



State Civic Education Policy: Framework and gap analysis tool

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While many Americans may agree on the importance of preparing young people for democratic life, civic education receives relatively less attention than other school subjects. Student performance on K-12 and postsecondary civic assessments reflects the limited focus of schools and universities on civic learning. For example, one-quarter of eighth-grade students scored proficient or above in their grasp of basic civic knowledge on the last National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civic assessment.¹ This level of student performance has been relatively consistent since 1998.² Additionally, 80 percent of college seniors performed at a D- or F-level on a test of basic historical and civic knowledge administered by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.³ As suggested by these measures, our schools and other educational institutions are inadequately preparing students for civic life today.

Beyond levels of civic knowledge measured by exams, engagement and participation are critical components of civic education on every level and have broad impacts on student success. According to a 2014 report by Gallup Education, emotional engagement at school is the noncognitive factor that most directly correlates with academic achievement. Yet 45 percent of U.S. students are either “not engaged” or are “actively not engaged” in school.⁴ Thus, civic education that focuses on the development of civic knowledge, skills and dispositions is critical for strengthening academic achievement and improving student engagement, and contributes greatly to the development of career skills.⁵ The skills and dispositions acquired through active civic learning that lead to effective participation in democratic life (critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity) are the same skills necessary for career success.⁶ Despite this knowledge, students’ opportunities to participate in high-quality, school-based civic learning are largely determined by students’ socioeconomic status and

Successful implementation of civic education requires well-prepared educators who have mastered methods of engaged pedagogies and student-centered learning, and practices that foster reflection, tolerance and respect.

ethnicity/race. This civic empowerment gap means that students in poorer communities and students of color have fewer opportunities to develop the skills and dispositions necessary for full participation in democratic life.⁷

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While many individuals and organizations (very often acting as a coalition led by the [Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools](#)) have sought to address the poor condition of civic education, the problem remains acute.⁸ Strong state policies are needed to establish and reinforce preparation for civic life, in addition to preparation for higher education and careers. Preparation for active citizenship was a foundational principle of public education in America from its beginning, and it is a principle that must be reaffirmed by each generation.

In 2014, Education Commission of the States convened a group of civic education leaders to design a new framework for state policy to support students' effective participation in civic life. Participants in the Thinkers Meeting — including students, educators, policymakers and other experts — helped create a model for education, prekindergarten through postsecondary (P-20), that identifies preparation for civic life as a core purpose of education institutions. Here we present an updated version of this Framework for State Civic Education Policy that incorporates the best thinking from the meeting and responds to critical developments in policy and practice since that time.

In addition to the framework is a State Civic Education Policy Gap Analysis Tool that captures the expertise of and recommendations from meeting participants, and is informed by leading research on civic education. The framework and gap analysis tool are intended to guide state policymakers as they address the complexities of preparing students for college, career and civic life. They allow for adaptation to state- and site-specific circumstances and may be adopted in whole or in piecemeal fashion, according to states' individual circumstances. In addition to the framework and gap analysis tool, this resource includes examples to demonstrate how current state efforts are leading to significant, positive change in civic education for all students, P-20.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Civic learning is not tied to only one discipline or context; it must exist across a broad set of standards-based academic content through active learning strategies, preschool through postsecondary.

Preparing youth for active and informed participation in civic life is a core mission of schools, equally as important as — and important for — preparation for higher education and careers.

KEY POLICY ELEMENTS

State policy is critically important to ensuring that every student in every school engages in high-quality civic learning as part of a comprehensive P-20 educational experience. Effective state policies for civic education need to address the following key elements in governance and finance, instruction, and continuous improvement and accountability:

Governance and Finance

- Mission statements that clearly identify the civic mission of schools — to preserve and enhance democracy by cultivating students' care and concern for their communities and to equip students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to participate effectively in democratic life — as co-equal to other purposes of education.
- Programs and policies, including allocation of resources, aligned to a paradigm for education that supports valuable, integrated civic learning opportunities that result in readiness for college, career and civic life for all students.

Instruction

- Standards and curricula for civic education at each grade level, P-20.
- Inquiry-based instruction that results in informed action and demonstration of learning.
- Integration of civic learning across all academic disciplines.
- Pre-service teacher education and licensure requirements and faculty recruitment efforts that support the development of all educators as civic educators.
- Ongoing professional development that continues the development of all educators as civic educators.

Continuous Improvement and Accountability

- Assessments of student progress toward civic learning outcomes that measure student performance and inform instructional efforts.
- Accountability indicators of teacher, school and district performance that ensure that all students develop necessary civic knowledge, skills and dispositions.
- Measures of community impact that help schools and communities better understand and maximize their symbiotic relationship.

A carefully considered plan for developing and implementing these policy elements is critical for the success of civic education policymaking efforts.

SHIFTING THE PARADIGM

“All students — regardless of race or income, religion or political affiliation — must be prepared for informed, engaged participation in civic and democratic life. The challenges to reaching that ambitious goal are many but so are the rewards for our nation. Now is the crucible moment. Now is the time to advance civic learning and democratic engagement throughout American education.”⁹

A core purpose of education in our society is to preserve and enhance democracy by cultivating students’ care and concern for their communities and equipping them with the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in democratic life. The addition of civic life to student outcomes is critical and necessary to contemporary education rhetoric and policy efforts, because education institutions will more completely fulfill their broad purposes when they focus on preparing students for college, career and civic life.

However, the prevailing paradigm for education, with its nearly exclusive focus on college and career readiness and accountability structures, is not well-aligned with the civic mission of schools.¹⁰ A shift in this paradigm — and an associated realignment of education investments — is necessary to achieve this mission. Participants in the Thinkers Meeting outlined a set of shared beliefs that should undergird the educational system, its institutions, practices and outcomes, including:

Equity for all. Regardless of background and social position, students have the right to an education that prepares them for full participation in democratic society.

Youth as a civic asset. Youth have critically important perspectives to offer to community improvement efforts. Youth are citizens who are gaining knowledge and experience to make positive contributions to their communities.

Schools as a civic asset. Schools add value and contribute greatly to the long-term health of their communities by preparing students to be productive citizens.

Participatory institutional culture. Educational institutions ought to be models of the democratic societies — the real world — in which students are expected to participate.

Mutual and reciprocal responsibility for schooling. Schools, community members, government bodies, parents, families, students and businesses all share responsibility for schooling. Collaboration among these parties is essential for student success.

Fluidity between community and school. The school and community both have assets that are valuable to each other, and each needs the other to fulfill obligations critical to their own success.

Preparation for democratic participation. A core purpose of education is to prepare students for participation in democratic processes and institutions through deliberation that is informed, civil, thoughtful, respectful and constructive.

Integration of civic learning throughout education. Regardless of subject, educators have an obligation to help students understand how they can apply their knowledge to better serve their communities, their country and their fellow humans.

Coordination across all educational levels. Standards and curricula should be coordinated across the entire P-20 continuum to fully support a pipeline that ensures all students are prepared for college, career and civic life.

Policymakers, educators, students, parents, families, community members and businesses can act upon these shared beliefs to implement effective policies, instructional strategies and programs for every level in the P-20 education continuum.

The P-20 Schoolhouse for 21st Century Democracy (see page 6) represents this revised paradigm for education in which coordination across communities and the P-20 education system provides students with the beneficial, integrated civic learning opportunities that result in readiness for college, career and civic life for all students.

The P-20 Schoolhouse embodies this revised paradigm through a foundation of shared beliefs about an engaging and integrated approach to education that empowers youth. Built upon this foundation are:

- Collaborative efforts by policymakers, community members, parents, families and youth that help to shape instructional approaches and opportunities for civic learning.
- Leaders that guide efforts to continuously strengthen and improve instruction in civics and student and community outcomes.
- Effective, integrated learning opportunities that prepare students for college, career and civic life and facilitate fulfillment of the civic mission of schools.

The open doors of the P-20 Schoolhouse further reflect two guiding principles:

- The entire P-20 system shares responsibility for implementing a seamless approach to students' civic learning.
- Learning occurs both inside and outside of schools; the community is a valuable asset to student learning, and students are a valuable asset in supporting the health and vibrancy of their communities.

