



# State Policy Menu

A Guide to Strengthening Civic Education

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**CivxNow**  
A PROJECT OF ICIVICS



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## About Us

CivxNow is a project of [iCivics](#), a nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing civic learning by providing educators and students with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to embrace and engage in our civic life together. iCivics empowers educators and leads the movement to make civic education a nationwide priority so all young people have the confidence to shape the world around them and believe in our country's future.

**CivxNow** is the nation's largest cross-partisan coalition working to prioritize civic education in order to sustain and strengthen constitutional democracy in the United States. This includes building a shared commitment to ensure that all young people are prepared to assume their rights and responsibilities to participate in civic life.



# State Policy Menu: A Guide to Strengthening Civic Education



## What's Inside

This guide is your one-stop shop for crafting strong civic education policies for K-12 schools. We understand you're busy, so we've made it easy to navigate.

**Actionable Recommendations:** No fluff, just clear policy options tackling various aspects of civic education. Each page outlines the challenge, followed by a plain-language recommendation and multiple policy options.

**One-pagers by Topic:** Each section is concise and easy to digest, perfect for you and your staff.

**Resources at Your Fingertips:** Need model bill language or examples from other states? Each one-pager has links to those, as well. Plus, we've included references to supporting research and specific real-life state examples.

### Use the Entire Guide or Focus on Specific Areas:

This guide empowers you to take a comprehensive approach to strengthening civic education or focus on specific areas you find most pressing. This menu-style approach allows you to choose the recommendations that best fit your state's priorities. Want to create new funding for civic educator professional development? We've got you covered. Looking to implement better civic assessments or establish a civic seal? We have recommendations for that, too.

**Beyond Legislators:** Recognizing the many key players in education policy, this guide includes dedicated sections for governors, secretaries of state, and America 250 commissions who are uniquely positioned to influence policy. (See pages 11-13.)

### Get the Status of K-12 Civic Education in Your State

Before delving into specific policy recommendations, we invite you to gain valuable insights from our website's [comprehensive state profiles](#) on K-12 civic education. Each profile details what currently exists and potential areas for improvement. State profiles are updated at the end of every summer.



# Why Civics?



## Too many young people are losing faith in our country.

Surrounded by political division, distrust, and polarization, too many young people are losing confidence and now view the United States as a “democracy in trouble.”



## The best way to strengthen our democracy is to teach it.

Building young people's faith in our country starts with teaching them how to participate in it—developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to effectively communicate their ideas with others and contribute to their communities.



## When young people see they can shape our country, they believe in its future.

We need civic education that is relevant, meaningful, and engaging for each new generation. Civic education not only inspires a belief in our country, but also instills in youth a sense of belonging and a confidence to shape the world around them and work with others to solve problems together.

## Students who experience high-quality civic education are more likely to:



**Complete college** and develop employable skills



**Vote** and discuss current issues at home



**Be confident in speaking publicly** and communicating with elected representatives



**Volunteer** and work on community issues

Learn more about what's at stake:  
[civxnow.org/our-vision/what-is-at-stake](https://civxnow.org/our-vision/what-is-at-stake)

Dig into the research:  
[icivics.org/strategy/illustrate-impact](https://icivics.org/strategy/illustrate-impact)

## Civics is a Winning Issue

The **51st annual Phi Delta Kappa poll of public attitudes on education** (2019) — as well as findings from **The Democracy Project report** (2018), an **iCivics/More Perfect poll conducted by Cygnal** (2022), and more — all tell us that an overwhelming majority of Americans want more civics taught. This high level of support remains true across all age, gender, racial, political, socioeconomic, and geographic demographics. To that end, you will find throughout this document examples of policies to advance civic education that have garnered bipartisan support.

# Strengthen Civics Course Requirements



**Challenge:** Current data on civic knowledge is alarming. The 2023 Annenberg Civics Knowledge Survey found that about one in six Americans could not name any of the three branches of the U.S. government, and most Americans could not name all of the rights protected under the First Amendment. Eighth graders' scores in civics registered their first decline since testing began in 1998, according to data from the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

**Solution:** Strengthen state course requirements in civic education. Based on existing research and recognized best practices, every student can spend more time on civics in the classroom.

