

**RESOURCES AND READINESS:
EXPLORING CIVIC EDUCATION ACCESS AND EQUITY
IN SIX NEW YORK HIGH SCHOOLS**

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About the Center for Educational Equity

The Center for Educational Equity (CEE) is a nonprofit policy and research center at Teachers College, Columbia University. CEE champions children's right to a meaningful opportunity to graduate from high school prepared for college, careers, and civic participation. We work to define and secure the full range of resources, supports, and services necessary to guarantee this right to all children, particularly children in poverty and children of color.

Founded in 2005 by educational law scholar Michael A. Rebell, who successfully litigated the landmark school-funding lawsuit, *Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) v. State of New York*, CEE pursues systems change through an interrelated program of research, legal analysis, policy development, public engagement, coalition building, and advocacy to advance this agenda at the federal, state, and local levels.

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Executive Summary

Preparing future generations for their civic roles in a democracy has historically been an essential purpose of schooling in the United States. In most states, including New York, preparation for civic participation is also central to the right to education, afforded to all students by the state constitution (Center for Educational Equity, 2018). New York’s highest court, the Court of Appeals, ruled in the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE)* case that the state government has a constitutional obligation to provide all students “the opportunity for a sound basic education” that prepares them to “function productively as civic participants.” It further held that adequate resources for that purpose must be available in *every school* (CFE, 2003).

There is significant consensus about the knowledge, skills, and democratic values students need to develop to be prepared for civic participation. There is also considerable agreement about the school-based resources and practices that help students to progress in their development of these civic competencies. Disparities in access to some of those programs and practices among subgroups of students have been documented, as have differences in civic learning outcomes.

However, efforts to understand and promote civic readiness have not explored the school-level specifics—that is, the extent to which individual schools are or are not equipped to provide the learning opportunities needed for civic preparation and how access to necessary resources and practices varies across schools. These details establish realistic reference points for families, educators, school officials, and policymakers who want to understand the relationship of civic learning opportunities to outcomes and to develop and advocate for more effective and equitable civic learning practices.

We compared three typical New York City high schools (schools serving large numbers of students in poverty and Black and Brown students) and three suburban high schools in the New York City metro area, one from a low-need-to-resource capacity school district, one from an average-need-to-resource capacity district, and one from a school district serving mostly students living in poverty. Our research focused on high schools because that’s the level of schooling where civic education is currently concentrated in most school districts. Through examination of publicly available documents, online data, and in-depth interviews with educators in six high schools in New York City and nearby suburbs, we obtained insights into the resources and practices necessary to prepare students for civic participation, and explored the extent to which these and other learning opportunities were actually available in each school. We compared the data for the various schools and then compiled them to scan for themes.

We found disparities among our schools in many of the civic learning areas we examined. These differences were widest between the four schools that served mostly students in poverty and Black and Brown students and the two schools that served most students from White and more affluent families. Specifically, we found:

- *Disparities in access to quality, up-to-date history, civics, and government courses.*
 - All six schools provided at least the state-required minimum social studies courses; however, there were significant differences among schools in the
 - number and variety of social studies courses offered;
 - curriculum and teaching of Participation in Government;
 - depth and breadth of content covered in the required classes; and
 - availability of required academic supports for students who are struggling to master the necessary material.

- *Disparities in access to a full basic curriculum.*
 - The high-wealth and average-wealth high schools provided numerous course offerings across a broad curriculum. In ELA, social studies, the arts, and other content areas, they offered both required courses and electives that helped build civic knowledge, skills, and mindsets.
 - Many students in the suburban district serving mostly students living in poverty, and nearly all students in the three New York City high schools, had access only to the minimum number of courses and the minimum rigor the state permits, and few other options across the curriculum.
- *Disparities in access to experiential learning opportunities in and outside of the classroom.*
 - The affluent and average-wealth high schools provided numerous hands-on learning opportunities, both in and outside of the classroom, that help build students' civic knowledge, skills, and mindsets.
 - The four schools serving large numbers of students in poverty offered many fewer experiential civic learning opportunities (particularly in our New York City schools). In most of the schools, many students from families living in poverty did not participate in extracurricular activities after school because of competing responsibilities.
 - None of the schools could offer sufficient opportunities for students to intern in the public and nonprofit sectors, particularly paid internships, though educators recognized that such internships could provide students opportunities to develop a number of civic competencies. The wealthier schools that had staff members devoted to student internships were considerably more successful in securing them.
- *Most of the schools had room for improvement in facilitating controversial discussions and disagreements.* Principals tended to be less confident than teachers themselves in teachers' abilities to help students with diverse opinions and cultural backgrounds deliberate civilly and democratically.
- *None of our schools provided comprehensive, coherent media literacy education.* Some schools lacked basic required resources to provide it, such as library media specialists (school librarians).
- *All the schools worked to provide a supportive and civic school climate.* The three NYC high schools, in particular, invested time and resources into providing a supportive and civic school climate, focusing on centering issues relevant to students, attending to the social-emotional wellness of students, and providing constructive opportunities for discussion.
- *The abundance of civic learning opportunities in our average-wealth and high-wealth schools surprised us almost as much as the scarcity in our schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty and/or struggling academically.*
 - Whether by design or by tradition, both the high- and average-wealth schools seemed to assure multiple opportunities for students to develop necessary civic competencies. Students had access to a wide range of classes across the curriculum, including in social studies; a large proportion of experienced teachers; many classroom practices centered on hands-on problem solving; civic-action and service-learning opportunities; and

extracurricular opportunities associated with the development of civic skills and knowledge.

- Redundancy in key supports for civic learning and development would also, of course, benefit students in schools that are less economically advantaged. However, the New York City high schools and the suburban high school enrolling mostly students living in poverty could provide many fewer of these opportunities and seemed to give students, at most, one bite at any given civic-learning apple.
- *The extent of the deficiencies suggested that the four schools serving predominantly students in poverty and Black and Brown students lacked adequate resources to meet their students' civic learning needs and fulfill their constitutional obligation to prepare all of their students for civic preparation.*
 - The schools with high concentrations of students struggling academically, students in poverty, and students learning English as a new language, provided scant resources in most categories. In a few resource areas, such as access to library media specialists and academic intervention services, some of these schools were out of compliance with state requirements.
- *Important civic learning opportunities that research shows to be essential for civic readiness—and, we argue, are constitutionally mandated—are not required under current New York State education law.*
 - Providing social studies electives, field trips, civic action projects, and civic-skill-building extracurricular activities, for example, was optional, but the well-resourced schools invested extensively in them. The schools in districts with high concentrations of students living in poverty schools were unable to provide or sustain them—though educators recognized the value and importance of these civic learning resources.

Analysis of these cases supported our hypothesis that schools' capacity, or lack of capacity, to prepare all of their students for civic participation would correlate with levels of school-district resources. Our findings further illuminate the effects of school-funding levels and student need on civic learning opportunities in individual schools. Civic learning opportunities, like other learning opportunities, appeared to be negatively affected by, for example, shortages of qualified teachers and other personnel, such as school library media specialists; narrowing of the breadth and depth of curricula and course offerings; lack of access to learning technologies; lack of sufficient experiential learning opportunities; and shortages of student support staff, such as school counselors.

This small pilot study examined only six schools, and they are not necessarily representative of other public high schools. Nonetheless, our cases suggest trends and issues that should be tested and explored through further research with a larger, fully representative sample of public schools. The broad disparities in civic learning opportunities also suggest the need for statewide public dialogue to develop a shared understanding of the civic competencies that students must develop and the civic learning opportunities that students must be provided.

New York State is poised to be a leader in this area. The Board of Regents and the State Education Department have taken important steps to elevate New York schools' civic mission. They included "civic readiness" among the measures of student performance to be used for school accountability and support in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan approved in January 2018. In September 2018, they established a statewide Civic Readiness Task Force. We hope this study contributes to that effort by advancing an understanding of how to ensure that all schools can prepare students to be civic ready.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is well past time to place civic readiness on an equal footing with college and career readiness.

--Betty Rosa, Chancellor, New York State Board of Regents

The current state of United States civic life and its democratic institutions has generated renewed interest in how well our nation's schools are fulfilling their historical mission to prepare all young people to be engaged civic participants—and whether and how our schools can do better. In recent years, observers have underscored troubling trends in the state of our democracy: the extreme polarization of the electorate, the growing tendency to dismiss opposing political viewpoints, and the widespread circulation and acceptance of one-sided and factually erroneous information.

Other disturbing patterns have been present for decades. The proportion of eligible U.S. voters who actually vote is substantially lower than in most other developed countries. Fewer residents actively participate in local community and civic activities and civic responsibilities such as jury service. Major segments of the population continue to be disenfranchised and marginalized in decision-making processes that affect their lives and the direction of the nation as a whole. And the widespread and longstanding denial of basic educational opportunities persists, particularly in schools that serve mostly children living in poverty and/or Black and Brown children.

New opportunities to address these trends may be emerging. Until fairly recently, relatively little public attention has been focused on these issues, and little political will has been devoted to prioritizing the schools' traditional civic mission. Now, national, state, and local advocacy for improving schools' capacity to build civic readiness appears growing, as evidenced, for example, by the New York State Board of Regents decision in its recent federal ESSA plan to expand the outcome goals of education in New York State from making all students "college and career ready" to making them "college, career and civic ready." The Regents have also established a Civic Readiness Task Force to advise them on how to advance the civic-readiness goal. State education officials, district leaders, and school personnel in other states have also begun reconsidering policies and practices and seeking more effective approaches for preparing all students for civic life.

Preparing future generations for their civic responsibilities as members of a democratic society has historically been an essential purpose of schooling in the United States. In most states, including New York, preparation for civic participation is also central to the right to education afforded to all students by the state constitution (Center for Educational Equity, 2018). New York's highest court ruled in the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE)* case that the state government has a constitutional obligation to provide all students "the opportunity for a sound basic education" that prepares them to "function productively as civic participants." It further held that adequate resources for that purpose must be available in *every school* (CFE, 2003).

The research literature reveals significant consensus about the knowledge, skills, and democratic values students need to acquire or develop to be prepared for civic participation. There is also considerable agreement about the school-based resources and practices that help students to progress in their development of these civic competencies. Researchers have also documented the gaps in access to some of those programs and practices among students of different backgrounds, as well as the resultant civic-learning disparities.

However, efforts to understand and promote civic education have not explored the school-level specifics—that is, how individual schools are or are not equipped to provide the learning opportunities needed for civic preparation, and how access to necessary resources and practices varies across schools. We think these details are important to establish realistic reference points for educators, school officials, and policymakers seeking to understand the relationship between civic learning opportunities and outcomes and to develop more effective civic learning practices.

The present study delves explicitly into the availability of civic learning opportunities through a close examination of a diverse set of New York high schools. It is an initial foray into providing information to help guide New York policymakers and school officials in their efforts to improve students' civic readiness. It also aims to provide public education stakeholders, including students and parents, with information and tools with which to monitor their own schools and school systems and help hold them accountable for implementing students' right to preparation for civic participation.

Though students' constitutional right to civic preparation applies to all grade levels, K-12, the present research focuses on high schools because that is the level of schooling where civic education is currently concentrated in most school districts. Through examination of publicly available documents, online data, and in-depth interviews with educators in six high schools in New York City and nearby suburbs, we obtained insights into the resources and practices necessary to prepare students for civic participation, and explored the extent to which these and other learning opportunities were actually available in each school. We compared the data for the various schools and then compiled it to scan for themes.

Our study undertakes a rights-based resource-adequacy analysis (described more fully below). It examines the availability of civic learning opportunities in light of the state's obligation under the state constitution to meet the needs of the students in individual schools. This method provides a framework for analyzing the distribution of civic learning resources and opportunities among different types of school districts. It helps illuminate patterns and trends for further investigation and provides evidence to guide the development of appropriate policy and practice.

To provide some context for our study, the first section of this paper briefly reviews the relevant research on equality of access to school-based civic learning opportunities necessary for preparation for civic participation. The second section describes the methodology of our study. The third section summarizes our findings. The final section proposes some implications of what we have found and what they might suggest to students and parents, educators, school officials, and policymakers about how to equip all schools to prepare every student for civic participation.

II. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Research on Necessary Civic Competencies and School-Based Learning Opportunities

Educators and researchers widely agree on the capabilities that students need to develop to be prepared for effective civic participation. These competencies are often categorized in terms of civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions or mindsets (see, e.g., Gould, Jamieson, Levine, McConnell, & Smith, 2011).

The civic knowledge that students need to be capable participants in civic and political life starts with a broad base of general knowledge—a solid grounding in the humanities, history, economics, world languages, science, and the arts (Allen, 2016b; Nussbaum, 2010; Rebell, 2018). It includes specific knowledge of U.S. government and political systems, U.S. history and geography, and the roles and responsibilities of participation in American democracy; knowledge of the histories and cultures of the various ethnic, national, religious and other subgroups that make up one’s own and other nations; and knowledge of global history and current events (Gould et al., 2011; Nussbaum, 2010).

Essential civic skills include verbal and written communication, critical thinking, and democratic decision-making, information gathering, self-expression, listening, argumentation, cooperation, conflict management, and civil agreement (Gould et al., 2011). In recent years, researchers and educators alike have emphasized media-literacy skills, such as recognizing stereotyping, bias, and inaccurate factual reporting in online sources (Hobbs, 2010; Kiesa & Vito, 2018; Mihailidis, 2018); and participatory skills, such as petitioning or protesting (Center for an Engaged Democracy, 2012).