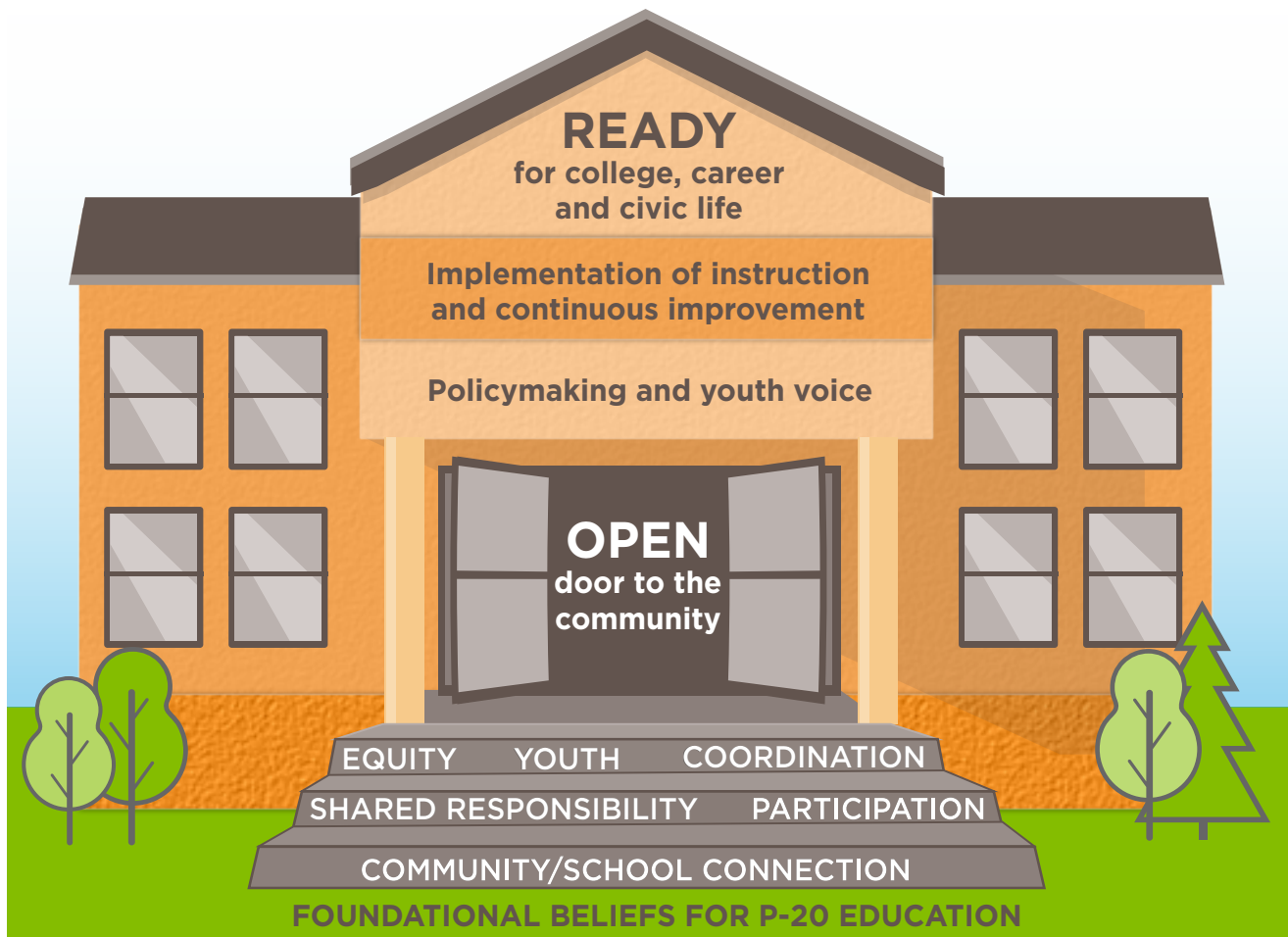
Each floor of the P-20 Schoolhouse is critical in supporting the desired outcome of readiness for college, career and civic life. Like any building, the second floor can't exist without the first, just as strong instructional programs can't exist without a clear intention of engagement or the involvement of youth.

P-20 Schoolhouse for 21st Century Democracy

The following sections include descriptions of key elements that support the fulfillment of the P-20 Schoolhouse for 21st Century Democracy. These elements are grouped into three broad categories:

- Instruction.
- Continuous improvement and accountability.
- Gap analysis tool for policy development and enactment.

The guidelines provided in these sections represent the best ideas from civic education leaders and are informed by leading research on civic education. The framework recommendations, therefore, are somewhat idealistic. Political realities and fiscal constraints in states likely will limit the extent to which any state may fully adopt the recommendations. The examples of policies, however, allow those who wish to use the framework to see how some states have already made progress toward the ideals embodied here, as well as how they may be adopted in whole or in part and adapted to local circumstances.



Instruction

A comprehensive state civic education policy should address the following elements of instruction:

- Standards and curricula for civic education at each grade level, P-20.
- Inquiry-based instruction that results in informed action and demonstration of learning.
- Integration of civic learning across all academic disciplines.
- Pre-service training and in-service professional development for teachers at all grade levels and in all subject areas.

Today's best practices for civic learning are far from the textbook-based high school civic classes that were dominant 25 years ago. Educators now have a better understanding that active civic learning — rather than just textbook learning — is essential to meeting the civic purposes of public education.

Contemporary approaches to civic education (such as the [College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework](#) for Social Studies State Standards developed by 15 professional organizations in the social studies field) call for consistent yet flexible student-centered and inquiry-based curricula and standards.¹¹

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Policy Goal

Research shows that one of the most significant ways that schools can foster youth civic engagement is by providing students with opportunities to engage in civic action through their classes and co-curricular and extracurricular activities.¹²

K-12: Legal requirements for K-12 civic education exist in all states, typically within social studies statutes, and they vary widely in scope and specificity.¹³ Policymakers may consider strengthening civic education instruction by ensuring statutes go beyond a minimal course requirement to establish and implement educational goals, civic competency outcomes, course subjects and content, and high-engagement instructional pedagogies.

Postsecondary: Students also receive academic and civic benefits when they are provided inquiry-based instructional experiences that allow them to apply academic content to real community issues.¹⁴ While state policymakers give significant discretion to colleges and universities, states such as **Massachusetts** and **Florida** provide leadership to state systems by establishing preparation for citizenship as a responsibility of higher education, developing and promoting models of effective civic learning, and supporting the tracking and evaluation of student civic competencies. Professional development is also essential for postsecondary faculty to effectively facilitate engaged coursework and service-learning.

Both K-12 and higher education policymakers may follow the lead of nine states that identify experiential and applied learning approaches, such as service-learning, as strategies to advance both workforce and civic readiness.¹⁵

This model of student-centered, inquiry-based learning is built on the recognition that, “Engagement in civic life requires knowledge and experience; children learn to be citizens by working individually and together as citizens.”¹⁶ When youth are provided engaged, applied and collaborative learning experiences proven effective for civic learning — rather than traditional teacher classroom lectures — students are more successful.¹⁷ Such a model also serves as a guide to improve teaching quality, an important factor to consider in state educator effectiveness policies.

Rationale

While states may acknowledge the importance of civic learning in policy, the decline in civic education requirements and opportunities — and the corresponding decline in civic literacy and participation at the K-12 and postsecondary levels — demonstrates that current efforts are inadequate to prepare youth for active and informed citizenship.¹⁸

In recent decades, “civic education as a formal part of the curriculum that is translated into effective instruction just does not exist in many schools.”¹⁹ Short-term interventions are insufficient for developing quality instructional practices or preparing students for a lifetime of civic participation. Rather than a single course in civics during a student’s senior year, educators must provide civic learning activities, informed by best practices, from preschool to postsecondary. The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools summarizes [civic competencies](#) that develop:

- **Content knowledge**, including knowledge of historical documents, events and individuals, and an understanding of our system of government and how it works.
- **Intellectual skills** that allow youth to critically describe, explain and analyze political and social issues, including multiple viewpoints.
- **Participatory skills** necessary for active civic life, such as respectful public dialogue, civic planning and coalition-building.
- **Dispositions** and personal efficacy, including tolerance, appreciation of diversity and concern for the common good.²⁰

Opportunities for students to engage in real-world learning activities can enhance the civic development of students and provide more authentic learning experiences. Research suggests that K-12 and postsecondary educators who base their pedagogy on providing these opportunities help students achieve greater academic success and increased motivation for learning.²¹ States can help to ensure that schools provide such opportunities for all students through the standards they set, funding investments, and the assessments and accountability measures they choose.

The [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) provides new incentives to strengthen K-12 civic learning instruction. ESSA calls for a well-rounded education that includes civics and government, history, geography and economics.²² ESSA funds can be used to develop standards in civics and government and to support teacher professional development in engaged learning strategies. ESSA also authorizes the Presidential and Congressional Academies Program (Title II, Part B3) to fund teacher and student workshops in history and civics. Lastly, civic learning and engagement is a strong match for ESSA Title IV Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants that support well-rounded education opportunities, safe and healthy students, and effective use of technology.²³

Fulfilling the Goal

Civic learning is neither unidirectional (from teacher to student) nor tied to only one discipline or context; it must exist across a broad set of standards-based academic content through active learning strategies. Successful implementation of engaging, student-centered curricula and standards requires well-prepared educators.

Important components of professional development and teacher or faculty preparation that support the successful implementation of civic curricula include:

- Mastering methods of engaged pedagogies and student-centered learning across academic disciplines.
- Understanding how to use high-quality reflection and relevant assessment tools.
- Fostering tolerance and respect within all educational environments.
- Developing partnerships that link P-20 efforts and engage the community.
- Leveraging community resources in support of civic engagement.

Educator preparation and ongoing professional development that builds the above capacities supports a multi-faceted support network for students and enables student-centered civic learning throughout the P-20 continuum and into communities.

Examples

While state policy can drive instructional approaches, most states leave such decisions to school districts. Policymakers can permit, require and incentivize effective state and local efforts in a variety of ways, including adopting permissive legislation that provides flexibility for engaged learning approaches and assessments at the district level; establishing course, content, assessment and accountability requirements; and incentivizing the use of evidence-based civic learning and engagement pedagogies.

