

# CIVXNOW STATE POLICY MENU

**CivXNow**  
A PROJECT OF ICIVICS 

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America’s self-governing constitutional democracy requires better civic education. High-quality, school-based K–12 civic learning for all is necessary to produce an electorate better equipped to meet the significant internal threats from polarization and misinformation the United States faces today. Civic learning is foundational to our shared civic strength and enshrined in most state constitutions. While 43 states require at least one civics course, too few incorporate proven pedagogical principles. Moreover, some state social studies standards informing history and civics teaching are outdated, too general, devoid of content guidance, and fail to facilitate students’ civic development. And professional development opportunities to enhance pre- and in-service teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogical skills are too few, underfunded, and deprioritized.

The **CivXNow Coalition** unites the civic learning community in a nationwide movement to improve and strengthen state-level policies and practices in civic education. The Coalition’s State Policy Task Force works with state-level advocates in 36 states and counting to bring about needed improvements in policy and practice.

*To strengthen the quality of K–12 civic education, the CivXNow Coalition urges state and local education policymakers to focus on the following policy goals:*

### **Universal Access to High-quality Civic Learning Opportunities**

States should work to strengthen their course requirements in civic education. Based on existing research and recognized best practices, these requirements should include:

- More time devoted to civic learning in the elementary grades with a common upper elementary assessment to ensure that students acquire foundational knowledge and skills as prescribed by the *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy (EAD)* and *Pedagogy Companion*;
- A semester-long civics course in middle school, aligned with the *EAD Roadmap* and pedagogical principles, with an opportunity for students to engage in practices of constitutional democracy, develop agency, and reflect and improve through formative assessments;
- A full-year high school civics course, aligned with the *EAD Roadmap* and pedagogical principles, with an opportunity for students to engage in practices of constitutional democracy, develop agency, and reflect and improve through formative and summative assessments, with passage of the latter linked to high school graduation; and
- Cultivation of students’ media literacy skills through embedded content across subject areas and grade bands, along with up-to-date school facilities—libraries most critically—as venues for students to both produce and consume media.

### **State Standards**

As states undertake periodic revisions of their standards for learning in the social studies, these standards should be updated in alignment with the *EAD Roadmap*. States should also ensure a uniform approach to media literacy instruction across core curricular areas.

### **Pre-service Teaching Requirements**

States should strengthen pre-service requirements for civics teachers by requiring undergraduate courses in U.S. Government and U.S. History, as well as undergraduate course work in the unique pedagogy of history and civics. States should also implement a fellowship program to encourage humanities and social science graduates of color to join the social studies teaching profession.



### **Educator Professional Development**

States should provide adequate resources for ongoing professional development (PD) for civics teachers, on par with that provided to math, literacy, and science teachers. PD opportunities should strengthen teachers’ civic and historical content knowledge, as well as instructional strategies, including media literacy, to facilitate engaged and effective learning.



### **Assessment and Accountability**

States should ensure that assessments are embedded in classroom instruction and used as sources of information for students and teachers, with the results informing and/or shifting classroom practices. States should provide student credentialing benchmarks at appropriate grade-level junctures, including civics graduation seals or certificates, with district-level implementation. States should require a civic learning plan from every Local Education Agency (LEA) and aggregate LEA civic learning plans to allow comparisons and assessments of progress, permitting the reporting of results disaggregated by demographic subgroups. States should integrate civic learning plan data within school performance indicators and participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Civics and U.S. History.



### **Deepen and Honor Schoolwide and Community Commitments to Civic Learning**

Each state should ensure that youth voice and participation are included in education and community decision-making by ensuring meaningful student representation on local boards, commissions, and other governmental bodies. Student representatives should be elected by, and accountable to, their peers. States should also verify that school and district practices related to school discipline, safety, and culture reflect the principles of constitutional democracy, with a commitment to ensuring that every student has an opportunity to be heard when they are in conflict or facing discipline. States should establish a recognition program to encourage excellence in civic learning for all, capacity building, practices of constitutional democracy, and student agency.