Necessary civic dispositions include caring, personal responsibility, self-efficacy, honesty, self-discipline, open-mindedness, fairness, and empathy; and “democratic” values such as civic and political tolerance, and equality, respect for democratic institutions and the rule of law, and a commitment to justice (e.g., Allen, 2016b; Gould et al., 2011; Macedo, 2000; Torney-Purta & Lopez, 2006). A number of school-based resources and practices have been shown to positively affect the development of civic competencies. Among the most important for students’ civic readiness are access to a full basic curriculum; access to instruction in civics, U.S. history, and government; discussion of current events and controversial topics in the classroom; access to media-literacy education; access to experiential learning activities; and school-climate factors (for an overview, see Rebell, 2018).

- **Access to quality instruction, appropriate course offerings, and sufficient instructional time in social studies and other civic-related subjects.** Both quality and quantity of instruction affect civic learning outcomes (Campbell, 2006; Niemi & Junn, 2005). Yet, according to a 2006 study, shortly after enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, over 70% of school districts reported cutting back instructional time on other subjects to add reading and math instruction. Social studies was the content area most frequently cited as having been cut back

(Center for Education Policy, 2006). In high school, students were once required to take three civic-education courses: a traditional civics course that stressed the rights and responsibilities of citizens and the ways that they could work together and relate to government; a “problems of democracy” course on public-policy issues; and a “government” class that describes the structures and workings of the U.S. government (Rebell, 2018). Today, most states with any mandate, including New York, require only a one-semester course in civics or government, and some require no courses in civics at all (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). All states have standards for social studies, a broad discipline that includes civics and government along with other subjects such as history, economics, and geography. Some states (including New York) have adopted the College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, a more probing, critical, analytic approach to civics and government themes (National Council for Social Studies, 2013).

- **Access to a full basic curriculum** provides an essential foundation for preparation for civic participation and educational equity in our complex contemporary world (Allen, 2016b; Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015). When students reach high school, this entails reasonable access to courses in biology, chemistry, and physics, advanced mathematics, world languages, and, as well as to English language arts, history and social studies, art, music, health, and physical education (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015; Rebell, 2018).
- **Classroom practices that foster open inquiry and debate, simulate and model democratic decision-making, and engage with controversial topics and current events that matter to students** help develop students’ sense of agency and other civic skills and dispositions (Campbell, 2008; Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). Good facilitation for classroom discussion requires thorough preparation, understanding the subject matter, cultural responsiveness/sensitivity, tolerance for conflict, and various other teaching skills and attitudes (Barr et al., 2015; Gould et al., 2011; Torney-Purta, Richardson, & Barber, 2005; Rebell, 2018). Discussion of controversial current issues may be particularly important in racially diverse schools. Some research indicates that students in these schools can develop a reduced likelihood of future electoral and civic engagement; however, effective discussion practices offset this negative association (Kahne & Spote, 2008; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014).
- **Access to curricular and extracurricular experiential learning activities**, such as student elections and student government, school-wide forums, school newspaper, internships, field trips, speech and debate, and the arts have been shown to be effective in building civic competencies (Duke, Skay, Pettigell, & Borowsky, 2009; Finlay, Wray-Lake, & Flanagan, 2010; Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007; Jennings & Stoker, 2004; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Oesterle, Johnson, & Mortimer, 2004; Snellman, Silva, Frederick, & Putnam, 2015; Metz & Youniss, 2005). Civic competencies are also fostered by well-designed, classroom-based civic-action projects, exposure to civic role models, and other real or simulated experiences of how government works and how civic participation can influence social and political outcomes (Epstein, 2014). These activities and experiences promote the formation of civic mindsets, such as interest in political participation, a sense of agency, and the ability to affect one’s environment, as well as the noncognitive skills directly linked with increased civic participation

in later life (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Thomas & McFarland, 2010; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003).

- **Community-based service learning** and participation in school-based or out-of-school community-improvement activities also contribute to civic preparation. Both voluntary and school-required community-service activities are strong predictors of adult voting and volunteering (Hart et al., 2007; Youniss, Su, & Yates, 1999). Quality service-learning opportunities, which combine community service with classroom-based learning, have been found to build civic competencies and have a large effect on later civic participation, even when controlling for a range of neighborhood, school, and family characteristics (Anderson, 1998; Billig, Root & Jesse, 2014; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Levine, 2007).
- **A supportive and civic school climate** can affect civic skill development and the formation of students' civic identities. This includes the quality of relationships within the school community, governance of the school community, its civic character and norms, and disciplinary practices—what some call the “informal curriculum” (see, e.g., Branson, 1998). School-climate factors influence civic preparation by building students' sense of community and belonging, engagement and connectedness with school, feelings of trust, and development of self-respect, self-efficacy, and self-expression (Campbell, 2012; Kawashima-Ginsburg & Levine, 2014; Levinson, 2012). Students who participate in the governance of their classrooms and schools, and have a voice in school rules and disciplinary procedures throughout the span of their schooling, learn to interact more effectively with other students and adults, as well as learn how to monitor and influence school and public policies (see, e.g., Dewey, 1916; Branson, 1998). Fair, equitably applied disciplinary practices can also help advance a sense of community and a school climate that contributes to civic preparation by fostering a system of shared values and a pattern of caring relationships among students and staff. Restorative-justice programs, for example, use mediation and conferencing among all those who have been affected by an offense to find a mutually acceptable way forward (Hopkin, 2002; Kupchik, 2010; Morrison, 2011).
- **Access to media-literacy education** across the curriculum helps all students apply critical, analytic, and self-expressive skills in the use of new media (Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2012). Recent research has documented differences in the use of digital media among young people from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Youth from wealthier families are “more likely to use the Internet for jobs, education, political and social engagement, health and news gathering and less for entertainment or recreation” when compared with youth from families with lower incomes (Putnam, 2015, p. 212). A factor that may contribute to these differences is a lack of access to skilled library media specialists in many of the schools attended by Black and Brown students living in poverty. In New York State, all middle and high schools are required to provide students with access to certified school library media specialists.¹ Nevertheless, a 2012 study of

¹ Schools with fewer than 700 students must have at least a part-time certified school library media specialist. Schools with 700-1000 students must have at least one full-time certified school library media specialist. For each additional 1000 students, schools must employ an additional full time librarian (8 NYCRR § 91.2).

schools in New York State—all serving high percentages of students living in poverty and/or struggling academically—the present authors undertook revealed that more than half of the middle and high schools (13 of 23) did not meet the minimum library staffing requirements, and two schools had no library at all (Rebell, Wolff, & Rogers, 2012).

Research on Students' Access to School-Based Civic Learning Opportunities

Although civic preparation is an obligation under many state constitutions and state statutes and regulations, knowledge of whether and how schools and school districts actually fulfill their civic mission and responsibilities is limited. Moreover, in spite of ample evidence of wide disparities in traditional measures of civic participation based on race and class (Jacobsen & Wilder, 2012), there have been few explorations of equity in civic education. Only a few studies have addressed the extent to which students from different backgrounds have access to the set of civic learning opportunities that are widely accepted to foster the knowledge, skills, and mindsets of civic readiness. And none has explored how access to such opportunities may vary across schools.

The study most often cited on disparities in civic learning opportunities is Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh's *Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School*. This 2008 report analyzes access to a set of research-supported school-based civic learning opportunities using survey data from the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) Civic Education Study—a nationally representative sample consisting of nearly 3,000 ninth graders at 124 schools throughout the country—and a sample of over 2000 California 12th grade students (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). The authors show patterns of disparities in access to most of the accepted civic practices we mentioned above. Students in poverty and students of color were less likely to have had access to discussions about current events; study of government, history, and related social sciences; discussion of social and political topics in an “open classroom” climate; interaction with civic role models; study of issues that students themselves care about; participation in after-school activities; learning about community problems and ways to respond; working on service-learning projects; and engaging in simulations of civic processes.

Kahne and Middaugh conclude that “[a] student’s race and academic track, and a school’s average socioeconomic status (SES)”² correlates with “the availability of the school-based civic learning opportunities that promote voting and broader forms of civic engagement. High school students attending higher-SES schools, those who are college-bound, and white students get more of these opportunities than low-income students, those not heading to college, and students of color” (p. 3). “Schools, rather than helping to equalize the capacity and commitments needed for democratic participation, appear to be exacerbating this inequality by providing more preparation for those who are already likely to attain a disproportionate amount of civic and political voice” (p. 18).

Using NAEP civics exam scores and other NAEP data, Kawashima-Ginsberg (2013) analyzed students’ access to three civic learning opportunities: discussion of current events, debates

² “Socioeconomic status” reflects a combination of an individual’s (or a family’s) income, level of formal education, and how respected one’s job or occupation is within a society.

on current issues (including controversies), and participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures (such as mock trial). At the 8th-grade and 12th-grade levels, she found that white students and wealthier students received more of these practices. In addition, wealthier and white students got more benefit from the same level of exposure to these pedagogies, suggesting that “[n]ot only are white and wealthy students more likely to receive recommended civic education experiences in school, but the content and topics they discuss and the way these are presented are often tailored to white and middle-class students rather than students of color and poor students” (CIRCLE, 2013, p. 16).

Other studies have examined students’ access to specific civic learning opportunities. Putnam (2015) documented widening disparities in participation in both school-based and community-based extracurricular activities between students living in poverty and wealthier students.

Poor kids are three times as likely as their nonpoor classmates to participate in *neither* sports *nor* clubs (30 percent to 10 percent) and half as likely to participate in *both* sports *and* clubs (22 percent to 44 percent)....

From 1997 to 2012, the “extracurricular gap” between poor kids and nonpoor kids aged 6-11 nearly doubled, from 15 to 27 percentage points, while the comparable gap among kids aged 12-17 rose from 19 to 29 points. (p. 177)

A 2010 study of all North Carolina high schools found that school size and poverty levels were closely associated with the number and types of extracurricular activities available, with larger and more affluent schools offering more of such activities (Stearns & Glennie, 2010). The same study also found that, when schools offer a range of extracurricular activities, students in poverty and Black and Brown students tend to be substantially underrepresented in these activities. Spring, Grimm, and Dietz (2008) found that students in schools with high concentrations of poverty were less likely than students in schools serving wealthier families to have access to service-learning opportunities or other civic activities.

Kahne, Lee, and Feezell (2012) looked at the “frequency and distribution of school-based media literacy activities.” Unlike their study of other school-based civic learning opportunities, their diverse sample of California high school and college students did not show demographic differences in the distribution of opportunities for digital-media-literacy activities.” One explanation for this may be the relative scarcity of formal learning experiences in this area across all schools.

Research also reveals disparities related to civic learning based on differences in students’ trust in political processes and institutions (Rubin, 2007; Middaugh & Kahne, 2008; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Kahne and Middaugh (2008) caution that, while there is a “widely accepted set of desired civic learning opportunities, ... research also indicates that there may be important variation within the United States related to the ways students from differing economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds experience civic education and discussions of democratic institutions” (p. 11). In a study of New Jersey middle and high school students, Rubin (2007) found that students from homogeneous, well-resourced/high-wealth school districts were more likely than urban Black and Brown students to have lived experiences that reflected the civic ideals they read about in class. Similarly, Middaugh and Kahne’s (2008) study of high school students in California suggests that

students from wealthy, White communities were “more likely to view political engagement as effective but less likely to view these activities as necessary or important compared to their counterparts from a primarily working-class, Latino community” (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008, p. 11).

In 2012, the Center for Educational Equity published the findings of a study of the availability of basic educational resources necessary to meet fully the requirements of New York State law, the regulations of the state education commissioner, and the state constitution in 33 elementary, middle, and high schools—all with high concentrations of students living in poverty—in eight New York State school districts (Rebell, Wolff, & Rogers, 2012). We mined resource requirements from court decisions, state statutes, and the commissioner’s regulations, as well as from the research literature, and we designed interview protocols to collect detailed information. The interview protocols were organized around the seven categories of resources listed as essential by the trial court in the *CFE* decision: (1) sufficient qualified personnel; (2) suitable, up-to-date curricula, including an expanded platform of services for students struggling academically; (3) sufficient, up-to-date instrumentalities of learning¹; (4) appropriate class sizes; (5) adequate resources for English language learners and students with disabilities; (6) a safe, orderly environment; and (7) adequate and accessible facilities. We created a resource inventory in each of the seven categories.

The study revealed that these schools were not equipped to meet students’ learning needs or state instructional requirements in many constitutionally required resource categories. We saw then that many of the 33 schools could provide only limited civic learning opportunities: At most of the schools, students had no opportunity to participate in student government or work on a school newspaper. In many schools, students had limited instructional time in social studies, few field trips outside of the school, limited or no library-media services, and little access to the arts or extracurricular activities.

III. THE CURRENT STUDY

Few among us pay adequate attention to the fact that almost all of our state constitutions guarantee a right to education. We pay even less attention to the fact that we have a right to civic education. Our state constitutions, in other words, are directed at the pursuit of equality.