The following examples illustrate policy-supported, student-centered learning and engaged civic participation.

Michigan C3 Alignment Project

Michigan and Illinois are among 20 states that have updated social studies, civic and government standards and curricula frameworks guided by the [C3 framework](#), which provides a guide to upgrading these standards around an “inquiry arc.”²⁴ The inquiry arc supports student-centered, engaged learning by guiding students to develop questions and plan inquiries, apply disciplinary tools and concepts, evaluate sources and use evidence, and communicate conclusions and take informed action.²⁵

Over the 2014-15 school year, Michigan undertook the [C3 Alignment Project](#) in which the state department of education — together with Michigan Social Studies Supervisors Association; Michigan Councils for the Social Studies, Civic Education, Economics Education and History Education; Michigan Geographic Alliance — collaborated to improve student performance by upgrading state standards and curricula frameworks guided by the C3 Framework.²⁶ A [report](#)

[to the Michigan State Board of Education](#) notes that instructional practices using an inquiry approach support higher-order thinking and shift students from passive to active learners.²⁷

Democracy Schools, Illinois

[Illinois Democracy Schools](#) are a statewide network of high schools leveraging high-quality civic learning and engagement experiences across the curriculum to promote civic equality, 21st century workforce skills, improved school climate and increased graduation rates. Since 2009, over 65 schools have earned the Illinois Democracy School designation and received funding from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation to improve civic learning and related teacher professional development. To become a Democracy School, the school must demonstrate that they have in place five elements identified by the [Illinois Civic Blueprint](#) as necessary to sustain a schoolwide commitment to high-quality civic learning, including (1) vision and leadership, (2) curriculum, (3) teacher professional development and peer support, (4) school-community connections and (5) school climate.²⁸

Advocacy by the [Illinois Civic Mission Coalition](#) and state policy supports have been critical to the success of the initiative.²⁹ In addition to establishing criteria and awarding school designations, ICMC has worked with state policymakers to improve civic education requirements and accountability. For example, [S.R. 149](#) (2011) encourages all secondary schools to become Democracy Schools and requires that each district's report cards identify which schools are Democracy Schools and which are not.³⁰ [H.B. 4025](#) (2015) establishes a one-semester high school civic course requirement for all students and new social studies standards that encourage the use of an inquiry approach. A public-private partnership, led by the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, made a \$3 million multi-year commitment to launch and support the initiative.

“Preparing Citizens” in Massachusetts public higher education

Massachusetts has adopted a strategic focus on civic learning and engagement as the result of the strategic planning process between the state board of higher education and department of higher education, as well as the work of the legislative Massachusetts Commission on Civic Learning and Engagement. In 2012, the state made “preparing citizens” a higher education goal and in 2014, a statewide policy on civic learning.³¹ The goal entails a commitment to “providing students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to be engaged, informed citizens,” as an outcome for all 300,000 public higher education students — the first civic learning commitment adopted by a statewide system.³²

This was followed by considerable work to define civic learning and engagement, identify civic content and competencies and begin implementation. Just as the C3 framework calls for student-centered, inquiry-based instruction in K-12, Massachusetts plans to reach its goal through active student participation in “civic engagement, academic coursework, co-curricular activities and off-campus programming.”³³ Current efforts on campuses include assigning course designations to indicate classroom-based civic learning and service-learning opportunities that engage students outside the classroom. The course designation facilitates systemwide tracking of the number and types of civic learning opportunities for students and lays the groundwork for outcomes assessments.

Washington Legislative Scholar Program

Provided by the nonpartisan civic education offices of the Washington State Senate and House of Representatives as part of their commitment to increasing civic knowledge and education, the [Legislative Scholar](#) program annually provides free, hands-on professional development for 25 social studies, history, civic and government teachers. During the five-day workshop, teachers explore the legislative process and state cooperation between the legislature, judiciary and state agencies; and tap into resources and ideas for improved instruction in civics.³⁴ The interactive nature of the program amplifies learning, while teachers also draw inspiration and motivation to integrate civics and citizenship into classroom experiences. Teachers leave the workshop with learning objectives and classroom activities that emphasize “simulations, critical thinking, civic discussion and authentic learning.”³⁵ Lesson plans from the Legislative Scholars contribute to an online collection of [Lesson Plans for Civics Teachers](#), which include interactive games, mock legislative committee hearings, budget exercises and role-play guides for young children to college students.³⁶

Continuous Improvement and Accountability

“Testing and accountability generally pose a dilemma for civic education. If we don’t test civic knowledge and skills, they become afterthoughts in education, especially in schools where lots of kids are at risk of failing the subjects that are tested.” — Peter Levine³⁷

Thinkers Meeting participants identified the following elements as critical components of a comprehensive state civic education policy:

- Assessments of student progress toward civic learning outcomes used for individual students and aggregated for subgroups of students that include some combination of the following:
 - ➔ Traditional standardized tests.
 - ➔ Alternative/authentic assessments (for example, portfolios, essays, projects, posters, presentations, etc.).
 - ➔ Experiential and project-based learning, including service-learning and action civics.
- Accountability indicators for the performance of teachers, schools and districts, such as:
 - ➔ Student surveys that measure attitudes and dispositions, behaviors and practices, educator behaviors, school climate, etc.
 - ➔ Educator surveys regarding school climate, administrator supports, etc.
 - ➔ Number and types of pre-service and in-service training opportunities offered and taken.
 - ➔ Educator evaluations on indicators related to civic education (for example, whether an educator supports open and respectful discourse in their classroom).
 - ➔ School-level measures (for example, attendance, on-time graduation, bullying rates, etc.).

- Measures of community involvement, including:
 - ➔ Community surveys regarding student contributions to community, connection to the school, etc.
 - ➔ Broader measures of community civic health (for example, the [Civic Health Index](#)).

The above elements are necessary for a continuous feedback cycle that supports the improvement of civic education outcomes for all students. Accountability measures have become more important in recent years as pressure has increased from policymakers and parents to understand how well schools are supporting student progress. Changes in school accountability policy require education leaders — now more than ever — to determine which measures best signal the quality of civic education and how that information is used to support student and school performance.

Policy Goal

Meaningful systems of assessment and accountability are crucial for ensuring that robust civic learning and engagement occurs in schools. Ideally, continuous improvement ultimately drives accountability models to improve student learning and system effectiveness. Successful models require multiple assessment measures from multiple perspectives and robust data to allow policymakers and school leaders to make well-informed decisions to improve student achievement and develop effective feedback cycles for continuous improvement efforts.

ESSA provides additional opportunities to strengthen civic education assessment and accountability. Title I ESSA funds may be used for the development or revision of civic assessments, including tests and more innovative demonstrations of civic competency.³⁸ Policymakers can also leverage civic learning and engagement strategies to meet broader educational accountability under ESSA, such as providing a high-quality and equitable education, and to improve ESSA school quality and student success indicators, ranging from absenteeism and graduation rates to student engagement and reduced achievement gaps.

Rationale

While traditional standardized testing can provide an accurate assessment of civic knowledge, performance-based assessments and qualitative indicators provide an important supplement to measure higher-order thinking skills and a more complete understanding of students' progress toward developing civic skills and dispositions. Therefore, a variety of assessment tools that measure civic outcomes, as well as broader school and community outcomes, are extremely useful for establishing the importance of civic education, recognizing exemplary practice and developing programs geared toward continuous improvement.

Well-designed assessments that have academic consequences potentially increase students' civic knowledge, engagement and participation. Civic learning has been shown to promote gains in students' civic literacy, attentiveness to government and politics and the likelihood of future voting.³⁹ Gains are particularly strong among African American, Hispanic and immigrant youth, and are vital to addressing gaps based on income and ethnicity — not only in civics, but also in academics.⁴⁰ The inclusion of civic education in state accountability policies may help to ensure that all students develop necessary civic knowledge, skills and dispositions. Further, such policies likely send the message that

“preparation for active, informed citizenship is the co-equal purpose of education along with preparation for higher education and career.”⁴¹

Fulfilling the Goal

K-12: All states have some requirement for K-12 civic education, and the majority have some mandated assessment in social studies or civics, typically as part of state annual summative testing. Over the 2015–17 legislative sessions, 17 states passed the Civics Education Initiative, requiring that students take a civic test that includes questions from the U.S. citizenship test. Eight of those states require passage of the test as a condition of high school graduation.⁴² A limited number of states require or allow non-tested assessments, such as portfolio or project-based assessments.

The most recent scan of state accountability systems found that 19 states include social studies or civic assessments in K-12 accountability systems.⁴³ District and school report cards most commonly included data on the percentage of students who complete a social studies or civic course or pass the test.

Although some states have incorporated teacher and principal evaluation systems, student surveys, school climate surveys and/or social studies assessments into school and accountability frameworks, gaps remain in tying these metrics together to capture the big picture of civic learning and engagement. Preparing educators and administrators to use assessments effectively is critical to continuous improvement and overall accountability efforts. School leaders and educators need clear, succinct resources on the impact and importance of accountability measures.

