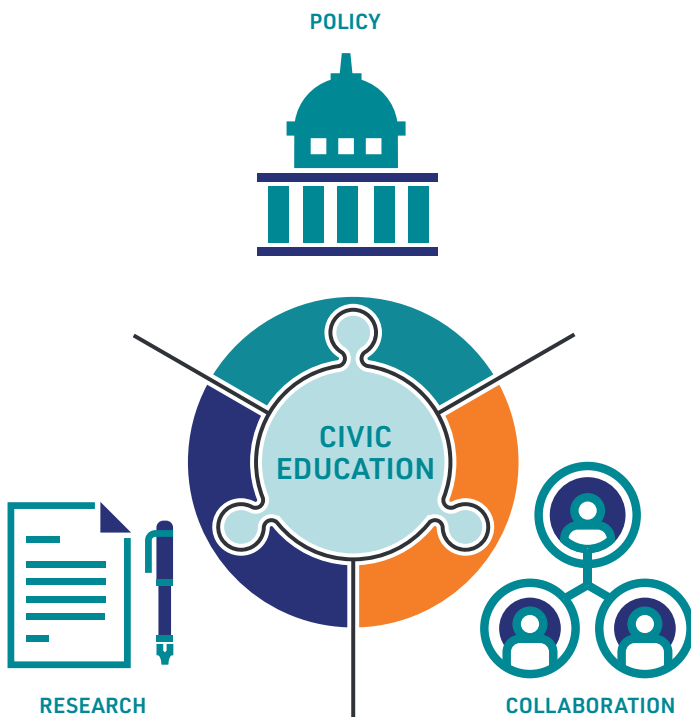
Project, and Generation Citizen, etc.) However, we understand that reflection and collaboration require resources, so we recommend that funding agencies allocate funds to support organizations looking to do this work through community partnership efforts that can help schools (and districts) become more democratic spaces. Furthermore, funding is necessary to support collaborative projects that help bolster teacher professional development, so that civic instruction can be both intentional and impactful.



RESEARCH

Finally, there is still much we don't fully know or understand about the facets of curricular and instructional changes that need to occur for the existing civic narrative to become more equitable. So as organizations partner with schools, districts, and communities to create more civic-minded environments, we recommend that more research is conducted and data collected that can strengthen our understanding of not only what equitable civics looks like in the classroom, but also how organizations, teachers, and schools might best be able to support the transformative impact that such work can have. This means that funders interested in working towards more equitable civic outcomes should engage projects aimed at implementing and supporting equitable shifts in school context as well as development of more equitable civic curriculum and instruction. As two examples from our report show, equitable shifts in civic curriculum and instruction can take on the form of incorporating SEL into civic learning or focusing on shifting the civic narrative to incorporate more culturally responsive teaching and supporting teachers to do that work.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of areas that deserve funding, collaboration, action, and attention; however, if the goal is for equity to be more centered in the field of civic education, then these suggestions must be included in our next steps. More than anything, this project has taught us that the continued fight for equity in civic education requires a healthy amount of humility, empathy, patience, and mutual respect. In order to achieve a more just future, the field and its stakeholders will need to work together to help more teachers, district leaders, and students engage with the kind of equitable civics that we have begun to imagine in this paper. The conclusion of this project provides us with a glimpse of what is possible for civic education in the 21st century. But it is only a beginning. In the end, there is no doubt that it will take hard work from all of us to succeed in shaping the future of the civic landscape, for while separate in our beliefs and principles, together we are one humanity.





Review of the Literature

As mentioned in previous sections of this report, our constitutional democracy currently faces a number of noteworthy challenges besides the most recent examples of political and economic inequalities:

ideological sorting has resulted in a more partisan political landscape (Levendusky, 2009); levels of trust in the federal government, elected officials, and our neighbors have declined (Rainie, Keeter, & Perrin, 2019); and there are renewed efforts toward voter suppression (Anderson, 2018). In this review, we examine what the literature has to say about these challenges as well as how robust and equitable civic education might help mitigate them.