--Danielle Allen, *What Is Education For?*

In the present study, we investigated, among other things, civic learning opportunities in a diverse set of public high schools in New York City and nearby New York suburbs. Informed by the state constitutional right of all New York students to a sound basic education that prepares them for civic participation (*CFE v. State of New York, 2003*), we asked the following questions:

- What civic learning opportunities should be available in schools to ensure all students acquire the civic competencies (knowledge, skills, experiences, and mindsets or values) that support civic participation?
- What resources, services, and supports are needed to ensure that the instructional needs of all students—including students in poverty, Black and Brown students, students with disabilities, students learning English as a new language, and students who are struggling academically—provide the opportunity to acquire the necessary civic competencies?
- Are these civic learning opportunities and supports currently available in all schools in accordance with students' needs?

Based on our own prior research and others' work, we hypothesized that we would find a relationship between school-district wealth and the availability of the basic civic learning opportunities necessary to fulfill New York students' right to an education that prepares them for civic participation.

Our review of the research literature shows that questions about equality of access to civic learning opportunities have not been widely investigated. One important study (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008) looked at data from broad-based student-experience surveys and concluded that a "student's race and academic track, and a school's average socioeconomic status (SES), determines the availability of the school-based civic learning opportunities that promote voting and broader forms of civic engagement" (p. 3). We were interested in whether we would see similar disparities from school to school, and what more we could learn by looking at access to specific resources at the school level. We specifically investigated the availability of these civic learning opportunities in a diverse set of public high schools to shed some light on the specifics of these disparities, albeit in a small number of schools.

Methodology

The present study focused on a more granular level on the extent to which the specific resources students need in order to have a meaningful opportunity for civic preparation were actually available in specific schools. Building on the methodology we developed for our prior

research, we created interview protocols to elicit the availability of civic learning opportunities. These covered several resource categories and were developed drawing on state court decisions, state law, and the civic-learning research literature. We zeroed in on a set of civic learning opportunities deemed essential by the research and by the local educators interviewed for this study:

- up-to-date quality history, civics, and government courses, including an expanded platform of supports for students who are struggling academically;
- a full basic curriculum;
- discussion of current events and contemporary issues;
- experiential-learning activities in and outside of the classroom;
- a supportive and civic school climate; and
- media literacy education.

In addition, some of the interview questions elicited educators' views on the core civic competencies and the role of schools in developing them. We conducted the in-depth interviews with school personnel in a small, diverse sample of public high schools in the New York metropolitan area. We then compared civic learning opportunities available in the different schools.

Our six cases consist of three high schools that serve large numbers of students in poverty within the New York City Public Schools system, which is classified by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) as a high-need-to-resource-capacity district; and three high schools from districts outside of New York City: one from a low-need-to-resource-capacity (high-wealth) district; one from an average-need-to-resource-capacity (average-wealth) district; and one from a high-need-to-resource-capacity district serving a high concentration of students in poverty.³ To assure confidentiality to all participants, we refer to the schools generically by district-need level and have disguised certain identifying details.

In each of our case-study schools, we sought local educators' views both about the core competencies that students need in order to become capable civic participants and about the specific civic learning opportunities that schools must provide to offer them meaningful opportunities to achieve this goal. School-based educators are well positioned to identify students' civic learning needs as well as the learning opportunities required to address these needs. Yet the literature on civic learning and civic readiness seldom incorporates the views of these key education stakeholders.

The research team recruited suburban, New York metropolitan-area high schools for the study from a low-need district, an average-need district, and a district serving mostly students living in poverty. We recruited New York City high schools from Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Bronx high schools in which 60-90% of the students receive free or reduced-priced lunch and in which 50% or more of incoming ninth graders during the 2014-2015 school year performed below proficiency in English or mathematics on state assessments.

³ See Data Categories, http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/DataCollectedandReported_000.html.

We sent recruitment emails and letters to the principals of all schools that satisfied the study criteria. The initial recruitment correspondence included a description of the study, a request for a 30-minute informational interview, and an informed-consent form for that interview. By telephone and in person, we conducted informational interviews with 12 public high school principals to gather preliminary information and to assess their willingness to participate in the full study. All of the principals who participated in the informational interviews were asked to join the full study, and six volunteered to do so.

Participating High Schools

We chose high schools as our focus because that is the level of schooling where civic education is currently concentrated in most school districts. We briefly describe the demographics of each of our six high schools here. To help disguise the schools, we report their percentages of English language learners in relation to the statewide average (about 9%) and/or the New York City average (13%). We report their percentages of students with disabilities in relation to statewide average (17%) and/or citywide average (22%).⁴

New York City East is a small high school in a predominantly working-class but rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. The school has no academic requirements for admission. It serves a mostly Black and Latinx student population, the vast majority of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Many of its students come from immigrant families; its percentage of students who are learning English as a new language is about twice the citywide average and more than three times the statewide average. The percentage of students with disabilities is close to the citywide average and well above the statewide average. Many students enter the school at academic proficiency levels far below their grade level.

New York City South is a small high school located in a neighborhood that is home to a mix of immigrant families. It is a screened school to which all students in the city can apply, but students who live in its local community school district are given admissions priority. Many of its students do come from the surrounding neighborhoods, some of which have high concentrations of families living in poverty. The school has a largely Black and Latinx student population. Approximately 90% of the student population lives at or near the federal poverty level. The school's percentage of English language learners is near the citywide average and well above the statewide average. The percentage of students with disabilities is near the citywide average. A number of homeless shelters are located nearby, and several dozen students lived in temporary housing.

New York City North is a small high school sharing a building with a larger high school; it serves a student population that is approximately 75% Latinx and 25% Black. Over 95% of its students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. There are no academic requirements for admission. Students throughout the city can apply, but preference is given to residents of the city borough in which the school is located. Nearly 30% of the students are students with disabilities

⁴ Based on New York State Data from 2016-17; see <https://data.nysed.gov/>.

who receive special-education services. Nearly all students enter ninth grade below or far below proficiency in both English language arts and math. Nearly 15% are English language learners, but many more still struggle with English. Some students arrive not only with very low English literacy but also with low literacy in their home language. Many students still have low literacy skills when they leave the school.

Our *high-wealth suburban high school* is a moderately large school in the New York City metropolitan area. The school is known for a strong emphasis on preparing students for admission to the nation's top colleges and universities. It has no admissions requirements; any student who lives in the district may attend. The vast majority of students in the community attend the local public schools. Nearly 75% of the student body is White. The remaining students are Asian, Latinx, or identify as mixed race. There is some socioeconomic diversity within the school, but virtually no students in poverty. About 10% are students with disabilities. The school enrolls fewer than a dozen students who are learning English as a new language.

Our *average-wealth suburban high school* is a moderately sized school in a district outside of New York City. It has no admission requirements; all students who live in the school district may matriculate. The school serves a community that is economically diverse. More than 50% of the students are Latinx, about 25% are White, and about 15% are Black. Student of other races and ethnicities make up less than 10%. About 50% of the students are classified by the state as economically disadvantaged. The percentage of English language learners is near the statewide average, as is percentage of students with disabilities.

Our *suburban high school with high concentrations of students living in poverty* is a medium-sized school in a district serving similarly large numbers of students living in poverty. It has no admission requirements; any student who lives in the school district may enroll. Roughly 60% of the school's student population is Latinx, 30% is Black, and 10% is White. The percentage of students who are English language learners is above the statewide average and its percentage of students with disabilities is well above the statewide average. Nearly 80% of students are classified by the state as economically disadvantaged. A substantial number of students live in shelters or other temporary housing.

Limitations of the Study

The high schools we studied do not constitute a representative sample of schools in New York State or of schools in the New York City metropolitan area, and they are not necessarily representative of other public high schools. Schools were invited to participate based on their geographic location and district's level of need; we accepted for participation the first schools that responded. We are aware, however, that some of the school leaders agreed to participate because of a special interest in civic education. Moreover, much of the data in this study is based on self-reporting.

When possible, we verified information through public documents, but most of the data are based on the observations, professional judgment, and experiences of the educators we interviewed. Nonetheless, we believe these case studies are instructive. They provide detail and insights into

school-level resource availability not obtainable through publicly available data. Our cases suggest trends and issues that could be tested and explored through further research with a larger, fully representative sample of public schools.

What Learning Opportunities Are Necessary to Prepare All Students for Civic Participation?

Educators' Views of Core Civic Competencies

We asked educators at all six high schools what core civic competencies—that is, what knowledge, skills, and mindsets or values—students should develop to be prepared for civic participation, and we compared responses across schools. These local educators' views of these core competencies, although aligned generally with the research literature and with one another, reflected significant variations in context, detail and emphasis, as we discuss in the following subsections.

Civic Knowledge

With respect to the knowledge of the history of the United States and of its political systems, law, and government processes, we heard slightly different emphases from school to school. In the four schools serving large numbers of students in poverty and Black and Brown students (the three New York City high schools and the suburban high school with high concentrations of students living in poverty), educators were more likely to stress the need for basic knowledge of U.S. government structures and for practical political information, such as the names of one's elected representatives). In the average-wealth and high-wealth schools, educators tended to cite the need for students to understand the day-to-day work of elected officials, government staff, and lobbyists in making or changing policy). Across the schools, educators noted that students' civic knowledge needed to include sociological knowledge, including the diverse histories and cultures of different communities. Understanding contemporary social structures was also stressed at all the schools, including the importance of students learning how racism, sexism, classism, and so on, affect their own identity and status. The value of this type of civic knowledge tended to be explained in terms of democratic values or social justice. To give two examples, at a school that served primarily students in poverty and Black and Brown students, one educator said, students need to “understand what is just or unjust, . . . why that is so and what they can do about it”; in the affluent school, we heard, “More privileged students, such as those at this school, need to understand their privilege and that the level of access to opportunities they enjoy isn't universal.”

Particularly in the schools that served large numbers of students in poverty and Black and Brown students, educators cited the importance of self-knowledge related to civic identity and empowerment—that is, students' knowledge of their own abilities and potential. For example, educators emphasized knowledge of culturally relevant and culturally diverse histories and literatures to contextualize students' own lives and experiences, as well as to understand and appreciate the talents and abilities of people from similar backgrounds and circumstances as the students themselves.

In all of the schools, educators said students needed sufficient knowledge of contemporary political and social issues to provide a context for understanding local, state, and national news. At several schools, respondents also specifically emphasized the importance of the development of a global, rather than solely national, perspective on history and current events.

Civic Skills

Educators in all schools consistently cited certain specific skills that they considered vital for civic readiness. Verbal and nonverbal communication, critical thinking, and oral and written argumentation were considered vital civic skills at all schools. Educators from all of the schools also cited the importance of information skills and media literacy, including the ability to express oneself in multiple media. Deliberation and discussion skills—for example, the ability to look at issues from multiple perspectives, to identify one’s own and others’ beliefs and biases, to have open and nonjudgmental discussion with people holding different beliefs, and to manage civil disagreement—were also cited at all of the schools. Finally, collaboration, teamwork, and practical civic participation skills that come from experience, such as the ability to work with people with diverse ideas or from diverse backgrounds, came up in each school.

Educators at the four schools with a high concentration of students living in poverty explicitly cited basic literacy skills and reading habits. Educators in these schools were also much more likely to include social-emotional skills, including self-expression and self-advocacy skills—and skills for coping with racial trauma and stress—as vital to preparation for civic participation.

Civic Dispositions and Values

We found less agreement among educators in our schools about which civic dispositions and values are fundamental for civic preparation. Empathy and compassion were dispositions that educators in all schools cited as important for civic readiness. Educators in all schools also said students need to become accustomed to, and feel comfortable, engaging actively with civic and political issues. Interestingly, only one educator mentioned patriotism as a civic value that students should learn; this educator made a distinction between patriotism and nationalism, and defined patriotism as having sense of family, and concern, for everyone who lives in the United States.

In the average-wealth and affluent districts, schools with large numbers of White students and students from wealthier families, educators also cited the need for open-mindedness, tolerance, and respect for differences and diversity. Dispositions and values stressed as vital by local educators in the four schools with higher levels of concentrated poverty (but not in the other two schools) included having a sense of community membership and interdependence, a sense of personal responsibility, a collaborative mindset (separate from collaboration skills), self-respect and self-confidence, persistence, the commitment to keep up with current events, and social justice.

Educators across schools agreed about many, but not all, of the civic competencies students needed. It was not clear what explained variations in educators’ views. Possible explanations include differences in educators’ experience or estimation of students’ prior civic learning and civic competencies; differences in educators’ expectations for students’ civic futures (for example,

envisioning some students as playing a bigger role in civic life and other students as playing a smaller civic role); and/or differences in educators' own civic and civic learning experiences. Future civic-equity research could explore which, if any, of these interpretations are valid.

Educators' Views of Essential Civic Learning Opportunities

We also asked local educators what school-level policies and practices were most important to develop civic competencies and promote civic readiness in their students. Educators in all six schools cited several research-based policies and practices that elevated and improved civic learning. In all of our schools, educators emphasized:

- School officials and administrators need to prioritize preparation for civic participation both as part of the mission of schooling generally and within the social studies curriculum in particular, including monitoring civic-readiness outcomes;
- Educators should model democratic processes and civic behaviors, particularly by providing students with a role in school decision-making; and
- State and district school officials must work actively to build the capacity of adults to support civic learning—for example, training teachers to lead discussions about uncomfortable or controversial subjects, and partnering with parents to make civic learning and civic engagement opportunities at school complement those provided at home and in the community.

In addition, educators in the four schools serving high concentrations of students living in poverty articulated a longer list of fundamental policies and practices. At these four schools, educators also emphasized that civic preparation depended on a solid, well-rounded education delivered in a supportive and civic school climate.

