



An Act related to strengthening constitutional democracy through equitable school-based civic education (Civics Strengthens Democracy Act)

Summary: America’s constitutional democracy requires improved civic education. Our nation and state face significant internal threats from polarization and misinformation, with an electorate poorly trained to meet the challenges of self-governing in a constitutional democracy. High-quality, school-based K-12 civic learning for all learners is a necessary antidote. Civic learning is foundational to our shared civic strength and enshrined in our state constitution. Therefore, the Civics Strengthens Democracy Act ensures students have designated middle and high school civics courses and instructional time for civics in elementary grades; project-based assessments in civics in middle and high school; a civic seal program to recognize students for exemplary achievement in civics through both project-based assessments and related coursework; implements a school and district recognition program to award to school districts and individual schools that show excellence in producing and promoting civic learning and civic project-based assessments; and empowers an in-state entity to oversee the Act’s implementation, with dedicated money for implementation through public and/or private sources in the form of the Civics Trust Fund.

An Act related to creating an equitable vision for implementing civic education

Be it enacted by the legislature of the state of STATE:

SECTION 1 - SHORT TITLE

An Act related to creating an equitable vision for implementing school-based civic education shall henceforth be known as the Civics Strengthens Democracy Act.

SECTION 2 - LEGISLATIVE DECLARATION

The legislature finds:

- A. Neglect for civics in our elementary and secondary education system has contributed to polarization, distrust in institutions, and a citizenry and electorate who are poorly prepared to understand, appreciate, and use our form of government and civic life.
- B. All students need to have the civic knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behaviors necessary to participate in, preserve, and strengthen our republic.
- C. Our state should embrace civic education that inspires students to want to become involved in their constitutional democracy and help to sustain our republic; tells a full and complete narrative of America's plural, yet shared story; celebrates the compromises needed to make our constitutional democracy work; cultivates civic honesty and reflective patriotism that leaves space to both love and critique this country; is relevant and engaging for students and teachers history and civics in an integrated and inquiry-based manner; and teaches history and civics through a timeline of events and themes that run through those events.
- D. Students who experience comprehensive, high quality civic education are more likely to vote and discuss politics at home, complete college and develop employable skills, volunteer and work on community issues, and are more confident in their ability to speak publicly and communicate with their elected representatives.
- E. The civic strength of our country relies on prioritizing and investing in quality, comprehensive civic learning for the next generation of civic participants.

SECTION 3 - DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this Act, the following words shall, unless the context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meaning:

- A. "Civics," shall mean a nonpartisan educational program that addresses (i) civic knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge, including an understanding of the history, heritage, civic life, and civic institutions of the United States; (ii) civic skills, the acquisition of skills, such as the ability to analyze text and determine the reliability of sources and an understanding of the ways in which civic institutions operate and how individuals may be involved in civic life; (iii) civic dispositions, the acquisition of dispositions, values such as appreciation for free

speech, civil discourse, tolerance and inclusion, and understanding perspectives that differ from one's own as well as a disposition to be civically engaged; (iv) civic behaviors, the development of behaviors, including civic habits and practices such as voting, serving on juries, engagement in deliberative discussions, volunteering, attending public meetings, and other activities related to civic life.

- B. "Civic seal," shall mean a recognition awarded by school districts to individual students who have demonstrated civic excellence through their high school project-based assessment and related coursework.
- C. "The department," unless otherwise indicated, shall mean the state department of education with jurisdiction over elementary and secondary public education.
- D. "Educating for American Democracy pedagogical principles," shall mean evidence-based instructional methods that address (i) Excellence for All, teachers commit to learn about and teach full and multifaceted history and civic narratives. They appreciate student diversity and assume all students' capacity for learning complex and rigorous content. Teachers focus on inclusion and equity in both content and approach as they spiral instruction across grade bands, increasing complexity and depth about relevant history and contemporary issues. (ii) Self-Reflection and Growth Mindset, teachers have a growth mindset for themselves and their students, meaning they engage in continuous self-reflection and cultivate self-knowledge. They learn and adopt content as well as practices that help all learners of diverse backgrounds reach excellence. Teachers need continuous and rigorous professional development (PD) and access to professional learning communities (PLCs) that offer peer support and mentoring opportunities, especially about content, pedagogical approaches, and instruction-embedded assessments. (iii) Building an Educating for American Democracy-Ready Classroom and School, teachers cultivate and sustain a learning environment by partnering with administrators, students, and families to conduct deep inquiry about the multifaceted stories of American constitutional democracy. They set expectations that all students know they belong and contribute to the classroom community. Students establish ownership and responsibility for their learning through mutual respect and an inclusive culture that enables students to engage courageously in rigorous discussion. (iv) Inquiry as the Primary Process for Learning, teachers use inquiry prompts as entry points to teaching full and complex content and cultivate students' capacity to develop their own deep and critical inquiries about American history and civic life, and their identities and communities. They embrace these rigorous inquiries as a