### **Equity in Civics**

Access to high-quality civic learning opportunities must be universal and culturally responsive. The students who make up the United States’ increasingly racially and ethnically diverse student body must both see themselves in civics curriculum and instruction and experience “windows” to cultures beyond their own. States should actively recruit and work to retain teachers of color into the ranks of social studies educators, and disaggregate civics assessment and accountability data to ensure equitable access and address disparate outcomes. Equity should be among the major criteria for school recognition programs, and policy implementation must take equity into account through both design and investment.



### **Implementation**

States should establish or empower an in-state entity to help schools and districts implement new policies equitably and create designated funds to attract public and private investment in civic education policy implementation.



# THE CIVXNOW COALITION CHARGE AND MISSION

The **CivXNow Coalition** is a project of iCivics. As an organization that champions equitable, nonpartisan civic education so that the practice of democracy is learned by each new generation, iCivics was among the leading civic education providers and research universities that contributed to the development of the *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy*.

The CivXNow Coalition has united the civic learning field in a common purpose:

- To restore civic learning to its rightful and necessary place of prominence in U.S. education;
- To spread innovation in civic learning to every school in the nation;
- To change, strengthen, and improve the policies that affect civic learning in every state;
- To eliminate inequities in civic learning opportunities;
- To ensure student-centered civic learning and authentic student voice and engagement are the reality in every school; and
- To ensure every K–12 student in the nation has the opportunity to gain civic knowledge, acquire civic skills, and develop agency to understand that civic engagement is critical to the health and future of constitutional democracy in the United States.

When it comes to education in the United States, the principle of local control is firmly ingrained. State legislatures, governors, school boards, and school administrators have all worked together to fashion solutions—often unique—to local conditions and challenges. That principle will assuredly govern the ways in which states and communities come together to restore the civic mission of their own schools. With that understanding, the CivXNow Coalition proposes that, drawing on research and best practices, states work to improve civic learning across a set of critical areas that comprise a menu of policy options for use in each state.

# EDUCATING FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

America's self-governing constitutional democracy requires better civic education. High-quality, school-based K–12 civic learning for all is necessary to produce an electorate better equipped to meet the significant internal threats from polarization and misinformation the United States faces today. In the United States, support for democracy, itself, and the country's democratic system of government is in steep decline, especially among the youngest generations. Whereas 72 percent of those born before World War II believe it “essential” to live in a democracy, only 30 percent of Millennials hold the same belief.<sup>1</sup>

A healthy constitutional democracy requires a rising generation that desires to live in a democracy, and has the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors necessary for effective participation. According to a 2020 survey conducted by notable pollster Frank Luntz, Americans of all political stripes—by wide, bipartisan margins—see civic education as the most positive and impactful lever to address the problems facing our country, besting national service, limiting money in politics, and expanding voting access.

High-quality, school-based K–12 civic education for all learners is foundational to our shared civic strength and enshrined in most state constitutions. While 43 states require at least one high school civics course, too few incorporate powerful pedagogical principles like classroom-based deliberation and decision-making, project-based learning, or media literacy. Moreover, state social studies standards informing history and civics teaching are either outdated or too general, devoid of content guidance, and fail to facilitate students' civic development.

Lackluster student performance in these subjects is therefore not surprising. In the most recent iteration of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), only 24 percent of eighth-grade students demonstrated proficiency in Civics in 2018, and only 15 percent in U.S. History. However, eighth graders whose social studies teachers spent at least three hours per week on civics significantly outperformed peers with less instructional time.<sup>2</sup>

One cause of neglect is controversy over the content of U.S. history and civics classes. Whereas STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields rallied around consensus standards and needs, in the late 2000s the National Governors Association purposely passed on the same for social studies during crippling debates over U.S. history. From debates over the National History Standards in the 1990s to more recent controversies surrounding culturally responsive pedagogies, disagreement remains constant and intense. However, the United States urgently needs a shared national conversation about what, how, and why we teach U.S. history and civics. Civics and history instruction in U.S. classrooms must reflect recent scholarship in related fields, including the history and contributions of marginalized populations. Instead of specialization and fragmentation, K–12 curricula need overarching and relevant narratives inclusive of the country's pluralistic populace. Moreover, the study of youth civic development has advanced in the field of political science and should inform K–12 civics teaching. Equitable civic learning is therefore more than the fair distribution of funding and resources, but also, in the words of Bryan Stevenson, “an honest accounting of the past [yielding] a more honest American identity.”<sup>3</sup>