- Schools must provide students a full basic curriculum, including sufficient, engaging core instruction, enrichment opportunities, and the additional supports they need when they are struggling academically. In all core academic subjects, schools must provide the resources, services, supports, and extra time for learning for students who are struggling with civic competencies.
- Teaching and learning should be culturally relevant and sustaining, and should develop in students an appreciation of, and respect for, one's own and others' differences. School personnel require sufficient and appropriate preparation and professional development to ensure that teaching aligns with the academic, social-emotional and civic learning needs of the students.
- Students must have access to experiential, hands-on, and applied civic learning experiences. Educators frequently emphasized that these activities should be student-centered, prioritizing issues that authentically engage students and make connections between the classroom material and the "outside world."

- Teaching and learning and school climate should proactively foster social-emotional learning and development. Toward the same end, educators stressed the importance of fair disciplinary practices and the use of restorative justice, mediation, and positive behavioral intervention and supports.
- Districts and schools should help students develop relationships with civically engaged adults. Several respondents suggested that internships and other hands-on experiences that help prepare students for employment, financial responsibility, and self-sufficiency also enhance civic readiness. Educators looked to community partnerships to provide more civic learning opportunities for students, particularly opportunities that also offer valuable career- and employment-related experiences.

Educators’ Thoughts on Civic Learning Policy

Educators in all of our schools agreed that the New York State Learning Standards and frameworks in social studies set high civic-learning expectations for students. The high-quality standards did not, however, safeguard against disparities in the availability of resources, supports, and/or incentives to provide the range of learning opportunities many students needed to meet those standards. Social studies teachers in the four schools that serve high concentrations of students in poverty said that pressure to prepare students to pass the Regents exams, rather than the standards or curriculum, was an obstacle to a greater focus on effective civic preparation. They said that the exams assessed only a subset of the standards, and that review and test prep consumed class time that could be used for activities that would meet other standards and deepen civic preparation.

Educators cited a range of other obstacles to preparing all students effectively for civic participation; these varied from school to school. In some schools, educators lacked sufficient time and adequate resources to ensure students’ basic academic preparation, much less their civic preparation. In some schools, strong notions that colleges prioritized certain coursework and experiences (for example, scientific research) was an obstacle to teachers and students focusing on civic readiness. In other schools, educators said they needed to provide civic learning opportunities that were relevant students’ lives and to offer more opportunities for students to practice civic engagement and civic action.

Across schools, educators generally agreed that every school should provide adequate civic learning opportunities to all students, but they disagreed about the extent to which specific activities should be required by the state and school districts. Educators in several schools serving high concentrations of students in poverty, welcomed a greater state emphasis on civic readiness, saying that additional state-level requirements might help empower and equip their schools for civic education; in other schools, educators did not believe that new policies were necessary to effect these changes.

Educators across schools generally agreed that civic education and civic learning opportunities should be provided at every grade level beginning in preschool—rather than starting in high school (much less waiting for Participation in Government in 12th grade). They said that

schools could benefit from learning how other New York schools were carrying out their civic mission and providing students with civic learning opportunities.

These local educators' responses draw attention to the relevance of schools' different resource and capacity levels relative to the basic educational needs of their students. The educators at the low-resourced schools recognized what opportunities their students needed, but largely lacked, in order to be prepared for effective civic participation. Their responses serve as a reminder that schools start from different baselines, and suggest that policies and practices may need to be tailored to meet the different civic learning needs of students within and across schools. Understanding those needs may be particularly important for civic educational equity.

How Well Are Public High Schools Equipped to Provide Civic Learning Opportunities?

Across the six study schools, we found disparities in access to many of the specific resources and practices most typically connected with civic learning, as well as to the basic educational resources that the literature indicates are foundational for preparation for civic participation. We describe our findings in the next sections.

Students' Access to Sufficient Up-to-Date Courses in History, Civics, and Government

Researchers consistently emphasize the value of sufficient instructional time in quality, up-to-date civics, history, and government courses to ensure high school students are prepared for civic participation. New York State's requirements in this area are relatively robust. For a basic Regents diploma, the state requires all students to complete four years of social studies—two years of global history; one year of U.S. history; and half year each of civics/government and economics—and it requires that all of these courses be offered in every high school.⁵ The state education department adopted the New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework, which is based on the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, a more probing, analytical, and active approach to social studies.⁶ All six high schools provided students at least the minimum required social studies courses.

New York's required government course, Participation in Government, falls in the course sequence during the first semester of 12th grade.⁷ Similarly, the state's required economics course,

⁵ See *NYS Diploma Requirements*, <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/curriculum-instruction/diplomarequirementsfinal011019.pdf>.

⁶ See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-k-12-social-studies-framework>; see also *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (2013).

⁷ "Students studying participation in government in grade 12 should experience a culminating course that relates the content and skills component of the K-11 social studies curriculum, as well as the total educational experience, to the individual student's need to act as a responsible citizen. ... In addition, the term "participation" must be interpreted in the broad sense to include actual community service programs or out-of-school internships, and in-class, in-school activities that involve students in the analysis of public issues

which also contributes to civic preparation, comes during the second semester of senior year. There was a wide disparity among the study schools in the percentage of each cohort of students who stayed in school long enough to take these courses. In the schools with high percentages of students living in poverty, large numbers of students dropped out before 12th grade, and senior classes tended to be a fraction of the size of freshman classes, whereas in the high-wealth high school, virtually all students graduated after four years.

We saw other disparities among schools in access to social studies course work. Both the high-wealth and average-wealth school districts offered a variety of courses allowing students to exercise choice within the required social studies curriculum, as well as to extend their studies through complementary electives. Within social studies course offerings, students had opportunities to participate in civic-action projects and service learning, to explore topics that were timely and/or relevant to students, and to shore up or deepen civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions. In contrast, the suburban school with a high concentration of poverty and the three New York City high schools—which served primarily students in poverty, Black and Brown students, English language learners, and had large numbers of students struggling academically—provided the required social studies courses, few or no civic-education electives, few or no opportunities for advanced coursework (civic-related or otherwise), and little support for students struggling academically.

From school to school, educators reported differences in (1) the number and variety of social studies courses offered; (2) the curriculum and teaching of Participation in Government; (3) the depth and breadth of content covered in the required classes; and (4) the availability of academic supports for students who are struggling to master the necessary material. In the next sections, we detail these specific findings.

Disparities in Number and Variety of Courses

The number and variety of social studies classes offered in the six schools ranged from over 20 different social studies courses at the affluent high school to just the four state-required social studies courses at all three of the New York City high schools.

- At the *high-wealth suburban high school*, the social studies department provided multiple sections of the required courses, including a selection of differently themed year-long courses—for example, global citizenship or urban civic issues—that satisfy the government and economics requirement. The school also offered a selection of teacher-designed advanced courses. In addition, all students in 10th-12th grades had access to an array of semester-long social-studies electives on themes of particular interest to students and/or teachers (e.g., gender politics). Educators said about 75% of students took these electives, which had class sizes of 15-18 students. To offer this number and variety of classes, the school employed about 20 social studies teachers, many of them highly experienced.

chosen because of some unique relevance to the student involved. Defining, analyzing, monitoring, and discussing issues and policies is the fundamental participatory activity in a classroom.”

- Similarly, but not to the same extent, the *high school in the average-wealth school district* offered the state-required social studies courses and a selection of electives, including courses that explored issues such as human rights, sexism, and race and racism. The school also offered a full complement of AP courses and college-level courses in social studies; White students are disproportionately represented in these courses.
- In *all three New York City high schools*, students had access only to the four state-required social studies courses. No social-studies electives or advanced courses were offered at all.⁸ Educators said to provide electives or other social studies offerings would require the schools to hire additional teachers, which their budgets did not permit.
- In the *high school in the suburban district with high concentrations of poverty*, most students took the state-required sequence of social studies courses, but some were allowed to substitute parallel Advanced Placement courses to fulfill the requirement. To provide more students with civic learning experiences that were relevant to their lives and experiences, the social studies department had recently added two one-semester electives, one that explored themes of prejudice and discrimination and another that explored the history of a region of the world from which many students' families immigrated or still live. However, educators told us that the civic-related coursework they were able to offer at that time was insufficient; students needed more instructional time to master civic knowledge and skills. They wanted to offer students civic learning opportunities throughout their high school years. This would especially benefit the sizeable number of students who drop out before 12th grade (in this school, the senior class tended to be about half the size of the 9th-grade class).

Variations in Curriculum and Teaching of Participation in Government

The curriculum and teaching of Participation in Government, the single required civics course offered in New York in first semester of 12th grade, varied widely within and among the six schools. Teachers tended to have substantial discretion in teaching this course, for which there is no Regents exam. Some teachers relied on a textbook, using a fact-centered, lecture-style approach. However, most incorporated at least some critical analysis, debate, and applied civic learning activities, such as engaging local politicians about issues important to and selected by the students.

- The *high-wealth suburban high school* offered over a half dozen different courses that fulfilled the Participation in Government requirement; some were college-level courses. Two courses, developed by teachers in the school and open to all students, emphasized active problem solving for civic life, community partnerships, and service learning. Students' civic development was assessed using a rubric that included collaboration, self-motivation, empathy, creativity, problem solving, communication, persistence, and information literacy.

⁸ Until recently, one of these schools offered an honors class in law and justice, open to the highest-achieving 10th-12th graders. Through a partner organization, students participated in a mock-trial competition. However, when the private funding for this partnership ran out, the school had to discontinue the course.

- In the *average-wealth suburban school*, teachers followed the state standards and frameworks for Participation in Government. The social studies teacher we interviewed there grounded the course in discussion, included assignments that involved current events, and asked students to engage in classroom debate to develop their use of evidence in creating and defending arguments. Students developed a research project on a public-policy issue of their choice: they created a portfolio on the issue, wrote a paper that proposed solutions, and delivered a presentation based on their research. All students were also required to attend a local government meeting of their choice, and then reflect on their experiences. Some teachers also required community service.
- The *suburban high school with high concentrations of students in poverty* gave teachers significant discretion in their approach to Participation in Government, particularly in the extent to which they engaged students in active civic learning experiences. Some teachers taught from a textbook. Others assigned hands-on activities—for example, one teacher required students to send a number of letters to elected officials at the local, state, or federal level about an issue of their choice. Among the goals of this assignment was to demonstrate the relevance of schooling to students’ lives, families, and communities. When politicians answered students’ letters, students recognized that they could make change.
- In *NYC North High School*, 12th-grade students took a year-long social-action course that met the requirements of both Participation in Government and Economics. The course was designed for relevance to the student body. Through research projects and “Socratic seminars” (structured, inquiry-based discussions based on a text) students explored how the U.S. government was structured and then delved into a selection of difficult political and social issues to discuss whether the government design was working for everyone. They watched “When the Levees Broke,” the Spike Lee documentary about Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, and followed a curriculum that explored the government’s responsibility to the people and individuals’ responsibility to their community.
- At *NYC East High School*, educators recognized the importance of making classes culturally relevant to the mostly Black and Latinx students. The Participation in Government teacher discussed adapting the recommended scope and sequence for the course by choosing issues designed to engage the students. The teacher shared examples including units on juvenile justice, the death penalty, and Supreme Court cases that highlight issues of race and class. “A lot of kids or their family members have run into the law. They come into a school where they’re frisked and they have to go through scanning and there’s a big police presence. It’s something that’s a big part of their everyday lives.” The teacher provided students some flexibility and choice in how they demonstrated mastery of academic and civic skills: students wrote research papers, created news articles, and participated in debates.
- At *NYC South High School*, Participation in Government and Economics course content varied for year to year and teacher to teacher. Some years, teachers required a service-learning project that addressed a current community issue and other years they did not. In Economics, some

teachers created an explicitly civic focus—for example, “What is a business’s responsibility to the community?”—and others did not.

Disparities in Depth and Breadth of Academic Content in History Classes

Our data also suggest differences among the schools in the depth and breadth of academic content covered in required history classes.

- In *all three New York City schools*, as well as the *suburban school with high concentrations of students living in poverty*, Global and U.S. History teachers said they focused heavily on content that students would find on the Regents exams, and tended to cover the material chronologically. Teachers told us that teaching and learning of recent history often get short shrift at the very end of the school year—and sometimes were not taught at all. Educators recognized that they were sacrificing some important opportunities to engage students with material that was more accessible and more immediately relevant to their lives. In the *suburban school with high concentrations of students living in poverty*, the social studies department chair suggested that students would greatly benefit from a separate course that explored current political events and contemporary social issues, but the school lacked staffing to offer additional classes.

Another constraining factor was that many students were not as proficient with reading and writing their social studies classes required. As a result, teachers said, Global and U.S. History classes tended to cover content slowly and to use substantial class time to help students develop basic verbal and writing skills. One history teacher said she could not expect students to come to the next class ready to discuss or debate a reading assigned for homework but felt she had to devote the next class to basic comprehension activities.

Nevertheless, two of the New York City high schools explicitly aimed to develop curricula to make classes more relevant to their mostly Black and Latinx students, most of whom lived in poverty. At these schools, teachers were encouraged, and worked hard, to create opportunities for students to explore contemporary social issues and discover how history has shaped those issues. However, teachers said the breadth of the curriculum they were required to cover, particularly in courses that ended with a Regents exam, constrained the time they could to focus on contemporary civic issues.