Postsecondary: Higher education civic education policies are very fragmented, with course and pedagogical decisions typically made at the systemic or institutional level. Only 18 percent of postsecondary institutions surveyed by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni require a course in U.S. history or government, amid calls for civic learning to be systematically integrated into higher education.⁴⁴

Some states, however, are beginning to show an increased commitment to higher education civic learning. **Massachusetts** has established preparation for citizenship as a core goal for all public system colleges and universities.⁴⁵ **Massachusetts** system colleges have begun designating courses that have civic engagement and service-learning opportunities, and are developing civic learning and engagement assessments. Additionally, students who enter the Florida College System (FCS) beginning in 2018 must demonstrate civic literacy through satisfactory completion of a civic course or a civic literacy assessment.⁴⁶

Examples

Florida’s high-stakes K-16 assessments of civic competencies

Florida requires assessments of civic competencies for K-12 and public postsecondary students. Florida began administering a statewide high school civic end-of-course assessment in the 2014-15 school year. The civic EOC counts as 30 percent of a student’s grade, and assessment results are included in each school’s accountability indicator.⁴⁷ As

reported in a recent American Enterprise Institute study, well-designed civic assessments with academic consequences have the greatest impact on increasing political knowledge.⁴⁸

The FCS Civic Literacy Initiative was inspired and championed by former Florida Gov. and U.S. Sen. Bob Graham.⁴⁹ The initiative, housed at the St. Petersburg College Institute for Strategic Policy Solutions, strives to:

- Develop models to integrate civic literacy into cross-curricula coursework.
- Survey FCS for best practices and establish an ongoing clearinghouse to measure progress and share successes.
- Embed civic literacy in the mission statements of the colleges in FCS.
- Develop an FCS Model Legislature.
- Develop strategies to promote civic engagement among domestic and international immigrants and other special populations.⁵⁰

FCS also instituted a civic competency assessment at the higher education level. Beginning in 2018, students that enter the college system must demonstrate civic literacy through a passing score on an assessment or successful completion of a civic course.⁵¹

Tennessee's project-based assessments

Tennessee [H.B. 2114](#) (2011) requires that all school districts implement a project-based assessment in civics at least once in grades four through eight, and at least once in grades nine through 12.⁵² This is an important step toward a more comprehensive assessment. The completion rate on the civic assessment is included in district and school accountability scores, giving the requirement more impact.

Tennessee's policy is a clear example of how an assessment policy can reinforce the instructional practices outlined earlier in this resource. Projects are student-driven and must involve an inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions. This promotes a hands-on, practical approach to learning as students seek solutions to the issues they are studying.

The law allows the state department of education to seek assistance from appropriate outside entities, including the Tennessee Center for Civic Learning and Engagement, to assist with professional development on the use of project-based assessments of civic learning.

Utah's K-12 accountability

Utah requires all districts and charter schools to submit annual reports to the lieutenant governor and Commission on Civic and Character Education. These reports must summarize how civics and character education are achieved through an integrated school curriculum and in the regular course of schoolwork.⁵³ Further, the state board of education is required to report annually on how schools in the state are preparing students to “become informed and responsible citizens through an integrated curriculum taught in connection with regular school work.”⁵⁴

University of Minnesota Rochester's action and accountability

In their 30th year, [Campus Compact](#), a coalition of over 1,000 colleges and universities committed to the democratic purpose of higher education, secured a commitment from over 450 higher education presidents and chancellors to develop and implement Civic Action Plans. University of Minnesota Rochester is one of the institutions that has released a draft civic action plan, which calls for service-learning courses across the curriculum, faculty research on innovative and equitable learning practices, expanded community collaborations and applied learning through capstone experiences and internships.⁵⁵

Rochester's plan acknowledges that to be successful "as an institution we have a need to better track what engagement efforts are occurring, as well as assess the impacts of that engagement."⁵⁶ Assessment and accountability plan components include student surveys, an intercultural inventory, community partnership outreach, establishment of goals and tracking for civic courses and research, and campus awareness efforts supported by a tenure-track civic engagement scholar faculty position and a community engagement coordinator staff position.

STATE CIVIC EDUCATION GAP ANALYSIS TOOL FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND ENACTMENT

Aligned with this civic education policy framework, the gap analysis tool has been created for use by states, school districts, higher education institutions and community groups. The seven-step tool guides stakeholders in comparing current civic learning policies with evidence-based best practices and competitive benchmarks, and in identifying strategic opportunities to improve civic education outcomes for students across the P-20 spectrum.

Most state civic learning and engagement policies focus on preschool through high school, while civic education policies for higher education typically originate at the institutional level. For this reason, this gap analysis tool has more elements directly applicable to schools than postsecondary institutions. Further, states have varying levels of control over schools. For example, in states where most control of schools is at the local level, states often have limited influence on curricula and instructional approaches. Because of these and other factors that differentiate education governance and policy across states, users should adapt the various parts of this tool to meet their own circumstances.

Users are encouraged to gather input from a broad range of stakeholders to help ensure that results are accurate and broadly representative of diverse interests and perspectives. Users should feel free to change the type of institution (for example, school, school district, college/university, state department of education, etc.) and accompanying terminology (for example, grade level, degree program, teachers, educators, etc.) to meet local circumstances.

STEP 1: INVENTORY THE CURRENT STATUS OF YOUR STATE CIVIC EDUCATION POLICY.

Collect your state (and/or school district/institution) policy information on:

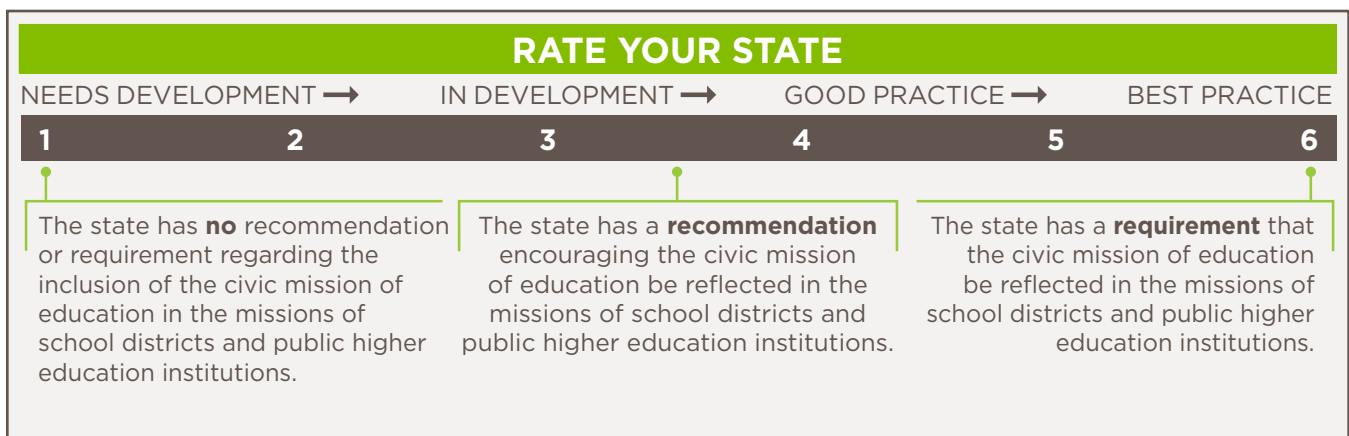
- Education mission statement.
- Education standards and curricula for all levels (preschool to postsecondary).
- Pre-service teacher licensure/accreditation requirements related to civic learning and engaged pedagogies.
- Teacher professional development policies and budgets related to civic learning and engaged pedagogies.
- Civic assessments for all levels (preschool to postsecondary).
- Tracking and reporting mechanism for civic assessment data (school, institution, district and state levels).
- Inclusion of civic assessment data on school, district and state public report cards or other public reporting.
- Inclusion of civic assessment in state longitudinal data systems.
- Role of civic mission, standards compliance and achievement in educator and administrator job descriptions and evaluation.
- Tracking and reporting mechanism for community impact assessment and data at the school, institution, district and state level.

STEP 2: RATE YOUR STATE.

Compare your current policies and practices with 10 best practices and competitive benchmarks.

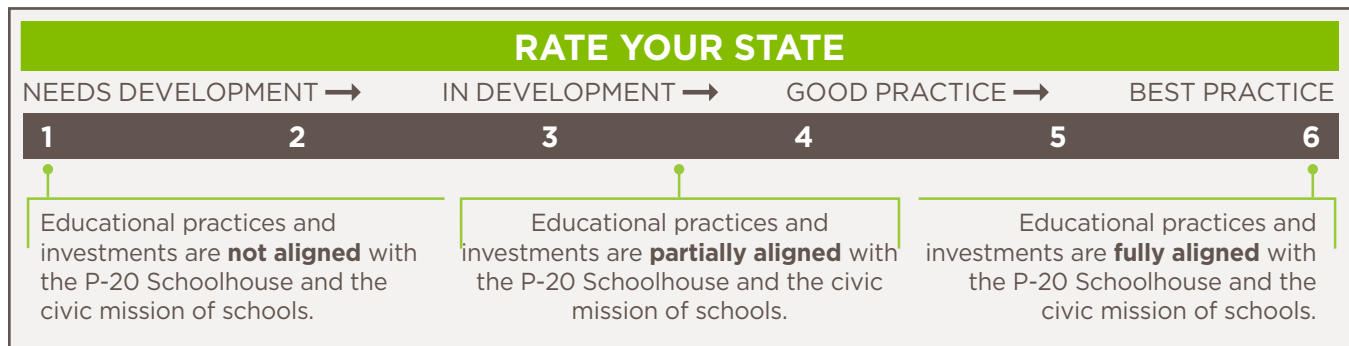
POLICY 1: CIVIC MISSION OF EDUCATION

- Preparation of students for full participation in civic life is included as a co-equal purpose (with preparation for college and careers) in the state education mission(s).
- The civic mission of education includes equipping students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to participate effectively in democratic life and cultivate concern and responsibility for their communities.
- The civic mission of schools is further reflected in the mission statements of public higher education institutions and school districts throughout the state.