A number of factors shape the trends mentioned above, including unequal access to important political resources such as time and money (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012), tenuous affiliations to political parties (Hajnal & Lee, 2011), and public policies that make participating difficult, particularly for those within marginalized communities (Sobel & Smith, 2009; Brady & McNulty, 2011; Burch, 2013). While complex challenges require complex solutions, civic education has historically been viewed as a great equalizer with regard to the nation's civic health. We define civic education as any course or school structure that aims to equip young people with the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that prepare them for democratic citizenship. Many founding figures of the United States, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, emphasized that citizens must receive explicit instruction in democratic processes.³ Similarly, scholars and social reformers dating back to Reconstruction and the Progressive Era viewed civic learning as a way to prepare our youngest citizens for full participation in public life (e.g., Dewey, 1916; Du Bois, 1903). Because of its ability to cut across various disciplines, civic education is well suited to help students build and develop the skills necessary to be successful in our communities and society.

Despite the strong relationship between civic learning and the United States' national identity, the intent, frequency, and quality of civic educational experiences varies greatly for different populations throughout history. For example, much of early civic education dealt with ensuring that young people were bestowed with Anglo-Protestant ideals that would guide them towards making "virtuous" decisions as voters and jurors (Mann, 1842). Moreover, as white Americans immersed in their country's heroic beginnings in schools, much of civic education in the early years of US history was devoted to assimilating various "immigrant" and indigenous populations for their existence in a Protestant, Eurocentric society

³"Promote, then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened." George Washington (1796); "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty." Thomas Jefferson (1787)

We define civic education as any course or school structure that aims to equip young people with the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that prepare them for democratic citizenship.



(e.g., Nash, 2013; Beadie, 2020). This same theme continued throughout the Reconstruction Era (e.g., Anderson, 2007), as freed Blacks were expected to integrate into white society. And yet, during most of this history, individuals that were assimilated through civic education were unable to vote or take part in governance. The tenets of justice, liberty, and self-determination espoused in civic education simply did not apply to them. Fast forward to World War II, when allegiances weighed heavily on everyone's minds, civic education reinforced US ideals across racial diversity (whites and non-whites alike) in order to bring together a collective spirit (Smiley, 1946). The rise of McCarthyism in postwar US meant that racial equity, a valued distinction between the free-world and Hitler's authoritarian rule only a few years prior, became a marker of communist leanings and promptly removed from schools (Serviss, 1953).

The civil rights movement of the 1960s brought about the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which finally guaranteed de jure equality when it came to the voting booth. But in the recently desegregated schools of the 1960s, civic education continued as an instrument to promote white, middle-class, Protestant norms, even as the Chicano community worked to fight against discriminatory and exclusionary practices in public schools (Ortiz, 2018; Lee, S., 2014). Unfortunately, this history of involuntary assimilation and violence towards people of color (especially Black and Indigenous People of Color) in schools is an entrenched part of the civic education narrative. In an era when the United States is reckoning with systemic racism, it behooves the field to ask, how has this inequitable past shaped today's civic education?

For the last two decades, scholars of civic education have sought to promote students' civic engagement by studying the availability and impact of civic education practices. A Center for Information and Research on Civics Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE, 2013) report notes that schools can help students become responsible citizens by giving them opportunities to experience best practices in civic education. Without these civic learning opportunities, students may not experience the type of education that encourages them to engage civically. At the same time, scholars have identified uneven access to civic learning opportunities along socioeconomic and racial divides (Kahne, Crow, & Lee, 2012). This uneven access shows that white and affluent students tend to receive more civic learning opportunities than lower income students of color, which are related to civic engagement and future political participation (Kahne & Spote, 2008).

A democratic system represents the interests of those who can access and influence the decisions of policymakers, politicians, and government officials; therefore, those in power may neglect the interests of disenfranchised and unengaged youths. According to the 2014 National Assessment of Education

Progress Civic Assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), over the last 20 years, white eighth graders performed significantly better on the civic knowledge and skills exam than Black eighth graders. If this inequality is left unattended, young people of color will continue to be disenfranchised by a government that is supposed to represent and be held accountable to them (Brown & De Lissovoy, 2011; Levinson, 2012). However, creating more equitable civics requires more than addressing this issue of inequality; instead, it requires a reimagining of civic education, as a school subject and a field. True to the tenets of our constitutional democracy, we believe that inclusivity, representation, and relevance are critical components of equitable civics. In a sense, equitable civic education should promote diverse student voices and draws on students' lived experiences and perspectives in order to engage them in understanding social issues, the power dynamics that cause them, and the power that young people have to bring change (Cohen, Kahne, & Marshall, 2018; Clay & Rubin, 2019).