- The Regents exams had little bearing on content in the *high-wealth school district*, where students tend to excel academically. Educators there said they expected students to master a much greater breadth and depth of knowledge in required social studies classes. As a result, Regents exams counted for only a small fraction of the course grade. Teachers said this freed them to structure classes creatively. The social studies department chair discussed strategies used to engage students, including tackling recent history and contemporary issues earlier in the school year. One educator, for example, taught U.S. History starting with the Great Depression—a dramatic and relatable period for many students—and covering colonial history later. Another teacher taught thematically, emphasizing historical periods that had particular relevance for contemporary issues.

Disparities in Access to Supports for Students Struggling Academically

In New York State, students who have not reached proficiency or are at risk of not reaching proficiency in the core subjects (English language arts, math, science, and social studies) are entitled to academic-intervention and student-support services.⁹ However, in several of our schools, educators indicated that very limited supports were available for their many students who struggled in the required social studies classes. In the absence of these supports, teachers in the New York City high schools were encouraged to differentiate instruction to address the wide range of skills and abilities in their classrooms, something these teachers said was, in practice, very difficult and of limited effectiveness.

- In *NYC North High School*, for example, nearly all students entered ninth grade somewhat below or far below proficiency in core subjects and essential skills, including literacy. Yet the school lacked both adequate staffing and space to provide the intensive level of academic and social supports that many students needed. Teachers provided some tutoring to students who could stay in the school building after school, but teachers were uncompensated, and thus tutoring was dependent on the limited amount of time teachers could volunteer. Without resources for systematic tutoring or small-group support, the school attempted to meet the needs of students struggling academically by prioritizing reading and writing skills across the curriculum—and intensive literacy work in the ninth and tenth grades. This included, the principal said, a concerted effort to incorporate texts that help students better understand the world beyond their immediate neighborhoods and city.
- Similarly, *NYC East High School* lacked the academic and student-support personnel to provide the intensive level of support its students needed. It lacked staff to provide remedial courses that would build students' skills and knowledge via new material and instead focused narrowly on Regents-exam preparation. To build basic grade-level verbal and written proficiency effectively, the principal suggested the school would need additional special-education, general-education, and English-as-a-new-language teachers in order to reduce classes to an appropriate size, at least in the ninth and tenth grades. In addition, a number of general-education students needed the support of a school social worker to build social and emotional skills, but did not have access to those services. Social workers were allocated to the school based on the amount of mandated counseling services required by students with disabilities in accordance with their individualized education programs (IEPs), and they had little or no time to attend to the needs of general-education students.
- In contrast, the *high-wealth suburban high school* used a one-on-one tutorial model to support students who were struggling academically. This approach allowed teachers to strengthen relationships with individual students and personalize instructional and social-emotional supports. Though the school did not have a systematic approach to tailoring civic learning to

⁹ See Academic Intervention Services, in New York State General School Requirements, <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/part100/pages/1002.html#ee>.

individual students' needs, teachers recognized that trusting relationships between teachers and students could foster the social-emotional aspects of civic development.

These disparities suggest that, although all of our schools might technically meet the state's minimum requirements for providing social studies, not all students in these schools had sufficient or equitable access to meaningful or adequate instruction in history, civics, and government courses. It may seem self-evident that, in schools that serve large numbers of students who are struggling academically, classes would cover required history, civics, and government content more slowly and perhaps in less depth; but they also appeared to cover less breadth of content—missing, in particular, knowledge of recent history that connects with contemporary issues. These schools also seemed unable to provide students with the academic-intervention services in social studies to which they are entitled. Some schools offered additional test preparation to students who had failed required end-of-course Regents exams, but did not seem to use this extra instructional time to teach new material.

Students' Access to a Full Basic Curriculum

While most discussions of civic education emphasize coursework that directly focuses on civic content, for educational equity and as a foundation for civic preparation, all students must also have access to a full basic curriculum. This would include, in addition to history and social studies, sufficient instruction and course offerings in English, art, music, math, science, health, physical education, as well as a reasonable range of world languages. We found wide disparities in the availability of a full basic curriculum in the schools we studied. The high schools in the affluent and average-wealth districts provided many course offerings across a broad curriculum; the four schools serving mostly students living in poverty provided a much narrower curriculum.

- The *high-wealth suburban high school* offered an expansive curriculum with both a large number and a large variety of courses. In both social studies and English, for example, students could choose among several themed sections of required courses that, we were told, reflected the interests of teachers and students. A full four-year sequence of coursework was provided in nearly every subject, including four languages other than English. The school had an extensive performing-arts curriculum, allowing students the opportunity to participate in band, orchestra, choir, and drama during all four years of high school.
- The *average-wealth suburban high school* provided the state-required course offerings plus opportunities for further study in nearly every subject. For example, in the social studies and English, students had access to a selection of remedial classes, advanced classes, and electives. Students could take up to four years of three world languages. They also had access to four years of coursework in music, theater, and other performing arts.
- The *suburban high school with a high concentration of students living in poverty* provided the courses required for students to earn a basic Regents diploma. Beyond the minimum requirements, the school offered four years of Spanish but access to no other languages. The school also offered access to a number of performing arts classes beyond the single required year. However, for lack of a sufficient number of instructional staff, some upper-grade students who had exhausted all

of the available course offerings were placed in study halls that accommodated as many as 60 students. One educator said, “As a person of color, it hurts” to be unable to fill the schedules of their students, who are predominantly Black and Brown, with meaningful educational offerings.

- *NYC East High School* did not offer even basic chemistry or basic physics, nor did it offer calculus, computer science, or any advanced or AP STEM (science, technology, engineering, or math) classes. Much of the school’s curricular focus was on building students’ basic reading and writing skills, since many students’ low literacy levels stood in the way of their passing the Regents exams required for graduation. (Nevertheless, many students dropped out or graduated with low skill levels.)
- *NYC North High School* provided only the courses required for a basic Regents diploma. The school offered no social studies or English electives and no AP classes, but some students took College Now courses through a nearby community college.¹⁰ The school provided a single year of visual arts and no opportunity to pursue a multiyear sequence of study in the arts. Beyond the single year of high-school-level Spanish that is required, there was no opportunity for further language study, and no choice of other world-language study (despite the large number of students from Spanish-language-dominant families).
- *NYC South High School* provided students with more course offerings in some subjects than the other NYC schools we studied, but no electives or AP courses at all were available in social studies or English. In addition, many students who needed extra or remedial help lacked access to coursework beyond the basic diploma requirements because of limited staffing, limited classroom space, and the resulting scheduling constraints.

Students’ Access to Open and Active Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Topics

We explored the extent to which teachers in each school fostered open and active classroom discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events—particularly topics that students saw as important to their lives—and provided regular opportunities for students to engage in civil conversations about controversial topics, both of which are important civic learning practices. Educators from all six schools stressed the importance of providing students ample opportunity to discuss current events and issues that are relevant to them—even when these discussions were uncomfortable or the issues controversial. Each school provided some opportunity for this type of classroom discussion.

Interestingly, all of the teachers we interviewed said they felt comfortable teaching “controversial” topics and mediating heated classroom conversations. However, principals’

¹⁰ The principal had observed that, when students took college classes while in high school, it signaled to students and parents, most of whom had not been to college, that college was accessible and seemed to enhance the likelihood that students would enroll. Students who passed College Now classes earned free college credit that was transferable to City University of New York (CUNY) and State University of New York (SUNY) schools. Whereas to be eligible for college credit after passing an Advanced Placement class, students must also meet a certain threshold on a costly AP exam.

confidence in teachers' ability to help students explore and have productive conversations about such topics varied from school to school. Some administrators indicated that educators at their schools needed additional training to address gaps in the teachers' civic knowledge and skills and better equip them to handle current and controversial discussions in a way that was engaging, respectful, and effective for all students.

- At the *high-wealth suburban school*, which was relatively socially, financially, and culturally homogenous, educators said that regular pedagogical practice across the curriculum included guiding students to address controversial issues, consider multiple perspectives, articulate their own points of view, and engage in respectful discussion that includes disagreement.
- In the *average-wealth suburban high school*, a relatively diverse school, teachers were also expected to facilitate conversations on controversial issues and to ensure that all viewpoints, including the teacher's, were subject to criticism and discussion. Given these expectations, respondents said that teachers could benefit from additional training on how to support students in difficult discussions about social issues, including race and racism.
- At *all three New York City high schools*, educators recognized that students needed to develop discussion and debate skills and to have opportunities to express their own perspectives, particularly on issues of relevance to them. Teachers often reported that they were encouraged to facilitate conversations about relevant and potentially controversial issues with students—for example, attitudes about immigration or the disparate treatment of Black and Latinx students by the police. At all three schools, certain educators said they had used a Socratic-seminar method—as explained earlier, a structured, inquiry-based discussion based on a text—to foster meaningful conversations about social issues. (This strategy is designed to encourage open-ended inquiry, to help students express their own opinions and back up their arguments with evidence, and to develop students' capacity to critique other viewpoints civilly.) It was not clear whether Socratic seminars were a regular feature of classwork or an occasional event. At one school, we were told that new students tended to be reluctant to discuss controversial issues, but once they saw that such discussion was part of the culture of the school, they began to engage in conversations and share their own interests.
- At the *high school in the suburban district with a high concentration of students living in poverty*, teachers were discouraged from leading political discussions in the wake of the 2016 election, in large part because administrators lacked confidence in some teachers' ability to facilitate open and unbiased discussions. In social studies, teachers were not encouraged to or discouraged from developing curricula and lesson plans that integrated current events and civic issues—some did and some did not. However, the social studies department had introduced a pair of electives to provide students with opportunities to engage meaningfully with relevant social issues, such as racism and sexism.

Educators in all schools told us that students had access to at least some opportunities for open and active discussion of current events and controversial topics. However, it was not clear how much took place in the various schools, whether that amount was sufficient, or what the quality of these discussions were. Access to such opportunities, though they are critical to ensure students'

civic preparation, are not required—much less guaranteed. Explicit guidelines and requirements may be necessary, including ensuring that all teachers are well prepared to facilitate difficult civic conversations with diverse groups of students.

Students’ Access to Experiential Learning Opportunities In and Out of School

At all of our study schools, educators recognized that the importance of experiential learning, both during and after school. However, among the schools, we found major disparities in the number and types of experiential learning opportunities available to students. In addition, in most of the schools, educators expressed concern that students from families living in poverty were not equally able, for financial reasons, to participate in some of the activities that were available, particularly after-school extracurricular activities.

- At the *high-wealth suburban* high school, field trips, guest speakers, and service-learning and other project-based learning experiences were regular features of courses in the social studies department and in other departments as well. The social studies department offered a yearlong service-learning course. The school supplemented course-based activities with school-wide civic experiences. For example, annually on international-citizenship day, dozens of speakers visited classrooms to share first-hand experiences of diverse national and world events.

In addition, all seniors were expected to complete a six-week internship either at a service-related or business-oriented work site. One staff member coordinated these internships, and each senior had a teacher mentor (individual teachers supervised 4-5 students) to provide additional internship-related support. Service-related internships were found for all students who requested them (e.g., a few students worked in the offices of elected officials), but staff said furnishing service-learning opportunities to every senior, if that practice were mandated, might not be possible in their area.

Students also had access to a large number of civic-oriented extracurricular activities after school, including an active student government, a school newspaper, and dozens of student clubs. Popular clubs included Model UN, Global Citizenship, Habitat for Humanity, debate, athletic clubs and teams, and clubs for the arts. Some students participated in a set of service-learning activities developed by a volunteer organization that combats homelessness. In total, the school boasted nearly 100 different extracurricular clubs and activities.¹¹ The principal aspired to offer more students civic learning experiences by connecting students with “good government” groups and providing more opportunities to interact with civic leaders and elected officials.

- The *average-wealth suburban* high school provided students with a variety of civic-related experiential learning opportunities in connection with their course work. Certain classes in social

¹¹ In addition to the many experiences provided through the school, students also took advantage of privately sponsored and privately financed extracurricular experiences that enhanced civic knowledge and skills. A number of students participated in global travel and study programs, a growing number of which had service missions.

studies and other subjects included field trips to relevant civic sites—though funding capped the types and number of trips that teachers could organize each year. Teachers invited guest speakers to address issues students were studying, and the school also organized a daylong program in which representatives from advocacy organizations spoke with students about present-day civic issues. All students were required to complete seven hours of community service during each of their four years in high school. Two staff members identified community-service opportunities, and coordinated and monitored students’ fulfillment of this requirement.

In addition, all seniors in Participation in Government were required to attend a school-board meeting or other official convening, to gain experience with local government and civic affairs. Extensive civic-oriented afterschool activities included Junior State of America, a club that features political discussion, debate, guest speakers, and travel; student government; school newspaper; Model UN; mock trial; career-interest clubs; the arts, including orchestra, band, choir, visual arts, and drama; clubs that celebrate racial/ethnic culture and identity; women’s empowerment club; media club; and LGBTQ club. Students who held jobs or had other family responsibilities after school were unable to participate in extracurricular activities, and these tended to be students from lower-income families. English language learners faced additional linguistic barriers to full and representative participation; club advisors often did not have the language skills needed to recruit and support students with limited English proficiency and to communicate with parents. White and wealthy students were disproportionately represented in clubs related to the exercise of civic leadership, including Model U.N. and student government.