## State Policy Options

**High School:** Require a full-year, stand-alone civics course aligned with the *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy* (see Align State Standards with Consensus and Best Practice, p. 7), with an opportunity for students to engage in practices of constitutional democracy, develop agency, and reflect and improve through formative and summative assessments.

**Middle School:** Require a stand-alone semester of civics aligned with the *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy*.

**Elementary School:** Require that elementary students have more time devoted to civic learning. Allow for flexibility in incorporating interdisciplinary connections with math, science, and language arts. (At a minimum, CivxNow recommends 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.)

**Example:** New Hampshire's bipartisan "**More Time on Civics**" bill, was signed into law by Governor Chris Sununu (R-NH) on August 4, 2023. This legislation requires that educators focus on civics and increase the time spent on the teaching of civics, particularly in the elementary and middle grades.

## → Resources

- [Model bill language](#)
- [2023 Annenberg Civics Knowledge Survey](#)
- [State-specific K–12 civic learning profile](#)
- [2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) results for civics and history](#)

# Strengthen Funding for Civic Education



**Challenge:** Civic education is drastically underfunded in the United States.

**STEM**  
**\$50**  
**Civic Education**  
**50¢**  
per student



Significant public and private investments in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) subjects are a good example of the difference these kinds of investments can make. Currently, federal funding for STEM is about \$50 per student. By comparison, students receive just about 50 cents for civic education. Well-funded and well-resourced policies are crucial to support teachers and students in implementing any policy improvements.

**Solution:** Strengthen funding for civic education. Be sure all new policies include companion resources for implementation to ensure compliance with new mandates and deliver results equitably and at scale.

## State Policy Options

**Trust Fund:** Create a separate fund to be administered by the state department of education for districts or providers to cover a variety of implementation needs. Permit the fund to include revenue from the general fund, line-item appropriations, or other funds authorized by the legislature.

**Fund for Scaling Up:** Include enough funding that each school can scale up new state mandates. All school districts should be resourced enough to offer universal access to high-quality civic learning.

**Set Priority Areas:** Be specific about funding usage for priority areas. For example, target specific areas of need, such as teacher professional development, experiential civic learning programming/experiences, or agency staff.

**Example:** In 2018, Massachusetts enacted new civic learning requirements and established a **Civics Trust Fund**. The trust fund was created to support civic education as a priority for school districts across the state and key provisions in the law, including professional development to support teaching civics effectively and the opportunity for middle and high school students to participate in civics-based projects.

## → Resources

- [Model bill language](#)
- [State-specific K-12 civic learning profile](#)

# Strengthen Professional Development and Preservice Training for Civic Education



**Challenge:** The lack of uniform undergraduate preservice 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 essential for informed and engaged civic participation. What’s more, related professional development is underfunded and often cost-prohibitive for teachers in terms of time and money (AEI, 2015).

**Solution:** Strengthen preservice requirements for civics teachers by requiring undergraduate courses in government and U.S. history, as well as undergraduate coursework in the unique methods of teaching history and civics. K-12 teachers across subject areas also need ongoing professional development to deepen content expertise, develop culturally responsive competencies, and build capacity to incorporate practices of constitutional democracy and student agency into classrooms. (See *Illinois case study on next page and state policy options on p. 8, “Encourage and Acknowledge Student Excellence and Participation in Civics.”*)

## State Policy Options

### Preservice:

- Require, at a minimum, undergraduate courses in 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.
- Consider requiring government and U.S. history coursework for all K-12 teachers, especially those in grades K-5 charged with social studies instruction.
- Ensure professional development opportunities within and across networks of Local Education Agencies (LEAs), allowing communities of practice to form and flourish locally and regionally.