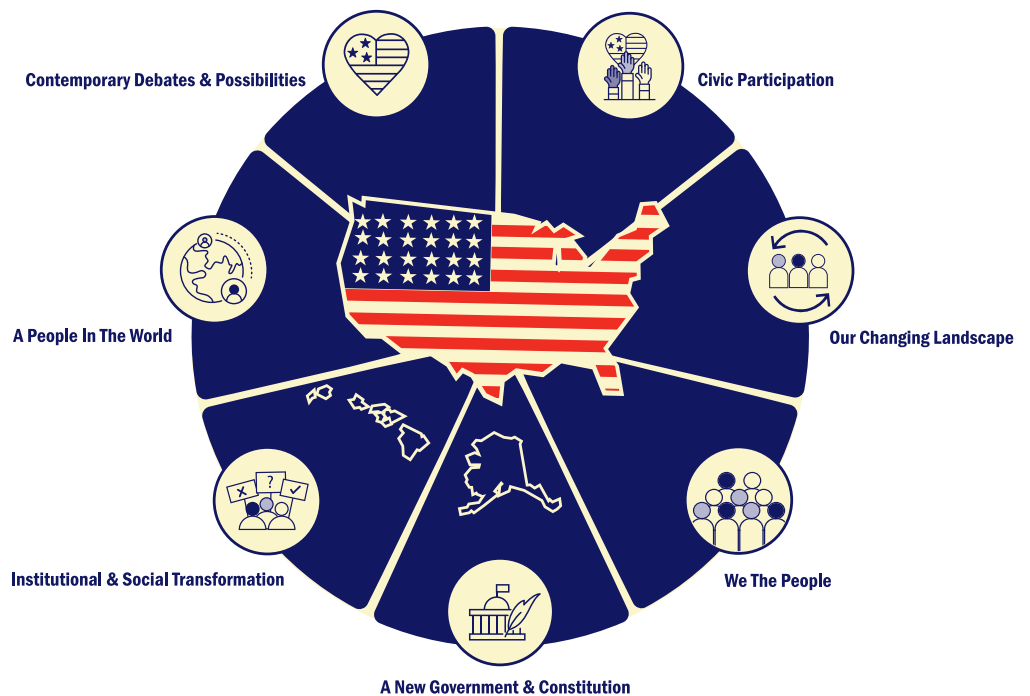
Renewal of history and civic education will require both respect for state autonomy and local diversity, as well as a harmonization of effort across all jurisdictions—local, tribal, state, and national. Success will depend on clear guidance for what should be learned, coupled with local adaptation, state-level accountability strategies that support continuous improvement, and public and private investment in development of highly qualified and effective history and civics educators. The policy recommendations that follow are a product of ideologically diverse deliberations, grounded in practical classroom application, and aimed to uplift teachers and students of all backgrounds.

## Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy

The *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy (EAD)* was designed to meet these needs and informs the state policy menu that follows. The *EAD Roadmap* was launched in October 2019, gathering an ideologically and demographically diverse national network of scholars, educators, and practitioners to synthesize expert judgment from the fields of history, political science, law, and education about the content and instructional strategies needed for excellent history and civic education for all learners.

It lays out a series of questions to be explored over the course of a K–12 education and organizes the questions around a set of design challenges for educators. The *EAD Roadmap* recommends approaches to learning that: (1) motivate student agency to sustain the republic; (2) narrate the United States’ plural yet shared story; (3) simultaneously celebrate and critique compromise; (4) cultivate civic honesty and reflective patriotism; and (5) balance the chronological and the thematic. Finally, the *EAD Roadmap* maintains a consistent commitment to all learners in its content and instructional guidance and implementation recommendations to ensure that excellent history and civic learning opportunities are delivered equitably throughout the country.