Educators said their students would benefit from greater access to internships and other hands-on learning opportunities with local government officials and the business community. However, educators believed that the school district would need a mandate and more funding from the state in order to make these opportunities a priority that would be accessible to all students.

- Students at the *suburban high school with a high concentration of students living in poverty* had access to far fewer civic-related experiential-learning opportunities than at the high-wealth and average-wealth suburban schools (but more than at the NYC schools). Moreover, because of limited school and/or family resources, many students were unable to take advantage of the afterschool opportunities the school did provide. The majority of students did not or could not participate in extracurricular activities.

The school provided a handful of experiential-learning opportunities connected with coursework, but none was accessible to all students. For example, the school organized a trip to Washington, D.C., for seniors, but it could accommodate only 50 students (less than a third of the cohort). It also organized a trip to the United Nations for a similar fraction of ninth graders. Teachers said these trips were valuable for the students who participated. For example, they said students’ own town and its largely Black and Brown population tended to be stigmatized by local media and neighboring communities; visiting these great, diverse cities, for example, offered students the opportunity to see their own experience in a more positive light.

For a number of years, select students participated in a program called The Constitution Works. Through this program, students enrolled in U.S. History or Participation in Government classes traveled to New York City for a mock-trial experience that involved arguing a First Amendment case. However, when grant funding for the program ended, the school could no longer take part.

Civic-skill building afterschool activities included drama club, school newspaper, student council, community service club, and a robust athletics program. About 20 students were involved in student government. An additional 12 students served on a parallel student council that reserved seats for student representatives from each grade level and also mirrored the demographics of the student body, with the exception that English language learners were not represented.

Partnerships with community-based organizations slightly expanded the school's civic learning resources. For example, one local organization annually informed students about voting rights and other civic duties and offered some students opportunities to participate in its efforts outside of school (e.g., as poll watchers on Election Day); another local organization engaged students as peer leaders in promoting healthy habits among their fellow students, for which they received a stipend.

- *NYC East High School* educators said they prioritized providing culturally relevant civic experiences. As one teacher said, “Our kids struggle to connect the world out there with the world in here.” In part because students tended to be unable to stay for afterschool activities, the school built extracurricular activities into the school day once a week. Students’ choices included some civic learning activities that most schools offered after school, such as student government, restorative-justice circles, a women’s empowerment group, and a group exploring issues of race and class. Nevertheless, students had limited school-facilitated opportunities for civic learning beyond the school walls. Social studies teachers did not take students on field trips, citing a lack planning time and school funding—though they said that students would benefit from exposure to civic institutions and activities, such as visit to the city council. Plus, one teacher said, “Time away on a field trip, which ... would give students so much, also takes time away from their preparation for the almighty standardized tests.”

The school offered a small handful of organized after-school extracurricular opportunities for civic engagement, activism, or community service, including a LGBTQ club and the National Honor Society. Through a local partner organization, some students gained hands-on experience in community organizing and in engaging elected officials to address community needs. The handful of students who were deeply involved in the partner organization’s activities received a stipend and co-facilitated workshops and rallies at the school. (The partner organization also organized college tours.)

The school particularly struggled to engage 11th and 12th graders. Educators also suggested that students might be more likely to engage in school and civic life if they had more teachers who shared their racial and ethnic backgrounds and who could serve as civic role models. Similarly, they said, mentoring programs, guest speakers, and internship opportunities could provide students with more role models who come from similar experiences and backgrounds.

- At *NYC South High School*, curriculum-centered experiential-learning opportunities were rare; educators mentioned only a single field trip, a visit to Philadelphia, sponsored by the student government. The school did require students to complete 60 hours of community service outside of the school in order to graduate. Some students collected donations for local families in need; some served meals at a homeless shelter; and some read with young children through partnerships with nearby elementary schools. Other students raised funds for various causes.

Extracurricular offerings and activities were limited by funding constraints; however, the school did have student government, school newspaper, and environmental, LGBTQ, and world cultures clubs. As one faculty advisor said about lacking funds for club outings, “I can’t start a Kickstarter campaign every time.” Many students had familial and financial responsibilities that limited their ability to participate in unpaid activities after school.

The principal was particularly eager to have students gain exposure to job opportunities in government affairs and stressed the connection between preparation for employment and preparation for civic participation. However, internships of any sort were available only a very limited number of students through civic and business partnerships. The school lacked staff to coordinate additional internship opportunities.

- At *NYC North High School*, educators said experiential-learning activities could advance students’ civic preparation, sense of community membership, and empowerment to effect change. They were limited in what they could provide but were able to create some important opportunities for all students. All ninth graders participated in a daylong community-service project with a nonprofit organization each semester. Respondents suggested students would benefit greatly from extended service-learning opportunities within different domains of service, but lacked the staffing to provide them. “A lot of these kids want to be challenged; they want to get out of their neighborhood where a lot of people have negative thoughts about them,” one educator said. In addition, in lieu of exams, seniors completed an interdisciplinary social-action project, choosing an issue that affected their community and developing plans to address it. In English class, students wrote about the social issue and crafted their plan. They gained practical experience by drafting emails to knowledgeable individuals, conducting phone interviews, and visiting organizations working on their issue. In math, students created budgets for their proposed plans. Some learned to make websites, found locations for envisioned offices, and estimated the cost of equipping those spaces. Ultimately, students delivered a presentation about their project.

Budget constraints ruled out field trips. The school could afford only one bus trip per year, which it used to take juniors to visit colleges. Some students worked with mentors on career- and college-related activities through a partnership with a large corporation that sends a diverse group of employees to volunteer at the school. Such opportunities built students’ confidence in their capacity to shape their own futures and contribute to their communities, educators said. However, the program served fewer than 50 students per year.

The school was still rebuilding its afterschool program, which had been eliminated by budget cuts during the recession. Some teachers doubled up on the number of afterschool activities they

advised (without compensation for the extra time) to allow the school to offer activities including yearbook, international club, and student government. However, many students faced economic barriers to participating in civic learning activities if they were only offered in out-of-school-time. In the previous year, more than half of the senior class had held jobs outside of school. The school had tried to incentivize participation in some school activities with stipends, movie passes, or Metro Cards, but the opportunity costs of unpaid activities were too high for students.

Although extracurricular activities after school have been shown to contribute in important ways to civic preparation, they do not appear to be a viable option for many students who have competing responsibilities after school. It may be important for schools to be able to offer alternatives, including providing sufficient hands-on civic-related learning opportunities during the school day. Paid student internships may be another alternative; however, in most of our case study schools, these were in short supply, in part for lack of staff to secure and manage student internships. Partnerships helped schools extend their capacity to provide experiential-learning opportunities, including internships, but did not seem to be a sufficiently reliable resource.

Students' Access to a Supportive and Civic School Climate

We investigated school-climate factors, such as the quality of relationships within the school community, the school's culture and norms, student participation in school governance, staff's fairness toward students, their attention to issues that affect students' lives, disciplinary practices, students' access to role models, and student-support staff. School-climate factors can influence civic-skill development and the formation of students' civic identities by affecting students' sense of community and belonging, engagement and connectedness with school, feelings of trust, and development of self-respect, self-efficacy, and self-expression. Educators at all of the schools recognized the value and importance of these school-climate factors; all the schools seemed to appreciate and foster student civic action.

- The *high-wealth suburban high school* seemed to invest extensively to create a school climate and culture that fostered students' self-confidence, self-expression, and sense of responsibility. The school kept class sizes small enough (regular classes have about 25 students; seminar-type classes have 15-18) to promote meaningful class participation, student-led learning, productive collaborative work, authentic dialogue, and camaraderie. Teachers were expected to identify students who did not engage appropriately with other students or exhibited other behavior or adjustment challenges. These students received support and interventions through teacher teams and the school's extensive counseling program that included a school counselor-to-student ratio of approximately 1:150. The school used progressive discipline to make students aware of the consequences of infractions, and suspended only a handful of students each year.

Educators said students were generally respectful of each other in classroom settings; nevertheless, interpersonal issues negatively affected some students' school experience. Though the school lacked significant socioeconomic or racial diversity, other perceived differences among students were sometimes exploited to belittle or ostracize other students. According to

teachers, some students felt judged because others perceive them not to be among the highest academic achievers. Other issues of concern included sexual harassment and assault and LGBTQ rights. Students' school-climate-and-culture concerns seemed to be taken seriously and, at least in some cases, democratically reviewed. For example, when students and parents challenged the dress code as sexist, a committee that included students deliberated and made recommendations that ultimately changed the policy.

- In the *average-wealth suburban school district*, educators cited strengths and challenges related to creating a supportive and civic school climate for all students. Respondents said the school's racial diversity (the student population is approximately 50% Latinx, 25% White, and 15% Black) and socioeconomic diversity provided the school community with opportunities to learn to work well with different kinds of people. Students who grew up in the area showed more cross-racial bonding. Still, some race-based student clustering could be seen; students who are new to the town and to the school, in particular, seemed to need a support system and tended to cluster within ethnic groups. Language-based divisions were also apparent. For example, honors courses did not reflect the diversity of the student body but rather were taken almost exclusively by English-language-dominant students.

The school supported and leveraged its diversity in some explicit ways—for example, by raising awareness about and celebrating students' cultures and national origins. It dealt with some anti-immigration sentiments among certain students by bringing together for facilitated dialogue students in different clubs who had conflicting views, and hosted an afterschool discussion with local elected officials. Educators said they encouraged students to express their opinions and experiences based on their racial identities, and that female students sometimes spoke about how they were treated differently based on their gender. Administrators encouraged students to speak out about their school concerns generally. Social workers, school counselors, and the school psychologist were also encouraged to support this. However, the school had no regular, schoolwide forum for addressing immediately relevant civic and social issues.

- At the *high poverty suburban school*, the principal cited a number of obstacles to providing a positive, predictable, safe, civic, and supportive environment within classrooms. These included some teachers' inconsistent enforcement of rules, lack of cultural responsiveness, evidence of bias, limited use of positive behavioral interventions and supports in place of disciplinary practices that removed students from the classroom, and low expectations for many students.¹² The school had experienced frequent turnover at the helm, having had several principals within the past decade. The new principal reported using strategic hiring and additional training to build a more civic/supportive school climate including cultural competency, rapport and trust, and challenging learning experiences, and to end to racism and sexism in the classroom.

The school had recently lost its peer-mediation program, which had been staffed by a local nonprofit organization and supported by a private grant. The program had helped students

¹² For example, students were counseled to take a less advanced [math] class rather than a more difficult one for which they were eligible.

become leaders in facilitating conflict resolution and participate in the governance of the school. Students no longer had that leadership-development opportunity and school administrators and staff spent more time resolving conflicts. The school was in the process of introducing new practices, such as town-hall-style meeting with students, toward expanding student involvement in the governance of the school and boosting student pride in membership in the school community.

The principal told us that the school's counselor-to-student ratio (1:250) was too large to deliver appropriate services and supports for all students. Few students actually knew their counselors and received individualized support from them. The school also needed at least one additional social worker to meet the needs of all students who required psychological counseling and other social services.

- At *NYC East High School*, many students needed to develop their self-esteem and sense of personal or civic agency, educators said. Some students “acted out” instead of communicating issues of concern in a productive way. Staff spent hours each day addressing students’ behavioral challenges and struggled to handle student infractions fairly and constructively. Peer mediation and restorative justice circles were effective, but the school could not sustain the necessary training for enough students and staff to participate. The school had one school counselor per 100 students, considered a good ratio by national standards, yet counselors’ time was still in short supply, educators said, and not all students received the level of emotional support that they needed.

The principal recognized the need to build students’ social-emotional and interpersonal skills and to help them understand their strengths and their potential. At the beginning of the year, to set the stage for trust, staff members, including the principal, visited the homes of students who were new to the school. Staff members throughout the school fostered students’ capacity to speak up and to express their concerns constructively—to help empower them “to talk about things, to think about what they’re saying to themselves, and how that is being perceived.” Listening was also an underdeveloped skill among many students; administrators and staff tried to model effective listening with students.

All ninth and tenth graders had an “advisory” period three times a week, the goal of which was to build students’ sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Advisory class sizes were kept small (15-20 students) to allow closer relationships to develop among teachers and students, and to allow students to explore their own topics of interest. The school’s approach, as one educator put it, was to show school as a place where students not only gained knowledge but also learned how to put that knowledge to use for a specific purpose. The staff recognized the need to make learning relevant to their mostly Black and Latinx students. Though many on the faculty approached their interactions with students with this orientation, the principal said teachers needed training and access to culturally relevant and up-to-date curricula to facilitate “higher-level” conversations about civic and school issues.

- At *NYC North High School*, educators said creating a supportive and civic school climate to prepare students socially and emotionally for life outside the school was one of the primary goals. The faculty pursued this in a number of ways. The school’s small size supported a more personalized learning environment. It actively fostered a culture of openness and acceptance. To develop trusting and productive relationships with the students, the principal modeled interconnectedness—for example, by extending an open-door policy for students and staff alike—and asked staff members to do the same.