POLICY 2: A REVISED EDUCATION PARADIGM FOR 21ST CENTURY DEMOCRACY

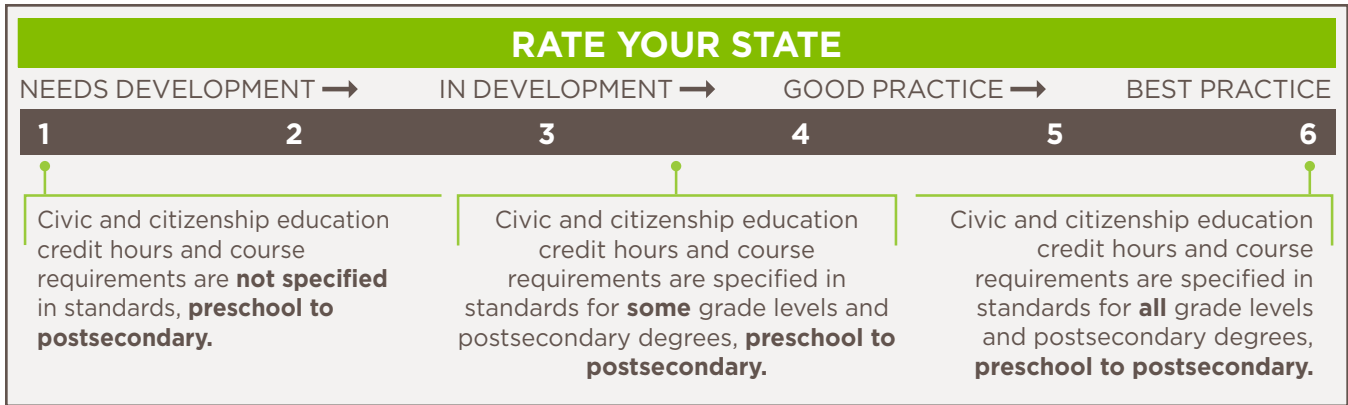
- Policies embrace P-20 Schoolhouse foundational beliefs, such as equity, participation, youth voice and community-school connections.
- Policies support P-20 Schoolhouse policies furthering civic education governance and finance, instruction and accountability, and continuous improvement.
- Education investments are reallocated as necessary to achieve the civic mission of schools.



POLICY 3: CIVIC EDUCATION STANDARDS AND CURRICULA AT EACH GRADE LEVEL, PRESCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY

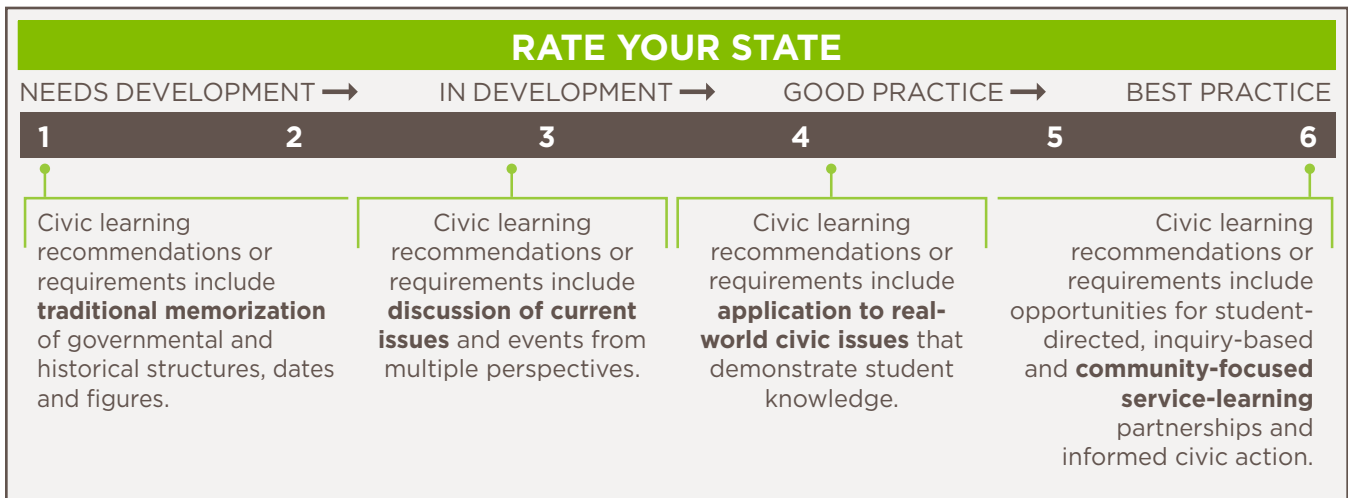
- Civic and citizenship education credit hour and course requirements (either through discrete courses or embedded within social studies curriculum) are included in state standards and curriculum frameworks for all grade levels.
- Standards establish requirements for civic knowledge in government, history, economics, law and democracy.*
- Standards include the development of civic skills such as accessing and analyzing issue information, deliberating between alternatives and problem-solving.* These goals are best accomplished through discussion and simulations that apply civic skills to real-world issues and events.
- Standards include the development of civic dispositions encompassing values such as a commitment to the public good, equality and rule of law, and behaviors including civility and respectful discourse.*
- The development of civic knowledge, skills and disposition through inquiry-based instruction may be guided by tools such as the C3 Social Studies Framework.

**Please see Appendix 1 for details on civic competencies and proven practices for civic education.*



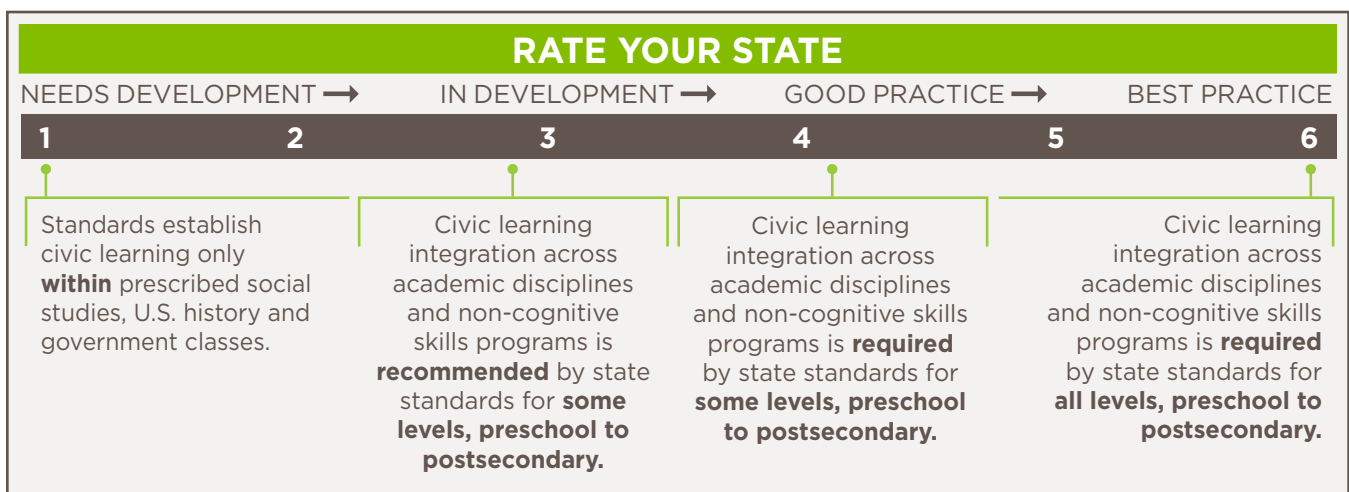
POLICY 4: STANDARDS INCLUDE INQUIRY-BASED INSTRUCTION, INFORMED ACTION AND DEMONSTRATION OF LEARNING

- Standards include the development of civic skills and dispositions through the hands-on application of knowledge to real-world issues that require student assessment, analysis and communication.
- Standards include participatory skills that incorporate group work, interface with elected officials and community partners, communicate perspectives and arguments, and plan strategically for civic change.
- Application of civic learning and opportunities for informed action are extended through out-of-school time/extra- or co-curricular activities.