### EDUCATING FOR **AMERICAN** ★ **DEMOCRACY**



The *EAD Roadmap*'s implementation recommendations assume local, state, tribal, and national dimensions, but for the purposes of this policy menu, only the state dimensions are summarized below and embedded in the policy recommendations that follow.

**The *EAD Roadmap* recommends that every state-level authority:**

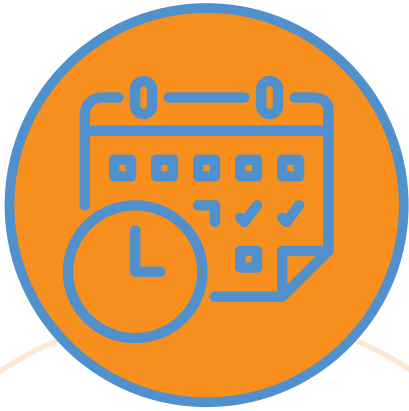
- Collect a civic learning plan from every Local Education Agency (LEA), aggregate these plans to allow comparisons and assessments of progress, and incorporate plans into school evaluation systems;
- Adopt social studies standards for elementary, middle school, and high school grade bands aligned with the *EAD Roadmap*;
- Require EAD training among pre-service teachers and professional development for in-service teachers through professional networks within LEAs;
- Accredit schools for excellence in EAD civics;
- Implement a fellowship program to incentivize people of color to join the social studies teaching profession; and
- Participate in NAEP history and civics assessments.

In order to implement the principles of the *EAD Roadmap* with fidelity and provide equitable civic learning to all students, the CivXNow Coalition embraces the following ambitious goals to be achieved by 2030:

- Sixty million students will have access to high-quality civic learning opportunities, with excellence in teaching civic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors, and a diverse supermajority earning civic learning credentials;
- One hundred thousand schools will be civic-ready through a fully resourced civic learning plan prioritizing teaching of civic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors; and
- One million teachers will be prepared to foster students' civic development through high-quality pre- and in-service professional development opportunities.

Because an agreement about fundamentals still leaves room for much diversity, the concept of a “roadmap” rather than “national standards” was chosen. *EAD Roadmap* implementation is a bottom-up endeavor left to state and local educational leaders and educators. Likewise, the policy menu that follows offers a menu of options for states to consider as they strengthen K–12 civic education policies while accounting for local context and what is best for students, parents, and local communities.





## Universal Access to High-quality Civic Learning Opportunities

### Course and Time Requirements

#### Background

Most states require only a one-semester high school civics course, allotting just 3½ months of instruction to acquire essential civic knowledge and skills, a marked decline from requirements that once called for as many as three courses. Many middle schools lack designated civics instruction. At elementary levels, research has shown that over the last two decades, the nation has seen a significant decrease in time devoted to civics and social studies. Moreover, universal access to high-quality civic learning opportunities requires we name and address historical and modern inequities across race, ethnicity, class, and language proficiency. This decline in the frequency and depth of instruction in civics, coupled with inequitable civic learning opportunities, poses a threat to the foundation of our constitutional democracy.

#### Recommendations

- Every state should require at least a one-semester, stand-alone civics course at middle school, and a full-year, stand-alone civics course in high school. While a traditional civics and government course alone is not enough to ensure comprehensive civic education without the other recommendations contained in this menu, it is an important anchor.
- Required civics courses should be structured to include the Educating for American Democracy (EAD) core pedagogical principles, including: (1) excellence for all; (2) self-reflection and a growth mindset; (3) building an EAD-ready classroom and school; (4) inquiry as the primary process for learning; (5) practices of constitutional democracy and student agency; and (6) assessment and reflection as mechanisms to improve instruction. States should also consult the *EAD Roadmap* for suggested content specific to a stand-alone civics course.
- Civics courses should include assessments that are aligned with the *EAD Roadmap* and part of the state's accountability system.
- Given an already crowded curriculum and the power that cross-curricular instruction has to engage students in their learning, states should take advantage of the interdisciplinary possibilities of civics and thoughtfully include civic content in other courses, such as English and science classes, while still providing stand-alone civics courses in middle and high school.
- Dedicated class time should be given to social studies in K–5. The [Council of Chief State School Officers](#) recommends 45 minutes of dedicated social studies instruction in K–5 each day. At a minimum, K–2 students should experience at least two 45-minute social studies blocks weekly, and grades 3–5 students should experience at least four equivalent blocks. Civics plays a valuable role in the elementary grades as students gain their first introduction to informational texts, building both important content knowledge and literacy skills that will serve them throughout their lives.