At present, all 50 states require some form of instruction in civics and government and more than 80 civics bills introduced in states across the country explicitly name how young people, teachers, and community members can influence the health and trajectory of our democracy. This increased interest in civic education is laudable. After all, these courses theoretically provide every student with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be full democratic participants. However, how much do these requirements continue the narrative of the past, or do they strive to create a more equitable and inclusive future? Namely, Generation Z is more racially and ethnically diverse than any other generation before them. Yet, civic education courses tend to emphasize heroes, areas of knowledge, and forms of civic and political participation that do not speak to the diversity of experiences in the United States (Levinson, 2012). Moreover, it is essential that conversations regarding how to make civic education courses more equitable also consider that these courses were never intended to serve the needs of all students (Moreau, 2004; Smith, 1997; Nelsen, 2020). Debates over civic learning have been inextricably tied to whose stories are featured in the narrative, and the contributions and agency of people of color have frequently been left by the wayside (Nelsen, 2020). This suggests that the answer to many of our constitutional democracy's most pressing challenges cannot be addressed by simply increasing access to civics as we have known it; civic education must change with the times and center equity as part of that change.

The literature review that follows summarizes two constructs that are essential to civic education (i.e., political knowledge and civic engagement), as well as three educational practices that can lead to more equitable democratic outcomes (i.e., culturally responsive teaching, discussion of controversial

issues, and digital literacy). Rather than addressing deficits, the goal of this review is to highlight resources and pedagogies *already* being used to address inequities that exist in 1) political knowledge; 2) civic skills; and 3) civic participation. We purposefully shy away from framing the paper using only “gaps” language in order to avoid focusing solely on the differences between outcomes (Woodson & Love, 2019)⁴. Instead, the resources and pedagogies highlighted below are steps toward ensuring that all students (both persons of color and white individuals) better understand the fullness of our history and institutions. In the process, we hope to develop a common language for policymakers and practitioners interested in the intersection of equity and civic learning, and to transparently present the political tensions that will inevitably emerge. In particular, we acknowledge that this literature review frequently discusses equity in terms of political participation. This is neither to promote partisan conceptions of civic education and engagement nor to embrace a narrow view of what they mean, but rather to acknowledge that the development of civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes is only relevant because it makes participating easier (Downs, 1957). The literature highlighted in the next section is meant to provide a path forward for those who are interested in providing the space for young people to reflect upon their own agency, so *they* are better able to determine if they want to participate and on what terms.

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Political knowledge is defined as the “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory” (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 10) and is typically measured using a battery of questions that address national institutional politics (e.g., “Which party controls the House of Representatives?”). In political science, political knowledge is frequently used as a litmus test for an individual’s civic competence, since political knowledge decreases the costs of participation, allowing individuals to more easily process information before going to the polls (Downs, 1957; Lupia, 2016). For this reason, these measures are frequently invoked to assess the civic competencies of young people and the vitality of civic education courses.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) uses similar questions to measure political knowledge among 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-graders. The results consistently show white youth possess greater political knowledge than youth of color (The Nation’s Report Card, 2018; see also Niemi & Junn, 2005). Given the strong correlation between political knowledge and political participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Lupia, 2016), these trends are concerning for those interested in the intersection of equity and civic education.

A handful of studies problematize the very inclusivity of traditional political knowledge measures. For example, Black youth are shown to be *more* knowledgeable about the Civil Rights Movement than white youth, but these measures are not accounted for in traditional measures of political knowledge (Niemi & Junn, 2005). Similarly, another study finds that Black youth possess considerably *more* political knowledge than their white peers when carceral violence (e.g., being able to identify the victims of police and state violence) is taken into consideration (Cohen & Luttig, 2019). In addition to challenging the notion that white youth are more politically knowledgeable than young people of color, these studies demonstrate that different types of political knowledge yield different democratic outcomes across racial and ethnic groups. While traditional political knowledge is significantly associated with voting across racial and ethnic groups, knowledge of carceral violence significantly bolsters rates of linked fate among Black youth (Cohen & Luttig, 2019). Linked fate, defined as “the belief that one’s own well-being is tied to the well-being of their racial group as a whole” is a crucial attitude for African Americans as it remains a consistent predictor of voter turnout (Dawson, 1995). However, knowledge of carceral violence was also shown to bolster voting rates among white youth as well (Cohen & Luttig, 2019). Thus, accounting for different types of knowledge is not only an essential component of understanding the current state of our constitutional democracy but provides insights into how to make civic education courses more equitable.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