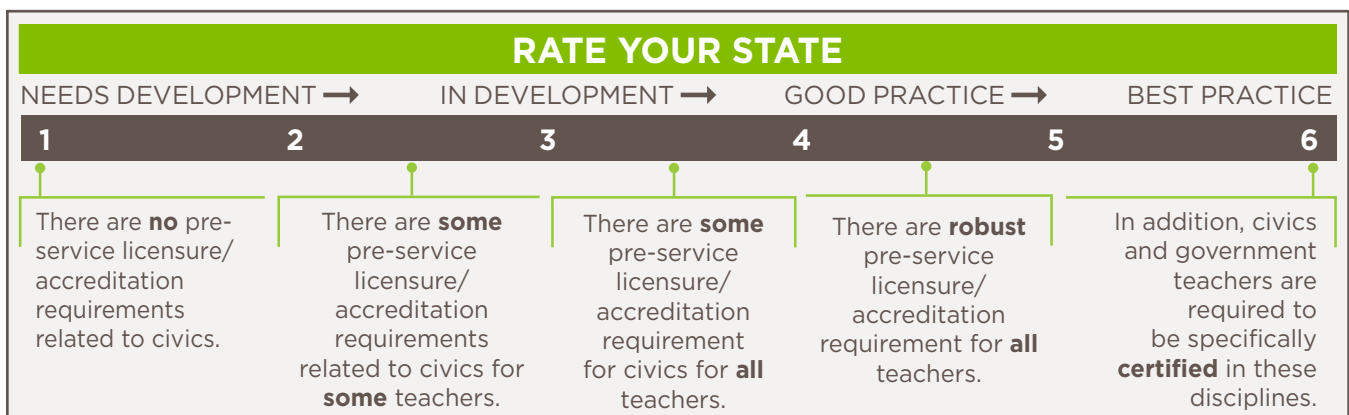
POLICY 5: INTEGRATION OF CIVIC LEARNING ACROSS ALL ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

- Curriculum across all academic disciplines incorporates civic learning.
- For example, language arts curriculum could mandate civic education reading content such as historical documents, letter writing or oral presentations.
- Engaged pedagogies across all academic disciplines build 21st century civic skills such as communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving, and creativity and innovation.
- Non-cognitive character education and life skills programs incorporate civic values, dispositions and responsibilities.



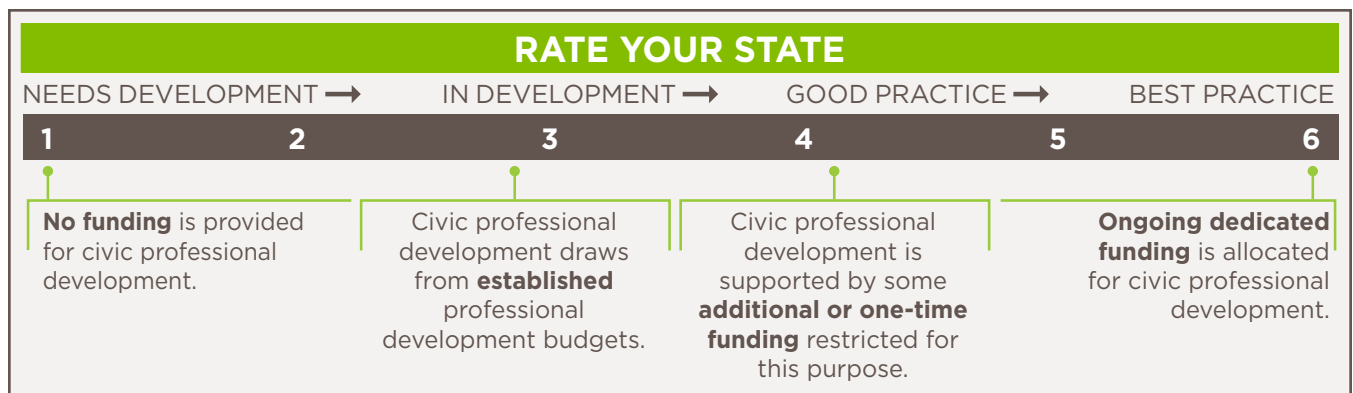
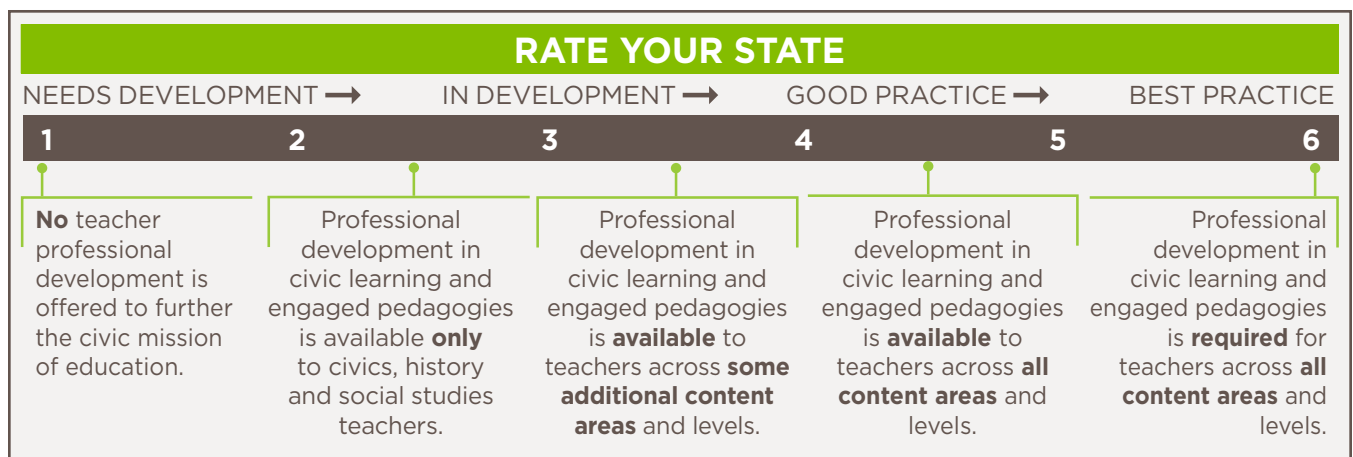
POLICY 6: PRE-SERVICE TEACHER LICENSURE/ACCREDITATION

- Pre-service teacher licensure/accreditation requirements related to civic knowledge, skills and dispositions prepare all teachers at all levels and in all subject areas to be civic educators.
- Pre-service teacher licensure/accreditation requirements support the use of engaged pedagogies that support civic learning.
- Civic and government teachers are required to be specifically certified in these disciplines.



POLICY 7: TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

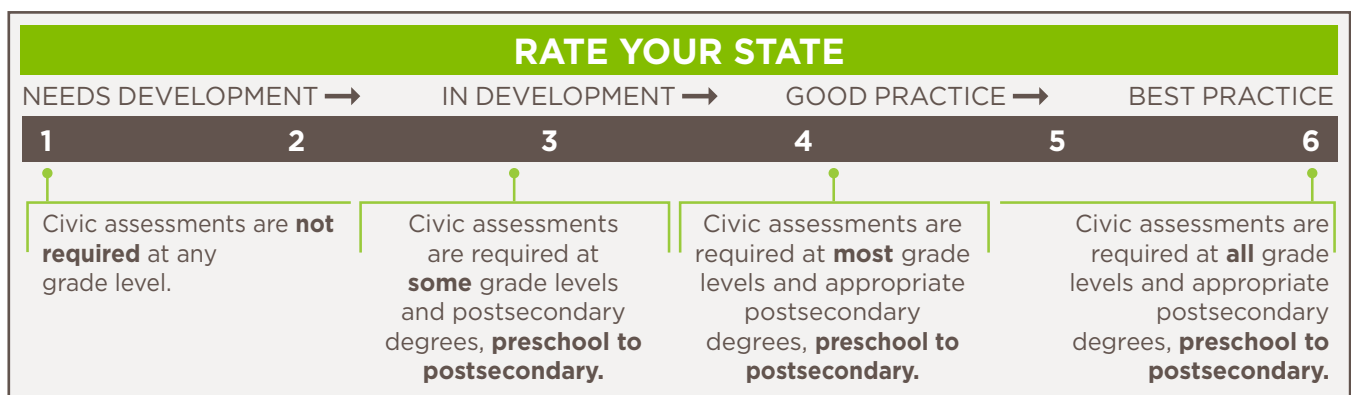
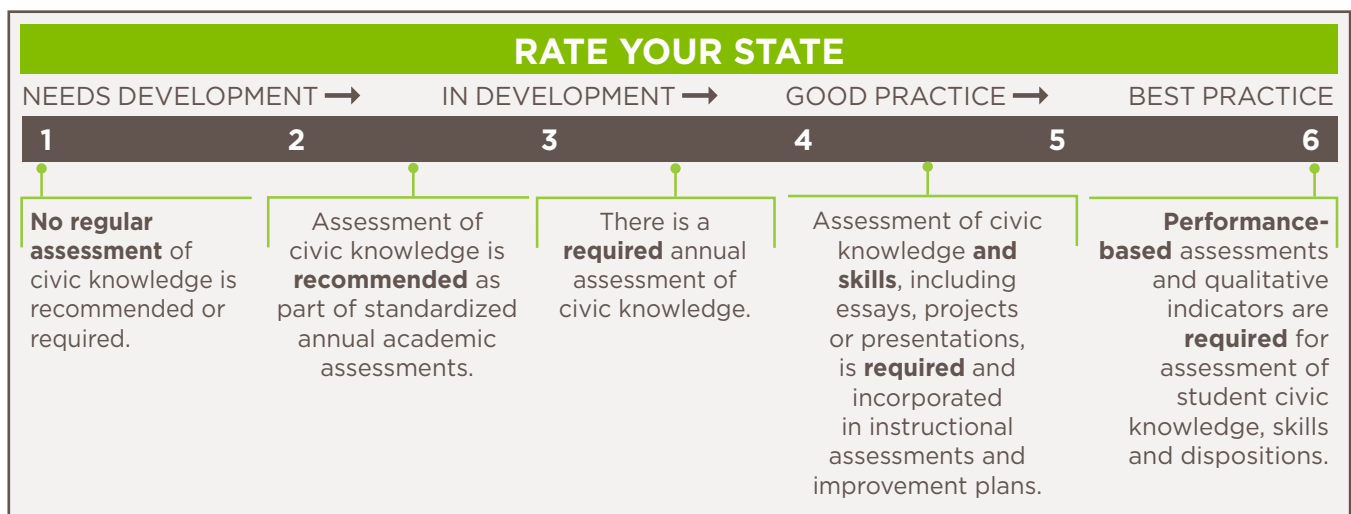
- Teacher professional development in civic knowledge, skills and dispositions supports all teachers at all levels and in all subject areas to be civic educators.
- Teacher professional development is required in quality instructional practices and engaged pedagogies, including inquiry-based approaches such as developing questions and planning inquiries, applying disciplinary tools and concepts, evaluating sources and using evidence.
- Teacher professional development is required to support planning and implementation of student-centered community service-learning projects applying knowledge to authentic local issues.
- Professional development for the integration of civic learning is supported by ongoing funding dedicated for this purpose.