**Ongoing Professional Development:** Provide adequate resources for ongoing, comprehensive, evidence-based educator professional development in order to:

- strengthen civics and history content knowledge;
- practice instructional strategies to facilitate engaged and effective learning;
- provide exposure to a wide array of vetted curriculum and resources for classroom implementation;
- ensure school and district policies and daily practices related to school culture and student discipline reflect democratic ideals and principles; and
- encourage and create opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration to allow educators to work together to integrate civics and U.S. history with English, language arts, math, science, and more.

## Related Challenge



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 (*Brown Center, 2018*).

## State Policy Options:

- Look for innovative ways to diversify the teacher pool, actively recruiting and working to retain teachers of color in the ranks of social studies educators.
- Implement a fellowship to incentivize college graduates of color with social science and humanities degrees to join the teaching profession.

## Case Study: Illinois Democracy Schools



Illinois Democracy Schools are secondary schools recognized for providing students with authentic experiences in the rights, responsibilities, and tensions inherent in living in a constitutional democracy. Through these experiences, students are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for informed, effective engagement in our democracy.

**Illinois Civic Blueprint**, from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.

**Video**: A look at how Chicago's George Washington High School raised its achievement through an emphasis on civic learning across the school.

**Example:** In the 2024–25 budget, the Michigan Senate Appropriations Committee agreed to include \$5 million in funding for professional development in the School Aid Budget. [View Committee language.](#)

## → Resources

- [Model bill language](#)
- [State's K–12 civic learning profile](#)
- [Civic Education Professional Development: The Lay of the Land](#) (*American Enterprise Institute, 2015*)
- [The 2018 Brown Center Report on American Education: How Well Are American Students Learning?](#)

# Align State Standards with Consensus and Best Practice



**Challenge:** Some state social studies standards that inform teaching of history and civics are outdated, too general, and/or lack content guidance.

**Solution:** Update state social studies standards in alignment with the *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy*. This approach ensures that standards reflect recent scholarship and content in related fields and utilize inquiry as the primary mode of instruction.

## State Policy Options

Adopt social studies **standards** for elementary, middle, and high school grade bands aligned with the *EAD Roadmap*.

- Ensure that social studies standards are inclusive of the country's increasingly diverse student body.

Require and provide funding for discipline-specific **training** among preservice teachers and **professional development** for in-service teachers in the social studies:

- Include preservice methods coursework on core teaching methods aligned with the *EAD Pedagogy Companion*, including facilitating student inquiries through analysis and investigations; discussion and debates; literacy; use of experiential learning; classroom-based practices of constitutional democracy; project-based learning; and use of formative assessments for purposes of student reflection and instructional improvements.
- Consider requiring training on EAD core pedagogical principles for all K-12 teachers.

## What is the Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy?

The Educating for American Democracy (EAD) initiative convened a diverse and cross-ideological group of scholars and educators to create a roadmap and guidance in the form of an inquiry framework that states, local school districts, and educators can use to transform teaching of history and civics. The resulting *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy* identifies seven major themes as high-priority content areas for all K-12 students.

With its emphasis on inquiry, EAD offers students the opportunity to ask questions, investigate topics, and share their findings. This approach enables learners to examine issues of substance and interest, giving them the essential tools for independent thinking and grappling with our nation's rich history.

## → Resources

- [Model bill language](#)
- [State-specific K-12 civic learning profile](#)
- [Educating for American Democracy State Standards Guidance](#)
- [Educating for American Democracy Pedagogy Companion](#)

# Encourage and Acknowledge Student Excellence and Participation in Civics



**Challenge:** 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.

**Solution:** Create learning environments that incorporate democratic practices through which students feel valued and respected. Provide civics graduation seals on student diplomas to recognize excellence. (See “*Civic Seal Toolkit*” in resources below to learn more.)

## State Policy Options

- Establish a “civic seal” diploma recognition program to encourage excellence in civics.
- Include youth voice and participation 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.
- 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.
- Ensure that district-level K–12 civic learning plans address all facets of students' civic development, allow comparisons across districts, and enable integration of accountability for civic learning into school performance measurements.
- As part of school recognition programs, include the quantity and quality of civic learning opportunities, the school culture that undergirds them, and measures of students' current and prospective civic engagement.