For many, democracy and civic participation are deeply intertwined. Indeed, since the publication of *Democracy in America* (1835), social scientists have suggested that the United States’ democratic experiment appears to work due to high rates of engagement in public life (e.g., Dahl, 1961; Putnam, 2001). Youth civic engagement is often a catchall phrase for activities ranging from community service and volunteerism to voting or joining an interest group. Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Delli Carpini (2006) define civic engagement as “voluntary activity focused on problem solving and helping others” (p. 7). Civic engagement has been the focus of many recent studies on how young people engage in a democracy (e.g., Flanagan, 2013; Levinson, 2012; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Youniss & Levine, 2009; Zukin et al., 2006), whether through traditional political processes like voting or through engagement in the community. However, those interested in participatory trends among racially marginalized groups (e.g., Cohen, 2012) and across generational divides (e.g., Zukin et al., 2006, Ekman & Amnå, 2012) suggest that our understanding of participation must move beyond traditional measures such as voting and volunteering. In other words, in order to identify the pervasiveness of inequities in political participation, it is important to un-

⁴For more information, see Lo’s (2019) conception of “civic debt,” which describes gaps in civic outcomes as results of existing structural and institutional inequalities that have disadvantaged people of color throughout history.

derstand the ways in which young people make their political voices known when they lack access to important participatory acts such as voting.

While a comprehensive review of the literature on civic engagement (and how adolescents influence their communities) is outside the purview of this white paper, suffice it to say that the field of civic education continues to define and study what it means for young people to engage with the polity. This continual broadening of engagement may be particularly important to building more equitable civics as young people of color might experience alienation or marginalization from the very political institutions and processes that civic education tries to promote (Lo, 2019; Clay & Rubin, 2019). With this concern in mind, we focus on pedagogy and curricula that may provide a path forward for those interested in engaging young people with the existing system while acknowledging the plurality of their lived experiences.

Numerous studies find a strong and statistically significant relationship between prominent components of civic education courses and acts of engagement such as voting. For example, Torney-Purta (2002) finds that young people are more likely to vote as adults if they are enrolled in civic education classrooms that emphasize the importance of elections. Similarly, an open classroom environment where young people are encouraged to talk about politics strongly affects the likelihood of voting later in life (e.g., Campbell, 2008). Others note that increased access to service-learning opportunities at school has increased civic engagement among younger generations in particular (Zukin et al., 2006). However, like Westheimer and Kahne (2004), the authors express skepticism that merely increasing access to non-partisan, service-learning opportunities will transfer into other participatory acts such as voting. Moreover, many of these studies do not explore whether access to civics courses has the same participatory effects across racial lines. In the next section, we highlight three civic education practices that can help foster more equitable civics in our current socio-political climate.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING (CRT)

Centering the knowledge that young people already possess—an approach commonly known as Culturally-Responsive Teaching, or CRT—is a central component of many existing educational philosophies. For example, ethnic studies courses include “units of study, courses, or programs that are centered on the knowledge and perspectives of an ethnic or racial group, reflecting narratives and points of view rooted in that group’s lived experiences and intellectual scholarship” (Sleeter, 2011, vii). In other words, these curricula offer an alternative and sometimes counterpoint to more traditional curricula that tend to be more “Euro-American” in nature (Sleeter, 2011, p. vii; see also

Loewen, 1995; Moreau, 2004; Epstein, 2009; Levinson, 2012). These courses tend to be associated with a number of promising academic outcomes for young people of color including increased school attendance and higher GPAs (Dee & Penner, 2017). While few studies directly examine the relationship between ethnic studies curricula and political knowledge, the research that does exist suggests that forging a narrative that actually includes everyone and takes the perspectives of young people of color seriously is a necessary precursor to delivering meaningful civic learning experiences.

One study finds that fifth graders possess distinct interpretations of US history across racial lines. While white youth espouse a belief that US democracy ensures equality for all and perpetually makes progress, Black youth articulate a narrative that centers on racial oppression, which conflicts with traditional accounts of United States history typically taught in schools (Epstein, 2009). As a result, young people of color express frustration that their own knowledge and the perspectives of people like them are not taken seriously in the classroom (Ford et al., 2000; Abu El-Haj, 2006). In turn, this is shown to lead to disengagement (Wiggan, 2007) and distrust (Epstein, 2009). Contrastingly, a randomized experiment shows that historical content that centers on the agency and grassroots political action of people of color facilitates the acquisition of more critical political knowledge and bolsters rates of intended participation for youth of color (Nelsen, 2019).