The school had a relatively large student-support staff to address the needs of its very large proportion of students with disabilities (nearly 30%), English language learners (about 15%), and extraordinarily large percentage of students considered chronically absent (nearly 70%). In addition to the instructional team of teachers, the school had three social workers who coordinate academic, attendance, and behavioral interventions, two school counselors, and an attendance committee. Students’ behavioral infractions were handled through conversation as much as possible. They could lose “habits of work” points that were tied to students’ grades, which provided a deterrent. All students belonged to advisory groups of one teacher and about 15 students that met weekly all four years of school to give students a sense of stability and help with team building. The group meetings addressed interpersonal, social, and academic issues and encouraged students to develop and express their own opinions and voice their concerns. The principal said that, over the four years, students tended to become more confident in sharing their points of view.

A partnership with a corporation brought a diverse group of employees to mentor students twice a month on a range of career- and college-related activities. However, fewer than 50 students could participate each year. With additional staffing to develop partnerships, the principal said all students would benefit from mentors and role models who shared their racial and ethnic backgrounds and who grew up in the students’ neighborhood or similar neighborhoods.

- At *NYC South High School*, staff members said the school actively worked to reinforce a culture of mutual respect, service, and civic responsibility. Several annual school-wide events celebrated students’ cultural backgrounds. The principal talked about the school as a family and expressed a commitment to teaching students to value the diversity around them. However, the staff did not reflect the diversity of the students. In fact, it lacked even a single Black teacher, though a third of the students were Black.

About a quarter of the students participated in group counseling. The school no longer offered advisory periods, but the principal said that the school was organized to ensure every student had “someone they could speak to”; it was unclear whether this was a formal or informal arrangement. Staff members said they tried to give students consistent social and emotional support to build their self-confidence and ambition.

The school implemented the NYC Department of Education’s “Respect for All” anti-bullying program, which includes both professional development and a curriculum for students. The school also used a Positive Behavioral Intervention System model that incentivized good

behavior rather than punishing students for infractions. Mediation programs were also used to resolve conflicts and address students' social and emotional needs.

In all of our study schools, educators made a connection between students' social and emotional well-being and the development of their sense of civic agency, self-expression, and confidence in their ability to make change. In the schools serving mostly students living in poverty, staff seemed particularly focused on providing a supportive school climate to foster civic development.

Students' Access to Media Literacy Education

We also explored access to media literacy education, which is increasingly seen as vital for civic preparation. Specifically, we asked educators in these schools about students' access to classroom-based learning opportunities related to media consumption and production; discussion about internet safety and civility; library media centers and library media specialists; as well as students' and teachers' access to relevant media and learning technologies. We noted substantial variation in access to these learning opportunities.

- The *high-wealth suburban high school* had taken some steps toward integrating aspects of media literacy education across the curriculum. The school had identified the responsible use of digital tools as a school-wide priority and embedded internet safety and civility lessons into the ninth-grade orientation curriculum. Some professional development opportunities related to media literacy had been provided (though we have no information about how many teachers participated). For example, a nationally known media-literacy-education expert shared her expertise with teachers and administrators. The local teachers' institute also offered media literacy classes and workshops.

Many teachers used new digital media and informational technologies in their classrooms. Each department adopted expectations for students' technology literacy in its discipline. Students had opportunities to use multiple media and learning technologies independently and within the context of specific courses. They had access to research databases at school and remotely. The school had a well-appointed and well-staffed library that included two library media specialists. It also employed two instructional technology teachers, as well as computer aides—who worked with both students and staff.

- At the *average-wealth high school*, educators made few references to media literacy education. We were told that across the curriculum teachers were expected to instruct students in how to access multiple sources of evidence and evaluate the sources carefully. The school library provided students with access to online databases and the library media specialist helped them access reliable online sources for research projects in order to improve the breadth and depth of students' research. The school enforced the statewide policy against cyber-bullying.

Individual teachers incorporated media analysis and production into classwork—for example, following the news through websites, and examining how media messages reinforced racist, classist, and sexist stereotypes. The school also offered media arts classes, including video

production and filmmaking, and had an afterschool digital-media club that made and posted videos about school events.

- At the *suburban high school serving mostly students living in poverty*, the principal noted that state standards allowed schools flexibility to embed some media-literacy work in English classes, but did not indicate that it was expected in the school. Teachers reported that, in practice, they had little or no time for tackling media-literacy skills. They said classes tended to move slowly through the required content in core academic subjects, and used class time to ensure basic comprehension of the assigned readings. This school’s library webpage, however, contained media-literacy resources, including information about teaching digital civility, identifying “fake news,” and evaluating the reliability on online sources.

Teaching and learning generally, and media-literacy education in particular, were also hampered by the school’s technology needs. The school lacked sufficient mobile devices for classroom use, and its outdated network and wireless infrastructure made access to the internet unreliable. The school’s technology plan also cited the need for ongoing professional development for staff, teachers, library media specialists, and administrators to get—and stay up-to-date in the use of—technology to meet the school’s goals. The responsible use of digital tools to expand communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity were among the areas in which ongoing training was needed.

Internet access was also constrained by the school district’s strict content-filtering system. (Schools that receive federal funds for internet access are required to use content-blocking software to filter material that is “harmful to minors.” This has resulted in some districts blocking entire major platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube.) Teachers said the district’s “over-filtering” discouraged teachers’ and students’ internet use and limited teachers’ adopting new media-based approaches to building students’ skills and habits in communication and self-expression. Plus, some students lacked computers and/or internet access at home, which limited the school’s ability to require their use in homework assignments.

- At *NYC East High School*, students did not receive consistent or systematic media-literacy instruction or support. One teacher told us that, in an advisory class, students engaged in some discussion of whether social media was an asset or a liability, and some analysis of the use of social media in politics, but these discussions were limited. There was no certified library media specialist on staff, though state regulations require schools to provide all middle- and high-school students access to these educators. (The school could neither afford the position nor the administrative time its supervision would require, the principal said.) The school shared a school library with a number of other schools sharing the same building. According to the principal, the library’s current collections and resources were of low quality. Teachers attempted to teach some online research skills and from time to time helped students use the library space to find resources.
- Due to budget constraints, *NYC South High School* had no library media specialist on staff, in violation of state law. Without a library media specialist, the school tended to invest in classroom materials rather than a common set of digital and print library resources. Any instruction in

research skills and methods was left to content-area teachers. The school depended on individual teachers with no training or specialization for media-literacy education and skill development. For example, one teacher we interviewed fostered certain media-literacy and internet safety and civility skills in a series of lessons about how some media perpetuate stereotypical ideas of masculinity and femininity.

- At *NYC North High School*, educators reported that media literacy was not explicitly part of the curriculum at all. Teachers observed that many students watched news on television and/or followed it on social media, and that many had the habit of taking what they saw at face value. Certain teachers worked with the school librarian to help students identify reliable sources of information. In some social studies classes, students analyzed media bias. Another obstacle to some aspects of media-literacy education was inadequate learning technologies. At the time of our site visits, teachers had to share laptops for hands-on, classroom-based media-literacy activities, and these computers were not always available when teachers needed them. Educators said students would benefit from systematic, sustained media-literacy education to be effective consumers and producers of new media, such as social media.

In spite of growing awareness of the importance of media literacy, none of our schools appeared to prioritize media-literacy education sufficiently; none had established a comprehensive or systematic approach to ensure students developed essential competencies. Though all secondary schools were required to employ certified library media specialists (teachers who have media literacy training), two of our three New York City high schools did not have a library media specialist on staff. The schools that did have librarians seemed not to use their expertise and services to expand media literacy among staff or students.

In the next section, we discuss the implications of our findings in these different areas of civic learning opportunities for state and district education policy and practice.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.

--John Dewey, *The School and Society*

As described above, we found disparities among our study schools in students' access to many of the types of civic learning opportunities we examined. These disparities were widest between the four schools in our sample that served predominantly students in poverty and Black and Brown students and the two schools that served students from wealthier and predominantly White families. Our analysis of the findings from six schools shows patterns in where and how these disparities occurred. Specifically, we found:

- *Disparities in access to history, civics, and government courses in high school.* While all six high schools provided at least the state-required minimum number of social studies courses, there were significant differences in students' access to social-studies coursework. Respondents reported differences in the number and variety of social studies courses offered; the curriculum and teaching of Participation in Government; the depth and breadth of content covered in the required classes; and the availability of required academic supports for students who are struggling to master the necessary material.
- *Disparities in access to a full basic curriculum.* The high schools in the affluent and average-wealth districts provided numerous course offerings across a broad curriculum. The schools in districts serving mostly students living in poverty and Black and Brown students, offered a much narrower curriculum. For many students in the suburban district with high concentrations of students in poverty, and nearly all students in the three New York City high schools, across the curriculum, only the minimum number of courses and the minimum level of difficulty the state requires were available.
- *Disparities in experiential civic learning opportunities in and outside of the classroom.* The high-wealth and average-wealth high schools provided many hands-on learning opportunities both in and outside of the classroom that contribute to building students' civic knowledge, skills, and mindsets. The four schools serving large numbers of students in poverty offered many fewer (particularly in the New York City schools). In most of the schools, many students from families living in poverty did not participate in extracurricular activities after school because of competing responsibilities. These findings are consistent with prior research based on student surveys that showed that Black and Brown students and students living in poverty had fewer civic learning opportunities than students who were White and/or wealthy.

The extent of the deficiencies not only indicated inequities in the civic learning opportunities among the schools but suggested that the four schools serving predominantly students in poverty and Black and Brown students lacked adequate resources to meet their students' civic learning needs and fulfill their constitutional obligation to prepare all of their students for civic preparation. The schools serving mostly students living in poverty, which also serve large numbers of students struggling academically and students learning English as a new language, provided scant resources in most categories. In some resource areas, such as access to library media specialists and academic intervention services, some of these schools were actually out of compliance with state requirements.

Other learning opportunities that research shows to be essential for civic readiness are not required under current New York State education law. Providing social studies electives, access to the arts, field trips, civic action projects, and civic-skill-building extracurricular activities, for example, were optional, but the well-resourced schools invested extensively in them. In our schools in districts with high concentrations of poverty, their schools could not provide or sustain them—though educators recognized the value and importance of these civic learning resources. Experiential learning opportunities, in particular, are critical for civic learning and yet districts and schools can decide not to provide them at all. It may be important for the Board of Regents to reconsider

regulations and requirements to help districts and schools sufficiently prioritize civic preparation. It is certainly important that all schools have the resources to provide these opportunities.

Civic learning was a high priority at all of our study schools (likely because these the leaders of the schools who agreed to participate in our study were interested in our research topic). Yet, the availability of many basic civic learning resources at a given school appeared to be more closely correlated with the wealth of the school district and average academic-proficiency level of the students than with how highly school-based educators prioritized civic preparation. In schools that do not prioritize civic education, for example in schools with a business or health focus, students may be even less likely to receive the minimum learning opportunities adequate for civic preparation. Further research should explore this issue.

Finally, we were struck almost as strongly by the abundance of civic learning opportunities in the high- and average-wealth high schools as we were with the scarcity in our schools serving high concentrations of students in poverty. Particularly in the high-wealth school, students seemed to have multiple opportunities to acquire necessary civic knowledge, skills, and mindsets. If they did not entirely gain proficiency or mastery through one avenue (e.g., required coursework), there was a back-up system (e.g., extensive extracurricular activities).

As Edmund W. Gordon (2005) pointed out, “most complex systems that achieve effectiveness and stability are characterized by redundancy—that is, by the existence of back-up or alternative components for all critical mechanisms in case of failure in the primary system.” He goes on to argue, “Just as biological and mechanical systems routinely employ this principle, social systems—especially those involving developing children—require redundancy. At best, the components of a redundant system should complement each other; at the very least, they should serve a compensating function.” Whether by design or solely by tradition, both the average- and low-need schools seemed to support redundancy when it came to the learning opportunities and practices that support civic preparation.

Redundancy in key supports for civic learning and development would also, of course, benefit children in schools that are less economically advantaged; however, students in the New York City high schools and the suburban high school with high concentrations of students living in poverty seemed to have, at most, one bite at any given civic-learning apple. Small schools in particular had to make difficult tradeoffs in relation to resources that support civic learning. For example, the New York City high schools seemed to invest time and resources into providing a supportive and civic school climate, focusing on centering issues relevant to students, attending to the social-emotional wellness of students, and providing constructive opportunities for discussion; they had to forego providing experiential civic learning opportunities, sufficient academic supports, and other important opportunities.

Whether these under-resourced schools prioritized the most efficient or effective civic and other learning opportunities could be debated. Whatever the case, the well-resourced schools did not have to make these difficult and sometimes unpopular tradeoffs among important learning opportunities; in the best interests of their students, they provided them all. This observation has

implications for defining “adequate” and “equitable” civic learning opportunities. It suggests that researchers, education officials, and policymakers need to consider not only which civic learning opportunities to provide but how much is enough. Strategies to improve the civic readiness of New York students need to look beyond incrementally increasing certain essential learning opportunities and focus on adequacy or sufficiency in relation to constitutional requirements and the specific needs of students. Among other things, this will require paying greater attention to differentiated preparation for civic participation for students with different learning needs, including the course of study and additional supports needed by students learning English as a new language, students with disabilities, and students who are struggling academically. It will also require a greater understanding of the role of culturally-relevant-and-sustaining pedagogy in fostering civic preparation.

In three essential areas of civic learning opportunities, all of our schools had room for improvement: managing controversial conversations, integrating media-literacy education, and providing civic-oriented internships.