way to advance students' historical and civic knowledge, and to connect that knowledge to them and their communities. They also help students cultivate empathy across differences and inquisitiveness to ask difficult questions, which are core to historical understanding and constructive civic participation. (v) Practice of Constitutional Democracy and Student Agency, teachers use their content knowledge and classroom leadership to model constitutional principles through democratic practices and promoting civic responsibilities, civil rights, and civic friendship in their classrooms. Teachers deepen students' grasp of content and concepts by creating student opportunities to engage with real-world events and problem-solving about issues in their communities by taking informed action to create a more perfect union. (vi) Assess, Reflect, and Improve, teachers use assessments as a tool to ensure all students understand civics content and concepts and apply civic skills and agency. Students have the opportunity to reflect on their learning and give feedback to their teachers in higher-order thinking exercises that enhance as well as measure learning. Teachers analyze and utilize feedback and assessment for self-reflection and improving instruction.

- E. "Media literacy," shall mean nonpartisan educational content that addresses (i) digital literacy, being technically fluent and able to make informed decisions about what we do and encounter online, recognize how networked technology affects our behavior and our perceptions, and create and effectively communicate with digital media tools; (ii) information literacy, understanding how to find, evaluate, and use information effectively to solve a particular problem or make a decision; (iii) news literacy, the ability to discern verified information from spin, opinion and propaganda, and produce news accurately, fairly and responsibly; (iv) visual literacy, the ability to find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media such as: photographs, videos, illustrations, drawings, maps, diagrams, and advertisements; (v) digital citizenship, understanding and following the norms of safe and responsible technology use.
- F. "Project-based assessment," shall mean a nonpartisan educational civics project as defined by the department that may be individual, small group, or class-wide civics projects, and designed to promote a student's ability to (i) reason, make logical arguments, and support claims using valid evidence; (ii) demonstrate an understanding of the connections between federal, state, and local policies, including issues that may impact the student's community.
- G. "Recognition program," shall mean a civic excellence designation as defined by the department that is aligned to the Educating for American Democracy

pedagogical principles with the purpose to formally recognize and highlight the accomplishments of school districts and/or individual schools.

SECTION 4 - CIVICS COURSE TIME

- A. In all public schools, history of the United States of America and social science, including civics, shall be taught as required subjects to promote civic service and a greater knowledge thereof and to prepare students, morally and intellectually, for the duties of citizenship. The department shall require universal, equitable access to high-quality civic learning experiences, including but not limited to (i) a one semester, stand-alone civics course in middle school; (ii) a full year, stand-alone civics course in high school; (iii) dedicated class time for social studies in each elementary grade, including but not limited to (a) Kindergarten, first, and second grade students shall experience, at minimum, two 45 minute blocks per week; (b) third, fourth, and fifth grade students shall experience, at minimum, four equivalent blocs per week; (iv) secondary students shall take and pass a stand-alone, full-year civics course as a prerequisite for graduation from high school; (v) embed units of instruction of media literacy across subject areas and may consider a stand-alone, semester-long high school media literacy course.

SECTION 5 - PROJECT-BASED ASSESSMENTS

- A. In addition to instructionally-embedded assessments in stand-alone civics courses, middle and high school students shall engage in a minimum of one project-based learning and/or field- or community-based activities as alternative forms of assessment, such as service learning or showcases and competitions.
- B. Project-based assessment civic learning projects shall be consistent with state standards and learning time requirements.
- C. No fee shall be charged to a student or their family for a student to participate in project-based learning opportunities, notwithstanding fees already required by schools to participate in school-sponsored field trips, clubs, or other activities.