In highlighting the benefits of courses that center the experiences of people of color, we acknowledge that we are entering politically contentious territory. However, we are *not* suggesting that we stop teaching content that leads to the acquisition of traditional political knowledge. After all, we know that traditional political knowledge is associated with greater intent to vote for young people across racial groups. Rather, as Meira Levinson (2012) suggests, a comprehensive civic education that yields more equitable democratic outcomes must be able to both empower young people of color and equip them with basic information about governmental processes and political stakeholders. For example, simply allowing students the space to talk about politics in the classroom consistently ranks as one of the most effective ways to bolster traditional political knowledge among students, including those from marginalized backgrounds (Campbell, 2008; Hess, 2009; Gainous & Martens, 2012; Martens & Gainous, 2013; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014; Hess & McAvoy, 2014). In many ways, ensuring that classrooms are safe spaces where young people are able to make sense of political topics using their own lived experiences as a guide incorporates key aspects of both ethnic studies and traditional civic education curricula.

Beyond the classroom, school administrators can also work to ensure that certain guidelines are in place at an institutional

level that also bolster rates of political knowledge. First, research suggests that simply having access to a civic education course significantly increases political knowledge. One study found that among 18-24 year-olds who graduated from high school in states with “high-stakes” civics exams resulted in “significantly higher rates of political knowledge among Latinx youth first- and second-generation immigrants, and—most of all—Latinx immigrants” (Campbell, 2019, p. 42; see also Campbell & Niemi, 2016). To be clear, the authors are *not* suggesting that high stakes tests be employed to foster political knowledge. Rather they are simply acknowledging that in contexts where teachers are held accountable to teaching rigorous civic education courses, young people of color tend to benefit most (Campbell & Niemi, 2016). Ensuring that civic education is emphasized in school is an important first step in the pursuit of equitable democratic outcomes. Secondly, teachers and administrators can work to support a democratic ethos in schools, since teenagers who feel their school’s policies are fair consistently score higher on political knowledge measures (Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknect, 2003).

DISCUSSION OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

A second staple of civic education that has the potential to help support more equitable civics is the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom. The use of discussion as a pedagogical technique has a long history in the field of social studies. Beginning with Oliver, Newmann, and Shaver’s Harvard Social Studies Project in the 1960s, discussion has been established as an instructional strategy that can help students address complex societal issues and develop rational decision-making skills (Bohan & Feinberg, 2008). The Harvard Project eventually led to a series of publications known as the Public Issues Series that supported the use of discussion in the classroom, with the subsequent establishment of the National Issues Forum (Oliver & Feldmann, 1983). Since then, social studies scholars and researchers have taken up the discussion banner, in support of its capacity to help students engage in problem-solving, rational argumentation, and democratic deliberation (e.g., Beck, 2005; Henning, 2007; Hess, 2009; Larson, 2000; Parker & Hess, 2001). Specifically, deliberating controversial issues with people who hold different perspectives can help students engage with decision-making (Hess, 2009).

The discussion of controversial issues helps students recognize, understand, and reasonably evaluate different belief systems. Through discussions, educators can “teach interpretive capacities that will help students to understand different comprehensive doctrines and conceptions of the good that are different from their own. These educational tasks seem essential to the formation of reasonable citizens who acknowledge the existence of reasonable disagreements about the good life and still agree to share a framework of common principles, norms and procedures of public policy”

(Costa, 2004, p. 10). By discussing controversial topics in the classroom, students would develop the capacities needed to maintain stability in a pluralistic democracy. Political scientists (e.g., Kennedy, 2014) and historians of education (e.g., Zimmerman & Robertson, 2017) alike have touted the importance of discussing contentious political issues as a part of engaging productively with the polity. Furthermore, discussions have been found to help support student engagement and civic outcomes (e.g., Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2013; Cohen, 2012; Brookfield & Preskill, 2012). However, studies show that youth of color tend to have fewer opportunities to engage in these types of discussions (e.g., Campbell, 2008; Kahne & Middaugh, 2009). Furthermore, discussions about race tend to be generally lacking (e.g., Brown & De Lissovoy, 2011; Howard, 2004; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009), even though well-facilitated racial dialogue may be able to empower students to think more deeply and constructively about race (e.g., Sue, 2015; Sue et al., 2009; Walsh, 2007).