**Example:** Public Law 114, passed with bipartisan support through Indiana's General Assembly, mandated the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) to introduce an “**Excellence in Civic Engagement**” designation for high school students, a commendation that will be noted on academic transcripts. The criteria for this designation encompass a range of activities, including volunteer work, engagement in project-based learning, and successful coursework completion, with IDOE providing the flexibility to define additional requirements.

## → Resources

- [Model bill language](#)
- [State-specific K–12 civic learning profile](#)
- [National Council for the Social Studies Civic Seal Toolkit](#)

# 21st-century Civic Education Priority: Information Literacy



**Challenge:** To address the serious challenges of polarization and mis- and dis-information, the United States needs to support strengthened information literacy skills—inclusive of artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models—for the 21st century.

**Solution:** Prioritize information literacy throughout students' K-12 experience, equipping educators with the latest teaching methods for strengthening students' information literacy skills, including learning how to evaluate and assess the validity of various digital information sources.

## State Policy Options

- Direct the state education agency to review and update information literacy state standards for relevance, including helping districts plan for responsible AI use. Encourage learning standards that embed information literacy content across subjects and grade bands.
- Provide resources for up-to-date school technology and facilities—libraries, most essentially—for students to both produce and consume digital information.
- Create new funding for professional development opportunities to strengthen educators' civic and historical content knowledge at scale, as well as instructional strategies, including information literacy, to facilitate engaged and effective learning.
- Ask the state department of education to assess, monitor, and report students' access to information literacy opportunities.

## Examples:

CivxNow coalition state affiliate DemocracyReady NY Coalition's **Developing Digital Citizens** offers recommendations to strengthen K-12 media literacy education in New York.

The New America Foundation's **media mentor program** implemented in Maryland and Illinois is worthy of replication across states.

## → Resources

- [Model bill language](#)
- [State-specific K-12 civic learning profile](#)
- [Digital Inquiry Group](#)
- [National Association of Media Literacy Education](#)
- [News Literacy Project](#)
- [Report: Uncharted Waters: Education, Democracy, and Social Cohesion in the Age of Artificial Intelligence](#)

# Build In Assessment and Accountability



**Challenge:** Civic learning is not meaningfully included in most states' assessment and accountability systems, arguably the leading cause of the erosion of time and attention to civic education. Simply put, "if it isn't tested, it isn't taught," and "if you can't measure it, you can't improve it."

**Solution:** Civics must be assessed authentically and regularly. Ensure that assessments consider a student's civic knowledge and skills, and that school and state agency accountability measures are in place.

## State Policy Options

### Student Assessment

- Offer 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 specific learning outcomes to improve instruction.
- Require that students engage in project-based learning and/or field- or community-based activities—such as service-learning or showcases and simulated competitions—as alternative forms of assessment at the middle and high school levels. These projects may be thought of as a "civics lab," similar to laboratory work in science classes.
- 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. It is important to disaggregate civics assessment and accountability data to ensure equal access and address inequitable outcomes.
- Integrate civic learning plan data within school performance indicators and participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics and history.

### Accountability for State Education Agencies

- Include civics assessments in ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) plans submitted to the U.S. Department of Education.
- Participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics and history to allow for disaggregated results by state.

## → Resources

• [Model bill language](#)

• [State-specific K-12 civic learning profile](#)

# Governors



As we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 2026, governors are uniquely positioned to seize the opportunity to reflect on our nation's history, honor the contributions of all Americans, and strengthen our constitutional democracy for the next generation. Governors can play a pivotal role in ensuring civic learning is prioritized in their state budgets, in policy activities, and more generally through awareness building and events. Below is a list of potential activities for governors' offices to become more involved in civic learning.