POLICY 8: ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT CIVIC LEARNING PROGRESS

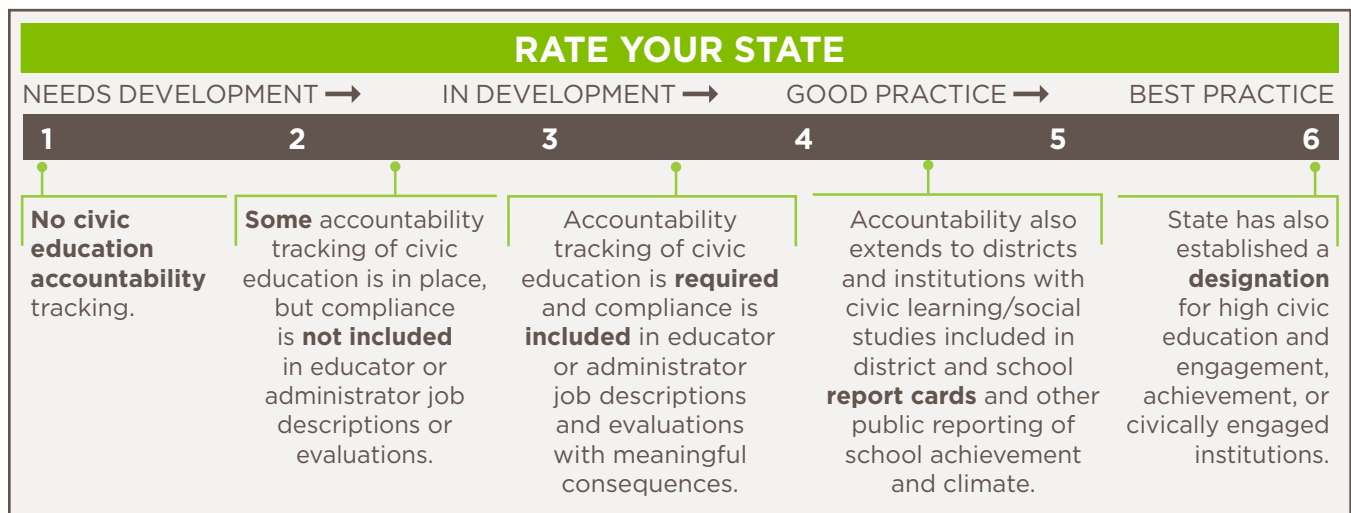
- Assessment of student progress toward civic education outcomes is used to measure student performance and inform instructional efforts.
- Annual performance-based assessments and qualitative indicators capture the development of student civic knowledge, skills and dispositions, including higher-order thinking skills.
- Indicators/metrics for civic education are included in instructional assessments and improvement plans.
- Civic education is included in assessment and planning focused on closing the achievement and civic opportunity gaps* for low-income, minority and special needs students.
- Civic education assessment data are included in the state longitudinal data system.

**Please see the introduction for more on the connection between gaps in academic achievement and civic empowerment.*



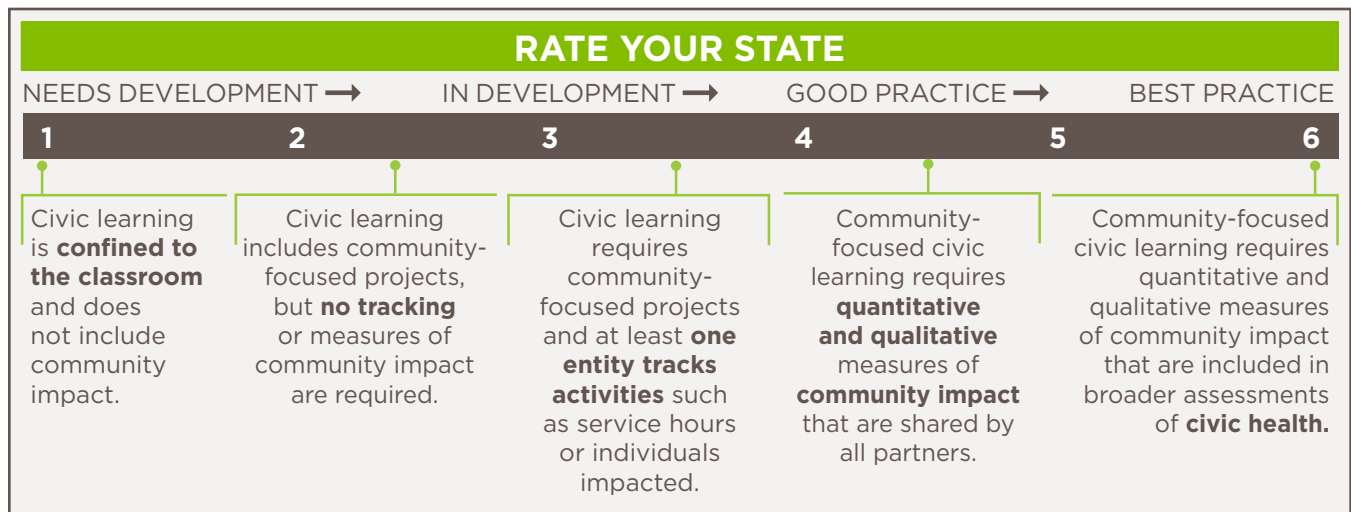
POLICY 9: CIVIC LEARNING ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS OF EDUCATOR AND INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE

- Accountability tracking is required for civic education and is included in the state accountability system.
- Compliance with civic education standards and requirements is incorporated in job descriptions and has meaningful consequences for educator and administrator evaluations and appointments, promotions and tenure decisions.
- Compliance with civic education standards and requirements, and successful civic education achievement, have meaningful consequences for school districts and educational institutions.
- Civic behaviors and measures, such as student and educator surveys on bullying and open and respectful discourse, are incorporated into accountability and reporting on institutional climate.
- Civic learning/social studies outcomes are equitably included in district and school report cards and other public reporting of school achievement and institutional climate.
- State has a designation for high civic education and engagement achievement or civically engaged institutions.



POLICY 10: MEASURES OF COMMUNITY IMPACT

- Civic education incorporates community-focused service-learning linked to curricula.
- Tracking of quantitative community impact, including service hours and accomplishments, is established and reported.
- Surveys and community input are included in qualitative measures of community impact, which encompasses both contributions to the community and connections between residents, communities and schools.
- Community and neighborhood surveys incorporate measures of student community impact and relationships as an element of civic health.



STEP 3: IDENTIFY AND PRIORITIZE POTENTIAL CIVIC EDUCATION POLICY IMPROVEMENTS.

Consider policies where your state rated lowest, the significance of the gap between current and best practices, and the potential impacts of policy changes. The tool uses the same scoring system and weight for all of the civic learning and engagement policies, and users may choose to prioritize and weigh specific goals above others.

STEP 4: ASSESS THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIC EDUCATION POLICY CHANGE.

Consider both support and barriers to policy change and determine resources and capacity needed to overcome resistance to civic education policy change.

STEP 5: DETERMINE STRATEGIC CIVIC EDUCATION POLICY GOALS FOR ADOPTION.

What are your areas of greatest impact and opportunity, given the civic education policy climate?

STEP 6: DEVELOP A CIVIC EDUCATION POLICY ACTION PLAN.

Your plan should delineate roles, responsibilities and timeline.

Education Commission of the States is your education policy team and can provide support to develop your Civic Education Policy Action Plan. This may include sharing research and reports; personalized guidance and counsel; facilitation and presentations at meetings, conferences, and convenings; and unbiased legislative testimony. For support, please [complete an information request](http://www.ecs.org) at www.ecs.org.

STEP 7: FOLLOW THROUGH.