- First, though teachers in each school said they felt comfortable teaching “controversial” topics and facilitating difficult classroom conversations, administrators did not express universal confidence in their teachers’ abilities to help students with diverse opinions and cultural backgrounds deliberate democratically and disagree civilly. Many administrators indicated that additional professional development should be focused on addressing these and other gaps in civic-education knowledge and skills among educators at their schools.
- Second, none of our schools provided comprehensive, coherent media-literacy education. Nevertheless, the high-wealth school made some relevant professional-development opportunities available at least to some teachers; it had a well-staffed and well-equipped library media center; and school staff prioritized helping students to develop some media-literacy skills. On the other hand, two of the New York City high schools did not even have state-required library media specialists.
- Third, at all of our study schools, educators recognized the value of student internships in the public and nonprofit sectors, particularly paid internships, but none could support a sufficient number. The wealthier schools, which had staffing devoted to student internships, were able to do a much better job of securing them. Publicly funded institutions and not-for-profit organizations should be expected and supported to offer internships for high school students.

V. CONCLUSION

There is considerable consensus on what students need to know and be able to do to be ready to participate in civic life and shape the future of our democracy—as well as on what civic learning opportunities best promote the development of these civic competencies. We developed and tested a methodology for studying the availability across diverse schools of the resources needed to provide those civic learning opportunities.

Through our in-depth exploration of civic learning opportunities at individual schools, we were able to provide concrete qualitative descriptions at a granular level of the impediments to civic participation faced by high-need, low-resource schools that is rarely available since most studies about these issues are based on surveys and quantitative data. Findings from the analysis of our cases supported our hypothesis that schools' capacity or lack of capacity to prepare all of their students for civic participation would correlate with district resource capacity. Among our cases, the schools that served large numbers of students in poverty and Black and Brown students were considerably less well equipped. Our findings add further detail the effects of school-funding levels and student need on civic learning opportunities in individual schools. Civic learning opportunities, like other learning opportunities, appeared to be affected by, for example, shortages of qualified teachers and other personnel like school library media specialists; narrowing of curricula and course offerings; lack of access to instructional technologies; lack of sufficient experiential learning opportunities; and shortages of student support staff, such as school counselors.

In sum, resource disparities among schools affects schools' ability to carry out the fundamental mission of preparing students for their roles in a democracy. Schools that served students who were wealthier and whiter were equipped to provide more of the civic learning opportunities that research supports as effective. Schools serving high concentrations of students in poverty and Black and Brown students tended to be able to provide many fewer of these opportunities.

This small pilot study examined only six schools. It will be important to expand this study in order to help policymakers and the general public understand whether the patterns revealed by this study are representative of the opportunities and challenges faced by similar New York City metropolitan area schools and/or in districts beyond the area, including those in rural areas, small cities, other large cities, and suburbs. The broad disparities in civic learning opportunities also suggest the need for statewide public dialogue to develop a shared understanding of the civic competencies students must develop and the related civic learning opportunities and necessary resources that the state must provide to all of its students. Moreover, we hope this study informs the state's implementation of its ESSA plan as well as the work of its Civic Readiness Task Force effort—two important civic-education levers—by advancing an understanding of how to ensure that all schools can prepare students to be civic ready.

We know that student outcomes such as test scores, graduation rates, and college attendance correlate with family wealth and school and district resources; our study suggests that these factors may also be associated with students' civic learning outcomes, and likely also their future civic engagement. In New York, a state where so many believe that the strength of our democracy depends on everyone's participation, this calls for renewed efforts to ensure equity in civic learning opportunities for all students in all schools.

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Appendix A. Data Collection Questions

This list represents the full set of data collection questions used in the study. Protocols for initial and follow-up interviews with different participants were built from the list.

Access to Civic Knowledge

General

1. According to faculty, what knowledge do students need to be prepared for capable civic participation? Is this encompassed by the NYS Learning Standards?
2. What, if anything, is the school missing in order to be able to equip students with the knowledge they need to be prepared for civic participation?

Courses in Civics and Government

3. What specific courses in civics, government, and/or current events does the school provide to its students (required courses and electives)?
4. Do all students have access to all of these courses? What proportion completes them?
5. Does the single state-required Participation in Government course provide what is needed to ensure that all students can meet the standards for “Participation in Government and Civics”? If not, what else is needed? Other relevant info about PIG?
6. What percentage of classes in this area are taught by appropriately certified teachers? What percentage of those teachers have themselves fully mastered the content?

Other Social Studies Courses

7. What other courses in social studies and history does your school provide (required classes and electives)?
8. Do all students have access to all of these courses? What proportion completes them?
9. Do the state-required courses in social studies provide what is needed to ensure that all students can meet the standards of the New York State Grades 9-12 Social Studies Framework? If not, what else is needed? Other relevant info re NYS requirements in social studies?

Access to a Full Basic Curriculum

10. Does the school provide all students access to basic course offerings?
 - Four years of English language arts
 - (Four years of social studies)
 - At least three years of science (biology, chemistry, and physics)
 - At least three years of a least one language other than English
 - At least three years of high school level math
 - At least three years of career and occupational studies
 - At least a year of health education
 - At least three years of the arts and/or music
 - Four years of physical education
11. What other advanced, honors, or AP classes and/or electives does the school provide?
12. What supports does the school provide for students who are struggling academically?

Access to Civic Skill Development

General

13. According to faculty, what skills do students need to develop to be prepared for civic participation? Are these represented in the New York State Learning Standards?
14. What, if anything, is the school missing in order to be able to equip students with the skills they need to be prepared for civic participation?

15. What opportunities does the school provide for students to develop the specific skills for civic participation set out in the NYS Social Studies Framework?
 - the basic verbal and mathematical skills necessary to understand complex civic issues?
 - the higher order skills needed for “democratic deliberation,”
 - critical thinking and problem solving skills?
 - collaboration skills?
 - self-directed learning skills?
 - library media, information literacy, and research skills?
 - the ability to engage in discussions about important issues and events with people who disagree with them?
 - The ability to come to decisions about action?
16. What resources, if any, is the school missing to ensure that all students develop these skills?
17. Do all of students develop these skills? Evidence?

Communication Skills

18. According to faculty, what communication skills do students need to be prepared for civic participation?
19. Do New York State standards promote the verbal and written skills needed preparation for civic participation (e.g., arguing, expressing, demonstrating, and persuading, verbal empowerment skills—the ability to articulate one’s own interests, interact with elected officials and community partners, maintain one’s integrity and autonomy, discern common ground for possible compromises)? If not, what is missing?
20. What resources, if any, are missing to ensure that all students attain the communication skills to be prepared for civic participation?

Media Literacy Skills

21. According to faculty, what media literacy skills do students need to be prepared for civic participation?
22. What opportunities does the school provide for students to develop these media literacy skills?
23. What resources, if any, are missing to ensure that all students develop these media literacy skills?

Creativity and Innovation Skills

24. According to faculty, what creativity and innovation skills do students need to be prepared for civic participation?
25. What opportunities does the school provide for students to develop creativity and the ability to innovate?
26. What resources, if any, are missing to ensure that all students develop these skills?

Access to Civic Experiences

27. According to faculty what experiences/experiential learning opportunities do students need to ensure they are prepared for civic participation?
28. What opportunities for civic experiences does the school provide? Are these curricular, co-curricular/extracurricular, or extended-day activities?
 - Classroom discussion/debates
 - Community service/service learning
 - Civic action projects
 - School radio or TV station, YouTube channel, blog
 - Clubs (e.g., mock trial, Model U.N., speech and debate, school newspaper, student government)
 - Arts
 - Sports
 - School assemblies
 - Field trips
 - Internships
 - Other activities?

29. Do all students have access to these experiences? What proportion of students participates in these experiences?

Classroom Activities

30. Do all students have access classroom to civic and political discussions? Discussion of cross-cutting issues (with people who disagree)?
31. Do social studies classes discuss current social problems and controversial issues?
32. Do teachers engage or avoid controversial topics? Why or why not?
33. Do all students have opportunities to engage in participatory politics?
34. Do all students have opportunities to apply civic learning and take informed action and apply civic skills to real world issues and events?
35. Do all students have
- Access to qualified library media specialists and well-equipped school libraries?
 - Access to technology and high speed internet?
 - Opportunities to use various technologies and digital platforms?
 - Access to “Student Voices” or other such software/online programs that supplement to existing civic education curricula?
 - Access to inquiry-based instruction?
 - Access to experiences in the arts that foster self-expression, bolster community and cultural representation, and/or advance social change?
 - Access to internships and work experiences, especially in civic and community-based organizations, advocacy, social justices, and political organizations?

Civic Values and Dispositions

36. According to faculty, should the public schools promote certain moral values and civic traits and dispositions in order to prepare students to be capable civic participants? If so, what values and dispositions must schools promote to prepare students for civic participation?
- Basic character values like honesty, compassion, responsibility, hard work, perseverance, courtesy, respectfulness, fairness, integrity?
 - Self-respect, personal autonomy, and agency?
 - Tolerance of disagreement and a willingness to listen, negotiate, and compromise?
 - Commitment to the public good?
 - Respect and appreciation for other peoples and cultures?
 - Patriotism (Defined traditionally? Defined more liberally/flexibly?)?
37. What civic values does the school seek to impart? How was this policy determined?
38. What challenges, if any, does the school face in transmitting these values and dispositions to students? (Resistance? Competing values? Trust issues?)
39. Does the school promote an understanding and appreciation of diversity (e.g., of values, cultures, identities, abilities, genders, sexualities, family structures, race/ethnicity, social and political views)?
40. Does the school confront the failure to achieve a just and equal society outside of school?
41. Do school staff other than teachers play a role in transmitting civic values and dispositions? Which ones and how?

Professional Development

42. Are teachers trained and comfortable with managing classes that focus on controversial issues?
43. What professional development does the school or district provides to enable administrators, teachers, and other school staff to prepare students for civic participation?

Integration of Civic Learning Across Academic Disciplines

44. Does the school integrate civic learning across the curriculum, providing access to civic knowledge, civic skills, civic values and dispositions, and civic experiences?

45. Do its classroom-based instructional practices help all students develop a sense of agency and self-efficacy in advocating for themselves and their positions on social/civic issues?
46. Do its classroom-based practices help all students learn to work together in teams?
47. Do classroom teachers, across the disciplines, help all students make connections between their studies and pressing civic/social issues in the neighborhood in which the school is located and/or with their own neighborhoods (for students who commute to school)?
48. Does the school align and coordinate the civic learning opportunities across content areas and grade levels?

Appropriately Differentiated Curriculum and Experiential Learning Opportunities

49. Does the school differentiate its civic learning curricula and related experiential learning opportunities to engage all students? If so, how? If not, what are the obstacles?
 - Students with disabilities
 - English language learners
 - Students with limited civic knowledge, skills, and behaviors
 - Students with advanced civic knowledge, skills, and behaviors

Access to Necessary Instructional Materials

50. Does the school to provide all students access to the instructional materials necessary for preparation for civic participation?
 - Access to print and oral technologies (e.g., posters, essays, letters, debates, speeches, reports, and maps) and digital technologies (e.g., Internet, social media, digital documentary, graphics)
 - Access to books, television appearances, articles, op-ed pieces, websites, policy statements, blogs, journal pieces, webinars
 - Access to databases and data analysis software
 - Paper based and electronic mapping

Access to Necessary Facilities

51. Does the school provide access to all students to the school facilities necessary for preparation for civic participation? (Library media center, auditorium, gymnasium and sports fields, art and music rooms; computer center?)

Embrace of Diversity

52. Describe the diversity of the school (students, staff, families, community)
53. What issues, if any, have arisen as a result of this diversity/differences within the school community? How has the school community handled them?
54. What activities and/or practices does the school engage in to promote an understanding and appreciation of diversity (e.g., racial/ethnic, religious, gender and sexual orientation, social and political views)? (classroom? schoolwide? community?)
55. What barriers, if any, impede the provision of these experiences or their success? (resources? fear of controversy or litigation? attitudes?)

School Climate, School Discipline, and Safety

56. Describe the school climate.
 - Level of trust/distrust in school community
 - Types of relationships between teachers and students
 - Democratic classroom practices/authoritarian classroom practices
 - Embrace of diversity/conflict
 - Positive bonding and bridging experiences/cliques
 - Classroom practices that promote the agency of all students/stereotyping, tracking
 - Availability of school counselors, social workers, psychologists, other support staff?
57. What proportion of teachers is caring, fair, and show respect to all of their students? Evidence?

58. Describe the school's conflict resolution and disciplinary policies and practices. How were they developed?
59. Are they applied in a fair and unbiased way for all groups of students? Evidence?
60. Do all who enter the building have efficient, respectful, and safe access?
61. What resources, if any, are missing to ensure that all students have access to a positive school climate, fair school discipline, and safety?

Educational Equity

62. Does the school have an adequate level of resources to meet students' basic educational needs and fulfill state requirements?
 - sufficient numbers of qualified teachers, principals, and other personnel
 - suitable and up-to-date curricula
 - expanded platform of programs to help students who are at risk of academic failure
 - adequate resources for students with disabilities and English-language learners
 - appropriate class sizes
 - sufficient and up-to-date books, supplies, libraries, educational technology, and laboratories
 - safe and orderly environment
 - adequate and accessible school buildings
63. Does the school have sufficient additional resources, services, and supports to address the barriers to school success presented by poverty?
 - Health and mental health services and supports
 - Internships and employment opportunities
 - Mentoring/advisories
 - Family engagement

 The **Center** for **Educational Equity**

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