## Media Literacy

### Background

According to the [National Association for Media Literacy Education](#), media literacy “...is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.”<sup>4</sup> Students must be taught to evaluate information online differently than in print, including lateral reading that entails using internet searches and alternative sources to evaluate online content.

Many teachers lack the curriculum or pedagogical skills to strengthen students’ media literacy skills, and may falsely conflate students’ comfort with digital devices and their ability to assess the quality of online information. A 2019 study by the [Stanford History Education Group](#) explored a nationally representative sample of high school students’ media literacy skills.<sup>5</sup> Nearly all of the students failed to complete basic tasks like evaluating the source of a video claiming voter fraud, distinguishing between news stories and advertisements, and assessing the credibility of a website on climate change tied to the fossil fuel industry.

The current information environment is described by the [Rand Corporation](#) as “civic truth decay [involving] the blurring of boundaries between facts and opinion and the increasing influence of opinion and personal experiences (rather than evidence) on public discourse and decision making.”<sup>6</sup> In addition to cognitive biases, the rise of social media, and political and social polarization, the educational ecosystem has failed to keep up with changes to the information ecosystem and empower students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to combat “truth decay” and be informed, effective participants in civic life.

### Recommendations

CivXNow Coalition State Affiliate [DemocracyReady NY Coalition](#) recently published “Developing Digital Citizens” and made recommendations to strengthen K–12 media literacy education in New York.<sup>7</sup> In line with this report, the CivXNow Coalition endorses the following recommendations for replication across states:

- Embedding media literacy curricula across subject areas;
- Maintaining up-to-date school facilities, school libraries most critically, as they now serve as media resource centers;
- Ensuring librarians have ongoing access to professional development opportunities focused on media literacy; and
- Transparent monitoring and reporting of students’ access to media literacy opportunities.

The Coalition also recommends states consult valuable resources on media literacy from the [News Literacy Project](#) and the aforementioned National Association of Media Literacy Education and Stanford History Education Group. Moreover, the [New America Foundation’s](#) library media mentor program implemented in Maryland and Illinois is worthy of replication across states.<sup>8</sup>



## Civics-centered State and Local Social Studies Standards

### Background

Comprehensive civics teaching, and learning must address four main domains of learning:

#### Civic Knowledge

To gain an understanding of the history and heritage of our civic life and the functions of our civic institutions;

#### Civic Skills

To learn to analyze text, determine the reliability of sources, and acquire an understanding of the ways in which civic institutions operate and how individuals may be involved in civic life;

#### Civic Attitudes

To cultivate values such as appreciation for free speech, civil discourse, and understanding perspectives that differ from one's own, as well as a disposition to be civically engaged; and

#### Civic Behaviors

To develop civic and political habits including voting, engagement in deliberative discussions, volunteering, attending public meetings, and other activities related to civic life.

### Recommendations

- As social studies standards are revised and updated, states and districts should draw upon the *EAD Roadmap*, with its emphasis on inquiry and ideological consensus on what to teach in civics and history and how to teach it in service of a healthier constitutional democracy.
  - ▶ In states that have adopted the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework, the *Roadmap* will help integrate key topics in history and civics with the skills, foundational concepts, and disciplinary thinking in both fields, and provide well crafted questions in alignment with C3's inquiry arc.
- Consistent with the recommendations in the previous section, states should clarify media literacy standards across core subject areas, ensuring a uniform, cross-curricular approach to this vital 21st-century civic skill.