- Create a follow-up plan and timeline to monitor and assess progress toward civic education policy goals and strategically revise adoption strategies.
- Plan a next round of civic education policy gap analysis to identify new target improvements and continue closing the gap between current and best civic education policies and practices.

Conclusion

Far too often, civic education opportunities have become minimized as schools prepare their students for math and reading standardized exams. One of the goals of this project is to foster a re-imagining of the structure of our education system so that civic education emerges as a priority, equally as important as college and career readiness. As *A Crucible Moment* declares, “It is time to bring two national priorities — career preparation and increased access and completion rates — together in a more comprehensive vision with a third national priority: fostering informed, engaged, responsible citizens.”⁵⁷

To this end, Education Commission of the States will continue to collaborate with stakeholders to:

- Share research and data critical to improving civic education, P-20.
- Identify policies that support civic education.
- Offer technical assistance to states.

Education Commission of the States recognizes a profound opportunity to work together with partner organizations to improve civic education in ways that will resonate for years. Education Commission of the States’ network is built on mutual trust and a clear vision of creating positive changes together so that all students, P-20, have the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to participate effectively in democratic life and contribute to their communities.

The appendices to this paper include numerous resources aimed at reinvigorating the civic mission of schools. Contact Education Commission of the States, as well, for support with civic education policymaking in your state.

Appendix 1

Civic Education Defined

The term *civic learning and engagement* is used to emphasize the importance of preparing students with knowledge and skills for action. Today's education for democracy, in both K-12 and higher education, needs to be informed by deep engagement with the values of liberty, equality, individual worth, open-mindedness and the willingness to collaborate with people of differing views and backgrounds toward common solutions for the public good.⁵⁸ These qualities are not automatically transmitted to the next generation; they must be passed down through schools. Ultimately, our education institutions are the guardians of democracy.⁵⁹

Civic Competencies

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools outlines civic competencies, which include knowledge, as well as skills and dispositions.

- **Content knowledge:** This includes core knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge to different circumstances and settings.
- **Intellectual skills:** These encompass knowing how to identify, assess, interpret, describe, analyze and explain matters of concern in civic life.
- **Participatory skills:** These encompass knowing how to cope in groups and organizational settings, interface with elected officials and community representatives, communicate perspectives and arguments, and plan strategically for civic change.
- **Dispositions:** These encompass interpersonal and intrapersonal values, virtues and behaviors, such as respect for others, commitment to equality, concern for the rights and welfare of others and readiness to balance personal interests with social responsibilities.⁶⁰

The Six Proven Practices for Civic Education

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools has identified these evidence-based practices, applicable across the P-20 education continuum.

- **Classroom instruction:** Schools should provide instruction in government, history, economics, law and democracy.
- **Discussion of current events and controversial issues:** Schools should incorporate discussion of current local, national and international issues and events into the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives and communities.
- **Service-learning:** Schools should design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.

- **Extracurricular activities:** Schools should offer opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or outside communities.
- **School governance:** Schools should encourage student participation in school governance.
- **Simulations of democratic processes:** Schools should encourage students to participate in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.⁶¹

Thought leaders have begun to articulate emerging practices strongly connected with effective civic learning and engagement approaches.⁶² These include:

- **News and social media literacy:** Today's civic learning and engagement take place within the context of rapid changes in traditional news media and social media. Civic learning may encompass skills in evaluating sources and distinguishing reliable information.
- **Action Civics:** This builds on the identified best practice of student-centered, project-based service-learning to promote community projects that have a specific civic focus, such as issues involving rights and responsibilities of citizenship and projects addressing policy change.
- **Social and emotional learning:** The goals of SEL programs — to help students learn to manage emotions, show empathy, develop positive relationships and make responsible decisions — support the development of civic skills and dispositions.⁶³
- **School climate reform:** Issues such as school suspensions and arrests can reduce youth civic and school engagement, particularly for racial groups disproportionately impacted by school discipline.⁶⁴ Efforts to improve school climate contribute to an environment in which effective civic learning and engagement can occur.

Appendix 2

Civic Literacy Data

- Only 23 percent of eighth-grade students performed at a proficient level on the most recent NAEP civic assessment.⁶⁵ Testing shows students across all grade levels have a less-than-adequate grasp of the skills and knowledge necessary to engage as citizens.
- Students who are from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, who have parents without college degrees, or who are English-language learners consistently perform at a lower level than their peers on the NAEP civic assessment.⁶⁶
- Black and Hispanic students consistently perform at a lower level than white students on the NAEP civic assessment.⁶⁷
- Eighty percent of college seniors graduating from 55 top-ranked American colleges and universities scored at a D- or F-level on a test of basic historical and civic knowledge, administered by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.⁶⁸
- The Intercollegiate Studies Institute found that college graduates score only 13 percent higher on a civic knowledge test than those who ended their formal learning with a high school diploma.⁶⁹

Appendix 3

Civic Education Assessment and Accountability in the States⁷⁰

STATE POLICY	NUMBER OF STATES
Civics, citizenship education or social studies included in state standards or curriculum	All states, plus the District of Columbia
Civics or citizenship education included in curriculum frameworks	20 states, plus the District of Columbia
Civics, citizenship education or social studies included as high school graduation requirement	All states, plus the District of Columbia
Civics, citizenship education or social studies included in other state statutes	47 states, plus the District of Columbia
Civics, citizenship education or social studies included in state administrative codes	36 states
Civics, citizenship education or social studies included in state assessments	41 states
Social studies included as a required state assessment	36 states
Social studies assessment required for high school graduation	15 states
Civics, citizenship education or social studies included in state accountability system	19 states

Appendix 4

Sample Assessments

A variety of assessments are available for states to measure students' civic learning and engagement. While some measure civic knowledge and competencies, others attempt to measure broader school environment and levels of civic participation.

Civic competencies

- [Colorado's social studies assessments](#)

- [Florida civic End-of-Course assessment](#)

The Florida Department of Education offers [sample questions from the EOC civic assessment](#), along with [test item specifications](#) as a resource defining the content and format of the test. An [EOC practice exam](#) is available from Florida Virtual School, and the [Florida Joint Center for Citizenship](#) offers extensive [resources related to the EOC assessment](#).

- [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Civics Test](#)

The 100 questions from the immigration civic test are the basis for required high school civic testing in 17 states.

- [Intercollegiate Studies Institute's Civic Literacy Exam](#)

One of the most-cited higher education civic assessments comes from the intercollegiate Study Group, a nonprofit dedicated to ideals of individual freedom and personal responsibility.

- [Assessing civic competency and engagement in higher education](#)

Several higher education institutions and systems are developing assessment frameworks to better evaluate student civic knowledge, skills and dispositions. The Association of American Colleges and Universities' [Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric](#) articulates criteria for each learning outcome and performance descriptors for attainment levels. The Massachusetts public higher education system shared resources from their ongoing development of [Rubrics for Civic Knowledge and Civic Values](#).

School climate

- [Comprehensive School Climate Inventory](#)

Measures five categories of a healthy school climate, including safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, social media and institutional environment.

- [California Healthy Kids Survey](#)

Assesses resiliency, protective factors, risk behaviors and school climate, contributing to the understanding of student health and academic performance across elementary, middle and high school.

- [Communities That Care® Youth Survey](#)

Gathers data on school, community, family and peer risk and protective factors related to perceptions of school climate.

Appendix 5

Thinkers Meeting Attendees

Aug. 11-13, 2014 | Denver, Colo.

Susan Abravanel

President, Susan Abravanel Consulting, LLC

Kelita Svoboda Bak

CEO, National Youth Leadership Council

Lisa Bardwell

President & CEO, Earth Force

Lyla Berg

Founder, Kids Voting Hawaii

John Bonaiuto

Former Director, Nebraska Association of School Boards

Mary Ellen Daneels

Teacher, West Chicago Community High School

James Dillard

Virginia State Board of Education, Chair, Virginia Commission on Civic Education

Doug Dobson

Executive Director, The Lou Frey Institute

Barbara Ferman

Professor of Political Science, Director, University Community Collaborative, Temple University

Bill Fulton

Founder and Executive Director, The Civic Canopy

Karen Gross

President, Southern Vermont College

Shawn Healy

Civic Learning and Engagement Scholar, Robert R. McCormick Foundation

Michelle Herczog

President, National Council for the Social Studies

Deion Jordan

Student, Connecticut College

Andrew Kerr

Senator, State of Colorado

John McCarthy

Executive Director, Future Civic Leaders

Les Francis

Chair, Federal Policy Task Force, Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

Barbara Miller

Executive Director, Center for Education in Law and Democracy

Connor Pfeiffer

Student, Princeton University

David Skaggs

Former U.S. Congressman

Stephanie Schooley

Executive Director, Campus Compact of the Mountain West

Andrew Seligsohn

President, Campus Compact

Britt Wilkenfeld

Strategic Data Fellow, Colorado Department of Education

Paul Baumann

Director, National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement, Education Commission of the States

Brady Delander

Communications Specialist, Education Commission of the States

Lisa Guilfoile

Project Specialist, National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement, Education Commission of the States

Maria Millard

Policy Analyst, Education Commission of the States

Leslie Hamdorf

Intern, National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement, Education Commission of the States



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