## Executive Branch Opportunities

- Equip future citizens by including historic investments for civic educator professional development and required courses in middle school and high school in state budget proposals.
- Work with the appointed members of America 250 commissions to issue state policy recommendations aligned with your budget proposal. Ask the commission to focus on civic learning as a priority. Ensure that your state's commission includes a K-12 civic educator or a member of your local state civic learning coalition. Find your state's coalition on the [CivxNow website](#).
- Issue a **Civic Learning Week** proclamation every March during the annual national celebration of civic learning.
- Develop a Governor's Civic Seal of Excellence designation for student diplomas in partnership with the state education agency.
- Request the state standards revision committee to align state standards with the *Roadmap Educating for American Democracy*.
- Visit classrooms, attend model government simulations such as mock trials or debates, and speak at your state's **Civics Bee**.

### Example:

Recognizing the importance of civics values and education, Governor Bill Lee (R-TN) announced the "Governor's Civics Seal" during his first State of the State address on March 4, 2019. Additionally, the Tennessee General Assembly passed HB0944/SB0800, to officially establish the "Governor's Civics Seal." In 2020, the State Board of Education amended SBE Rule 0520-01-03-.07 to further outline the requirements for districts and schools to earn the seal. Learn more: [Tennessee Governor's Civics Seal](#)

## → Resources

- [State-specific K-12 civic learning profile](#)
- [Educating for American Democracy State Standards Guidance](#)
- [Sample Civic Learning Week proclamation](#)

# Secretaries of State



Secretaries of state can be leaders in promoting high-quality civic learning by leveraging their platform to encourage civic engagement among young people. The report by Generation Citizen, “Civic Advocates In the States: How Secretaries of States Can be Public Champions of Civic Education,” highlights three main ways:

- 1** through the implementation of a civics seal program;
- 2** by ensuring a more open government by promoting policies that increase access to civic learning material; and
- 3** by being public champions of civic education.

## What are Civic Seals?

Civic Seals, also known as civics diploma seals, recognize students’ proficiency in civic knowledge, responsibility, values, and engagement. Secretaries of state can actively promote civic learning by partnering on a civic seal program with in-state stakeholders, including policymakers and departments of education.

### Example:

Several states have implemented civic diploma seal programs in partnership with their secretary of state’s office. For example, Kentucky’s secretary of state partners with the Kentucky Civic Education Coalition. Students who successfully complete the seal receive a certificate through the Kentucky Secretary of State’s office. In Connecticut, Secretary of State Stephanie Thompson’s office began the **Red, White and Blue Schools Program** that recognizes K-12 public and private schools excelling in their commitment to civic education.

## Other Opportunities for Secretaries of State

- Start a public awareness campaign in partnership with your state governor to leverage America 250 to elevate concerns about youth readiness for civic life.
- Request funding from the legislature and governor for historic investments for educator professional development and required courses in middle school and high school.

### → Resources

- [State-specific K-12 civic learning profile](#)
- [National Council of Social Studies Civic Seals Toolkit](#)
- [Report: Civic advocates in the states: How secretaries of state can be public champions of civic education \(Generation Citizen\)](#)
- [Report: United We Stand: Examining Core Criteria for the Kentucky Civic Seal Program](#)

# America 250 State Commissions



As the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence approaches on July 4, 2026, America 250 (A250) commissions have a unique opportunity to lead the way in reflecting on our nation's history, honoring the contributions of all Americans, and envisioning a future worthy of the next generation. Commissions can play a crucial role by advocating for civic education in state budgets, engaging in policy initiatives, and raising awareness through various events and activities. Following are some potential ways commissions can leverage their role for long-term impact on civic learning in their communities.

## Commission Opportunities

- Call for historic investments from state legislatures in civic educator professional development to improve teacher training.
- Include a civic educator or member of your state's civic learning coalition on your planning committees to ensure engagement in the celebration of A250.
- Develop public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the importance of civic engagement and the history of American democracy.
- Work with other organizations and institutions, such as museums, libraries, and historical societies, to create a network of civic education resources and opportunities that live beyond the 250th anniversary.
- Recommend state policy development for civic diploma seals of excellence for students.
- Urge the state education agency to revise state standards that align with the *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy*.

→ **Resources** • [State-specific K-12 civic learning profile](#)



For one-to-one support and/or technical assistance, please email our state policy staff at [civxnow@icivics.org](mailto:civxnow@icivics.org)

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