## Pre-service Teaching Requirements

### Background

The lack of uniform undergraduate pre-service requirements in civics, law, history, government, and political science means that many teachers assigned to civics classes may be ill-equipped to help students master the knowledge and skills that are essential for informed and engaged citizenship. Moreover, the teaching profession as a whole, and social studies teachers in particular, are not reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity of students.<sup>9</sup> Recent reports suggest static or even declining enrollment among students of color in pre-service teaching programs, and a higher percentage of teachers of color leaving the profession altogether within the first five years of their careers.<sup>10</sup>

### Recommendations

The CivXNow Coalition strongly recommends that each state strengthen their pre-service requirements for civics/social studies teachers as follows:

- Require, at a minimum, undergraduate courses in U.S. Government and U.S. History;
- Revise social studies certification examinations to include more rigorous civics and U.S. history content to ensure that each prospective teacher has fundamental knowledge of the subjects;
- Include pre-service methods coursework on the EAD core pedagogical principles, including facilitating student inquiries through analysis and investigations; direct instruction; discussion and debates; media literacy; use of experiential learning; classroom-based practices of constitutional democracy; project-based learning; field- and community-based activities; and use of formative assessments for purposes of student reflection and instructional improvements; and
- Implement a new fellowship for humanities and social science graduates of color to include preparation in the EAD core pedagogical principles and stipends for the first five years of teaching to incentivize joining the profession, support teachers of color, and address the marked lack of diversity of the teaching force.

States should also consider requiring U.S. Government and U.S. History coursework and training on EAD core pedagogical principles for all K–12 teachers, especially those in grades K–5 charged with social studies instruction.



## Educator Professional Development Through Network-building Across Local Educational Agencies

### Background

Building upon their educator preparation experiences, K–12 teachers across subject areas need ongoing professional development (PD) to deepen content expertise, develop culturally responsive competencies, and build capacity to incorporate practices of constitutional democracy and student agency into classrooms. A three-year study of Illinois high school civics course implementation efforts found that effective PD begins by making the case for civic learning, followed by scaffolded training to “meet teachers where they are.”<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, teachers rarely rate their existing PD opportunities as “useful,” and many have little control over the type of PD they receive.<sup>12</sup> Because federal and state funding shifted away from civics in recent decades, related PD is underfunded and often cost-prohibitive for teachers in terms of time and money.<sup>13</sup>

### Recommendations

The CivXNow Coalition calls on each state to provide adequate funding to ensure ongoing, comprehensive, evidence-based teacher PD, on par with that provided to math, literacy, and science teachers. PD opportunities should:

- Help teachers strengthen civics and history content knowledge and instructional strategies to facilitate engaged and effective learning (e.g., culturally responsive strategies, media literacy, formative assessments, and social-emotional learning);
- Incorporate exposure to a wide array of vetted curriculum and resources for later classroom implementation; and
- Encourage and create opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration to allow teachers to work together to integrate civics and U.S. history with English, language arts, math, and science.

States should ensure that ongoing PD opportunities are provided within and across networks of Local Education Agencies (LEAs), allowing communities of practice to form and flourish locally and regionally.



## Assessment and Accountability

### Background

In this era of accountability-based education, the fact that civic learning is not meaningfully included in most states' assessment and accountability systems is arguably the greatest cause of the erosion of time and attention to civic education. Simply put, "if it isn't tested, it isn't taught," is the unfortunate reality in far too many schools. Civics is critical to the health and future of our constitutional democracy, and must be assessed authentically and regularly.

According to the late, great education researcher Grant Wiggins, authentic assessment:

- Is realistic;
- Requires judgment and innovation;
- Asks the student to apply their knowledge in the subject area;
- Replicates or simulates "real-life" application in the workplace or community;
- Assesses students' knowledge and skill use in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in a complex situation; and
- Provides opportunities for practice and feedback to refine products and performances.<sup>14</sup>

Developing and implementing a new assessment is an expensive undertaking for any state, and many educators, parents, and some policymakers are calling for less testing, not more. The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) calls on states to ease existing testing burdens on schools and explore offering testing in currently untested areas (such as civics).