During an era when the US public is openly grappling with issues of racial inequity and racial justice, it is paramount for civic educators to address controversial topics in the classroom, specifically about our racialized past and present. Rather than overlooking or canceling historical gaffes, equitable civic education should explore what it means to help young people grapple productively with the realities of our past, present, and future. Doing this work may require civic educators to recognize systemic inequities and the roles that we play in reifying those imbalances (e.g., Giroux, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2017) so that we can help students engage productively with multiple perspectives.

DIGITAL LITERACY

Any discussion of educational efforts designed to support youth civic and political engagement would be incomplete without a discussion on engagement in digital forms of civic and political life. Social media practices and platforms and other digital forms of engagement are now central to politics—from raising funds, to mobilizing others, to applying pressure to government and businesses, and to sharing perspectives (Allen & Light, 2015; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). And youth are at the forefront of these changes (Krueger, 2002) as exemplified by their leading roles in large scale movements such as #blacklivesmatter, #marchforourlives, and the DREAMer movement. Overall, youth participate in politics online at higher rates than adults (Smith, 2013) and social media is now the most common source of news for young people (Robb, 2017).

Such engagement is highly relevant for those concerned with equity and civics. First, it is important to point out that #blacklivesmatter and other social movements often fueled by social media have equity issues at their core. In addition, studies have found that online political engagement is more equitably

distributed across race and social class than many other forms of political participation such as voting (Cohen et al., 2012; Correa & Jeong, 2011). Thus, supporting youth engagement with digital media may very well be an impactful way to support more equitable civic and political engagement overall.

There have yet to be many rigorous studies of civically-oriented digital literacy education, but several recent studies indicate that such efforts can improve students' abilities to accurately judge the credibility of online content (see Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; McGrew et al., 2019; Pérez et al., 2018). Research also indicates that media literacy efforts can promote youth engagement with varied forms of online politics (Bowyer and Kahne, 2020) and studies indicate such efforts can enhance learning and engagement overall (for example, Baron et al., 2014; Kwon & de los Ríos, 2019).

Finally, given their efficacy, it is important to examine the degree to which digital civic learning opportunities are equitably distributed. To date, findings point in divergent directions. For example, Gray, Thomas, and Lewis (2010) drew on a large national survey and found that high-income youth were significantly more likely to use educational technology to prepare written text or media presentations, while low-income youth were more likely to use educational technology to learn or practice basic skills. Similarly, Leu, and colleagues (2014) found that students in a high-income school district had an additional year's worth of instruction related to online reading abilities that are used for online reasoning and discourse (i.e., abilities to find, evaluate, integrate, and communicate online information) than did those in a comparatively low-income school district. In contrast, a study of a diverse set of seven California high schools that focused directly on instruction tied to civic media literacy, found that civic media literacy opportunities were equitably distributed for youth of varying races, ethnicities, and levels of academic performance (Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2012). At the same time, lack of reliable Internet access and mobile coverage, as well as cost of connectivity, can negatively impact students' civic engagement in a myriad of ways (CIRCLE, 2020). Though more study is needed since data at this point is limited and generally focuses on specific locations, efforts to ensure equitable access to these learning opportunities must become a high priority.

A RELATED APPROACH: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

While the aforementioned curricular and instructional shifts are necessary, educational efforts designed to support youth civic and political engagement require attention to the influence of social and emotional learning (SEL) in the socialization process. This is especially true when those efforts aspire to advance equity, a critical lever in emerging SEL frameworks (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019; Schlund, Jagers

& Schlinger, 2020). As a 2018 white paper from the Aspen Institute's Education and Society Program asserts, "Both equity and social, emotional, and academic development are currently receiving much-needed attention, but neither can fully succeed without recognizing strengths and addressing gaps in these complementary priorities" (p.1). Similarly, civic education is receiving renewed and much needed attention, and as such, the two fields dovetail nicely in addressing issues of equity when working with young people.