SECTION 6 - CIVIC SEAL

- A. The department shall develop and provide student credentialing benchmarks to school districts for the purpose of awarding student civic seals on high school diplomas to students who have demonstrated civic excellence through their project-based assessment completed in high school and related coursework. School districts and individual schools shall not be obligated to participate in the civic seal program.
- B. A school district that participates in the civic seal program shall (i) provide information to all students regarding the civic seal opportunity and criteria for being awarded the recognition; (ii) maintain appropriate records in order to identify pupils who have earned the civic seal; (iii) record a student's civic seal recognition in their official transcript; (iv) affix the appropriate insignia to the diploma of each student who earns the civic seal.
- C. No fee shall be charged for a student to receive the civic seal they earn.

SECTION 7 - SCHOOL AND DISTRICT RECOGNITION PROGRAM

- A. The department, in collaboration with the STATE civic learning coalition and civic education researchers, shall develop and establish an Educating for American Democracy recognition program to award to school districts and individual schools that show excellence in producing and promoting civic learning and civic project-based assessments aligned to the Educating for American Democracy pedagogical principles (see Section 3, Part D) and provide credentialing benchmarks for schools and districts.
- B. The purpose of the program shall be to formally recognize and highlight the accomplishments of districts and schools and to provide teachers and administrators with the components and stages of successful civic learning.
- C. The department shall develop an application process for school districts and individual schools to apply for the recognition program and shall promulgate rules and regulations for awarding the recognition, provided that these rules prioritize school districts and individual schools that promote equitable access to civic learning and project-based assessments. Schools and districts that apply shall be evaluated annually.
- D. The department shall develop a website to showcase school districts and individual schools that are recognized for civic excellence and the civics projects

produced by the students of said school districts and individual schools. School districts and individual schools shall not be obligated to apply for the recognition program.

- E. No fee shall be charged for a school or district to be awarded the recognition they earn.

SECTION 8 - RESOURCING

- A. An in-state entity shall be established or empowered to oversee the implementation of the Civics Strengthens Democracy Act to advise and assist school districts and individual schools in implementing universal, equitable, comprehensive, and quality civic learning.
- B. The responsibilities of said in-state civic education entity may include providing (i) technical assistance; (ii) provide competitive, needs-based funding to districts; (iii) educator professional development; (iv) administrator professional development; (v) models of best practice; (vi) maintaining a comprehensive database of civic education resources; (vii) monitoring of the fidelity of policy implementation by schools and districts.
- C. There shall be established a separate fund to be known as the Civics Trust Fund. The fund shall be administered by the department. Funding may come from the public or private sectors or a combination of public and private sources. The Civics Trust Fund shall be credited with (i) revenue from appropriations or other money authorized by the legislature and specifically designated to be credited to the fund; (ii) interest earned on such revenues; (iii) funds from public and private sources such as gifts, grants, and donations to further civics and history education and professional development.
- D. Amounts credited to the Civics Trust Fund shall not be subject to further appropriation and any money remaining in the fund at the end of a fiscal year shall not revert to the General Fund.
- E. Amounts received from private sources shall be approved by the in-state entity and subject to review before being deposited in the Civics Trust Fund to ensure that pledged funds are not accompanied by conditions, explicit or implicit, on the implementation of civic programming that may be detrimental to the neutral and

rigorous teaching of civics or unduly influence the direction of civic education policy. The review shall be made publicly available.

- F. The in-state entity shall report to the legislature on an annual basis regarding the Civic Trust Fund's activity. The report shall include, but not be limited to (i) the source and amount of funds received; (ii) the amounts distributed and the purpose of expenditures, including but not limited to, funds expended to assist school districts in meeting the requirements of the Civics Strengthens Democracy Act; (iii) any grants provided to institutions of higher education and other stakeholder organizations; (iv) anticipated revenue and expenditure projections for the next year.

SECTION 9 - IMPLEMENTATION

- A. The department shall begin implementing the Civics Act for the INSERT SCHOOL YEAR THAT BEGINS ONE YEAR AFTER THE CURRENT LEGISLATIVE SESSION CONCLUDES academic year and shall be fully implemented state-wide for the INSERT SCHOOL YEAR THAT BEGINS AT LEAST TWO YEARS AFTER THE CURRENT LEGISLATIVE SESSION CONCLUDES academic year.