Teaching and learning civics involves several domains of knowledge and skills. Assessing all of them calls for different approaches. Assessment of civic knowledge—addressing students' understanding of the history and heritage of civic life and the functions of civic institutions—can be assessed with a traditional objective paper/pencil or online test. Students' acquisition of civic skills, by contrast, is most often and most effectively assessed through a performance-based assessment that may take the form of a portfolio, reflection, oral presentation, classroom-based assessment, or other type of assessment to evaluate student learning. District-level civic learning plans should ensure that schools address all facets of students' civic development, allow comparisons across districts, and enable integration of accountability for civic learning into school performance measurements.

We recognize that the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' Civics Test has some appeal as an assessment of students' civic knowledge, but this must be viewed as only a first step, as this test covers a small portion of the civic knowledge students need and does not measure student attainment of civic skills, behaviors, and attitudes.

### Recommendations

The CivXNow Coalition calls on states to consider appropriate assessment in civics in their accountability systems:

- States should have specific civics courses at upper elementary, middle, and high school levels, with instructionally embedded assessments, including in-class activities, projects, presentations, assignments, or exercises that provide data about a specific learning outcome that can then be applied to improve instruction.
- States should require that students engage in project-based learning and/or field- or community-based activities as alternative forms of assessment, such as service-learning or showcases and competitions at the middle and high school levels. These projects may be thought of as a “civics lab,” similar to laboratory work in science classes.
- Student performance on civics assessments should be used as sources of information for students and teachers, informing and shifting practice in the case of the latter. Beyond student and teacher accountability, schools and school districts also should consider creating civic learning plans aligned with the *EAD Roadmap*. Civic learning plans could be aggregated across LEAs to allow comparisons and assessment of progress, and integrated within school evaluation systems if the state uses a school ranking formula.
- States should ensure the assessment instruments offer a comprehensive measure of civic and history learning and will permit the reporting of results disaggregated by subgroup.
- States should include civics assessments in the ESSA plans they submit to the U.S. Department of Education.
- States should consider providing performance-based student credentialing benchmarks at appropriate grade level junctures, including civics graduation seals or certificates, with district-level implementation.
- States should participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Civics and History to allow for disaggregated results by state.



## Deepen and Honor Schoolwide and Community Commitments to Civic Learning

### Background

As with learning in any other content area, students need coherence between what they learn about citizens' power to effect change and their perceptions of their own schools in order to engage fully with learning about U.S. constitutional democracy. Thus, there should be age-appropriate opportunities for students to develop, use their voices, and feel their opinions matter while making necessary compromises. Offering students a meaningful role in decision-making and the planning and management of their schools and issues that affect them, including policies governing civic education, provides a powerful and particularly relevant means to do so.

Civic learning is a schoolwide endeavor and represents one of the foundations of the U.S. educational system. It plays a role in every discipline and should not be relegated to instruction solely in a single content area. Further, the daily operation of schools is a primary means through which students gain their first experience with democratic governance and their roles as guardians of constitutional democracy. Schools must establish a welcoming environment, open to students taking democracy out for a “test drive,” through classroom-based practices of constitutional democracy and meaningful student participation in school decision-making processes.

Democratic learning environments are those in which students feel valued and respected. Establishing such environments—using, for example, peer mediation and non-punitive solutions for minor behavioral incidents—is a crucial step toward reversing harsh school disciplinary policies that disproportionately affect students of color, and are correlated with decreased community engagement, voter turnout, and trust in government.

In the classroom and wider campus settings, there should be clear rules and consistent responses to violations of school norms and procedures, with a commitment to ensuring that every student has an opportunity to be heard when they are in conflict or facing discipline. However, disciplinary policies should encourage self-regulation and restorative practices rather than modeling authoritarian systems that are the antithesis of democracy.

School recognition programs are an effective means to encourage educational excellence, continuous improvement, and peer replication. Such programs should measure students' current and prospective civic engagement and focus on the quantity, quality, and equitable distribution of civic learning opportunities; and the extent to which the school culture undergirding them is democratic. Recognition must not be bestowed as a crowning achievement for schools, but instead as an affirmation of their commitment to students' civic development and continuous improvement to this end.