The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is currently the field leader in SEL research, practice, and policy. Their website defines SEL as "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions" (www.casel.org). This is important for civic education because research suggests such knowledge, skills, and attitudes are positively associated with adult political behavior (Fowler & Kam, 2007; Hillygus, Holbein, & Snell, 2016). For example, the ability to empathize with others – to be able to "put oneself into another's shoes," – may promote altruistic behavior, a known predictor of civic participation (Fowler & Kam, 2007). Holbein (2017) demonstrates that childhood programs targeting individual skills involving self-regulation and sociability have a substantively meaningful effect on adult voter turnout. As he suggests, "in a landscape of stubbornly low and unequal rates of voter participation and small estimates for many mobilization efforts, this finding should give policymakers and advocates for higher levels of civic participation from a more diverse electorate renewed hope and direction" (p. 582). With these civic-related implications, it becomes necessary to explore how SEL plays a key role in advancing equity in civic education.

Helpfully, CASEL offers a framework that establishes preschool to high school learning standards and competencies that articulate what students should know and be able to do in order to achieve optimal developmental outcomes, including civic engagement. In 2019, CASEL conducted a review of the landscape to discern how to integrate the intersecting issues of equity, adult SEL, and childhood SEL in all of its work. In advocating for SEL in the service of educational equity and excellence, they powerfully contend that SEL is best understood as a civic development enterprise and highlight the importance of developing political agency in effort that seeks to promote transformative SEL (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019). This places their recommendations squarely in alignment with more traditional typologies of political engagement explored earlier in this review, including the pedagogies that tend to

cultivate them. More recently, CASEL conducted an equity field study examining the various ways in which some of their partnering school districts were addressing issues of equity. The ensuing report presents a theory of change for advancing SEL as a lever for equity and excellence that includes civic engagement as a long-term developmental outcome for this approach (Schlund, Jagers, & Schlinger, 2020). Conversely, the theory of change positions SEL as foundational to the civic socialization process, and thus critical to advancing equity in the civic education field.

At the same time, SEL is not only concerned with individual skills and abilities. As seen elsewhere in this report, systems and structures have to be in place to create safe classroom, school, and community environments that allow students to engage both civically and academically. The field of SEL provides evidence that community and school settings that support students holistically can foster the development of individual skills (Cavanaugh, 2017). In terms of equity, SEL demands that students, educators, and other elements of the schooling environment (e.g., policies, structures, etc.) work together so that students might feel authentically supported and capable of developing social and emotional skills. Specifically, Immodino-Yang, Darling-Hammond, and Crone (2019) suggest inclusive classrooms that foster a positive social learning experience for all learners by cultivating social-emotional competencies among students and enforcing inclusive practices and norms can benefit learning outcomes. On the other hand, they found that external threats to emotional safety such as exclusion, stereotyping, or ongoing distress can disrupt learning, because negative emotional events consume a learner's working memory. While the way in which learners achieve optimal growth varies by age, a key to success is building an inclusive learning environment where all learners feel safe and can fully engage in learning (Immodino-Yang et al., 2019). In this way, both SEL and civics call for systems support (in terms of policy and structures) that can create safe spaces for students to thrive civically and academically.

CONCLUSION

The research synthesized in this review provides a number of noteworthy insights regarding how to ensure that civic education courses yield more equitable democratic outcomes for students. Securing access to these courses is an essential first step, but policymakers and practitioners must also be attuned to the importance of content and pedagogy—not only *what* is taught, but also *how* it is taught. Courses that center the unique histories and experiences of people of color provide a promising way forward for those interested in the intersection of civic learning and equity. Curricula of this kind are shown to yield greater feelings of empowerment, are associated with the development of important civic skills for all students, and appear to bolster rates of intended civic and political participation among young people of color. Similarly, the ability to discuss controversial issues and demonstrate digital media literacy are necessary competencies for students to acquire in the 21st century. However, questions remain on how to center multiple histories and experiences in civics curricula that tend to be white-centric; and how to better enable teachers to skillfully engage in both leading discussions and teaching media literacy skills. While we acknowledge that there are multiple perspectives regarding what the goals of civic education *should* be, we believe that civic learning opportunities that yield more equitable rates of civic knowledge and participation are essential in order to maintain the vitality of our constitutional democracy.

Schools serve as critical local institutions that embody our most cherished civic aspirations. While this literature review largely focuses on the important role of curriculum and instruction, this research also suggests, much like SEL, that schools with strong and equitable civic ethos are more effective in preparing young people, including those from marginalized backgrounds, for active participation within our constitutional democracy. Indeed, the research presented here suggests that the complex challenges faced by our democratic system can be surmounted if young people have access to curricula that reflects, validates, and builds on their lived experiences in broader school communities that they perceive to be equitable and responsive to their concerns.



I Can't Vote, But I Can Stand Up For Others!

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