### **Recommendations**

The CivXNow Coalition recommends that schools, districts, local policymakers, and state policymakers, respectively, deepen their commitments to civic learning by implementing the following recommendations.

### Schools and Districts

- Ensure that school and district policies and daily practices related to school culture and student discipline reflect democratic ideals and principles.
- Afford students opportunities to share their views and to act on issues related to the conduct of school operations;
- Empower each student council to have a meaningful voice in school operations and management;
- Include at least one student representative or committee on school boards; and
- Work with units of local government to create opportunities for student participation in public decision-making by including youth representation and youth voice on the myriad of local boards, commissions, and similar decision-making bodies;
- Have students work with local government representatives and make presentations on issues of concern, ensuring students selected to serve in these roles fully reflect the diversity—academic and otherwise—of their schools and have an established means for clear communication between student representatives and the students whose interests they represent;

### State and Local Policymakers

- Ensure substantial and meaningful youth participation and leadership in updating and strengthening civic-related learning standards, assessments, and curricular frameworks (also includes nongovernmental entities);
- Include at least one student representative or committee on the State Board of Education;
- Provide adequate funding for training district and school officials on strategies and techniques to ensure a healthy, democratic, and inclusive school climate in all schools; and
- Adopt a school recognition program aligned with the EAD core pedagogical principles either through administration by a state entity or through state recognition of a program administered by a private-sector entity.



## Equity in Civics

### Background

The quality and quantity of civic learning opportunities in K–12 U.S. public schools correlates strongly with students’ race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.<sup>15</sup> Disparate opportunities yield wide differences in student performance on measures of civic proficiency. For example, 43 percent of Asian students and 31 percent of White students scored “proficient” or better on the 2018 NAEP in Civics among eighth graders, whereas only 13 percent of Hispanic students and 10 percent of Black or African American students scored the same.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, civics curricula are infrequently inclusive of marginalized students’ race, ethnicity, culture, and identity,<sup>17</sup> and social studies teachers are even less representative of the ever-diversifying U.S. student population than their peers in other subject areas.<sup>18</sup> As a result, too many students may not be able to see themselves as citizens with agency in the U.S. constitutional democracy.

Policies constructed to strengthen civic learning frequently fail to account for equity in their design and implementation. Collectively, these unequal inputs contribute to a “civic empowerment gap” in which civic participation in the United States is not reflective of the nation’s racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity, yielding disparate policy outcomes, and undermining the high ideals of America’s foundational documents.

### Recommendations

- States should ensure that social studies standards are inclusive of the country’s increasingly racially and ethnically diverse student body in alignment with the *EAD Roadmap*.
- States should actively recruit and work to retain teachers of color into the ranks of social studies educators and implement a fellowship to incentivize college graduates of color with social science and humanities degrees to join the teaching profession.
- States should disaggregate civics assessment and accountability data to ensure equal access and address inequitable outcomes.
- Equity should be among the major criteria for school recognition programs, including the quantity and quality of civic learning opportunities, the school culture that undergirds them, and measures of students’ current and prospective civic engagement.
- All state policies designed to strengthen civic learning should center equity in their design and through investments in policy implementation.



## Implementation

### Background

Policies do not implement themselves. They may well fall short if the necessary implementation oversight and support is not available. States improving civic education benefit, in most cases, from the presence of an entity that helps policymakers and school officials effectively implement the new policies. Examples include the Lou Frey Institute in Florida; the Washington State Council for Public Legal Education; and the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, iCivics, and Generation Citizen in Massachusetts. State departments of education, state social studies councils, and regional education offices also are strong candidates for state and local implementation of civics policies.

### Recommendations

The CivXNow Coalition recommends that each state establish or empower an existing in-state entity to help districts and schools implement new policies in civic learning. The responsibilities of these in-state civic education entities may include providing technical assistance, educator professional development, and models of best practices; researching and maintaining a comprehensive database of civic education resources; and monitoring the fidelity of policy implementation by schools and districts. Funding for these in-state entities may come from the public and/or private sectors. States should consider creating designated funds for these purposes.

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