



**Education Commission**  
of the **S t a t e s**

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# ECS Policy Brief Citizenship Education

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## INTRODUCTION

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) is committed to helping education leaders identify, develop and implement public policy to ensure that students become active and principled citizens. NCLC's mission is to assist state and district leaders to promote, support and reward citizenship education as an essential component of America's education system.

Over the past five years NCLC has advocated for quality citizenship education that encompasses the entire spectrum of P-12 education; aligns with quality standards; focuses on student citizenship knowledge, skills and dispositions; utilizes appropriate assessment strategies; encourages continuous improvement by using data as a diagnostic tool; and is community-based. Since 2003, NCLC has conducted a comprehensive 50-state citizenship education policy scan identifying and analyzing existing policies that encourage, support and reward citizenship education. These scans have been shared with many state, district and local policymakers and education leaders providing information on existing state policies and providing ideas for implementing a policy agenda.

A June 2006 scan revealed that, compared to the initial 2003 scan, citizenship education has made improvements especially in the area of course and teaching requirements. All 50 states and the District of Columbia have a civics and/or government teaching or course requirement.

While 49 states and the District of Columbia have state standards in civics and/or social studies, few have established standards in knowledge, skills and dispositions. (Iowa's standards are developed locally.) NCLC believes that citizenship education must lead to student acquisition and enhancement of related knowledge, skills and dispositions so that young Americans are active principled citizens today and tomorrow.

Eight states, highlighted below, have been selected as examples of standards that reach beyond the teaching of knowledge and extend to skills and dispositions. Each state is different in terms of its political and economic climate and yet each has successfully formulated standards and guidelines for civic education that address knowledge, skills and dispositions. Some civic standards are interwoven in the state's social studies standards while other states have stand-alone civic standards.

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE DATA

In conducting a policy scan on each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, five primary sources were used to collect and verify the data:

- ◆ Lexis-Nexus searches of state statutes, pending bills and administrative code
- ◆ Online state statutory and administrative code via state Web sites
- ◆ National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) pending and recently enacted database search
- ◆ Fact verification with other ECS institutes and centers (e.g. high school graduation requirements)
- ◆ Request for verification by state Alliance for Representative Democracy (ARD) coordinators.

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

### *Existing State Policy Supporting Citizenship Education*

#### **Teaching and course requirements**

Teaching and course requirements have improved substantially since 2003. Four states serve as examples to illustrate the marked improvements in civics and citizenship education. For example, Michigan requires three credits in civics as a graduation requirement. Beginning with the class of 2007-08, Minnesota students are required to complete three and a half credits, encompassing U.S. history, geography, world history, economics and government/citizenship; or three credits encompassing U.S. history, geography, world history, government/citizenship and a half credit in economics.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, Missouri requires at least two units for graduation in order to “enable students to master important knowledge and skills in the areas of civic knowledge and responsibility.”<sup>2</sup> One of the two units must be American history, and the equivalent of one-half unit must be in government.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Nebraska requires the teaching of civics and government as part of the core curriculum with the goal of developing “informed, competent, and responsible citizens who are active politically and committed to the fundamental values and principles of American constitutional democracy.”<sup>4</sup>

#### **Standards and assessments**

Standards and assessments remained relatively constant with little improvement. Forty-nine states have standards in civics and/or social studies while only 25 states have implemented statutory assessments. However, a few states have comprehensive standards and/or assessments that seek to develop civic knowledge, skills and dispositions. Most of the existing state civics standards address knowledge but do not address skills and dispositions.

At a time in which standardized tests have become the assessment tool of choice to enable comparisons across schools and districts, the time and energy required to adequately assess civic skills and values can make it a difficult sell. Advocates for citizenship education must recognize the value of assessment tools that can demonstrate the important public purpose of citizenship education.

#### **Accountability**

As of June 2006, only 21 states focus on accountability in civics and/or social studies. Implications for lack of accountability in civics education include no consequences for failing to develop civic competencies in students and a lack of adequate measurements to determine whether students are learning the necessary skills and dispositions for civic efficacy.<sup>5</sup>

Missouri is an example of statutory accountability that measures knowledge of civics and/or citizenship. Missouri requires all schools to provide regular instruction in the constitutions of the United States and of the state of Missouri, American history and governmental institutions. High school graduates must have passed a test or tests covering history and government. Also all high schools are required to offer, during grades 9-12, the equivalent of one-half unit of credit in the institutions, branches and functions of the local, state and federal government and in the electoral process.

## Recent State Action in Support of Citizenship Education

In addition to requiring course and teaching requirements, some states have been active in bringing attention to and fostering skills in civics and citizenship.

### Display of historical documents and mottos

Several states have either enacted or are attempting to enact legislation permitting the display of U.S. documents such as the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution, and mottos and slogans. For example, Oklahoma's HB 2477 permits administrators and/or teachers to display "In God We Trust" and "E Pluribus Unum" in public schools, classrooms and buildings.

### Handbooks for citizenship education

Arizona and Utah have created handbooks for teachers on civics education. Sections 15-203, 15-1626 and 15-1802 of the Arizona Revised Statutes have been amended to read:

Develop and maintain a handbook for use in the schools of this state that provides guidance for the teaching of moral, civic and ethical education. The handbook shall promote existing curriculum frameworks and shall encourage school districts to recognize moral, civic and ethical values within instructional and programmatic educational development programs for the general purpose of instilling character and ethical principles in pupils in kindergarten programs and grades one through twelve. Require pupils to recite the following passage from the declaration of independence for pupils in grades four through six at the commencement of the first class of the day in the schools, except that a pupil shall not be required to participate if the pupil or the pupil's parent or guardian objects: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, the Utah State Board of Education and Utah Office of Education have developed, approved and are implementing a guide entitled *Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success*. This publication includes fostering civic learning and social and civic responsibility. Utah is trying to enable every teacher to be knowledgeable in civics in order to have a more successfully integrated curriculum. Utah's guide is also an integral part of professional development. By providing teachers with a guide, they will be informed and encouraged to integrate the teaching of civics and civic engagement in their instruction.

### Greater recognition for citizenship education

States have increased the recognition and importance of civic and citizenship education in schools (for example, by creating new commissions and summits and by implementing a Civics Day). In Idaho, the legislature urged the secretary of state to convene a summit on civic education.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Kentucky created a Civic Literacy and Engagement month to encourage more civic involvement.<sup>8</sup>

As a final illustration, Vermont directs the commissioner of education to convene a council on civics education to strengthen civics education opportunities for all Vermonters.<sup>9</sup> Vermont also recognizes the need to hold a civics education forum in which people engaged in civics education can share their best practices, activities and resources, and produce a catalogue of civics education resources and activities available in Vermont schools.<sup>10</sup>

### Involving youth in elections

In Maryland, legislators permit youth 17 years of age to be appointed and serve as election judges.<sup>11</sup> The Ohio legislature required a board of elections to establish a program permitting certain high school seniors to serve as precinct officers on the day of an election, and to permit a board of elections to establish such a program for home-instructed students who are in the equivalent of 12th grade.<sup>12</sup>

### New sources of funding for civic education

The North Dakota legislature appropriated moneys from the general fund in the state treasury to the division of independent study for the purpose of developing, publishing and distributing a North Dakota studies textbook and workbook including civic education for both grades 4 and 8, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2005, and ending June 30, 2007. In addition, it appropriates out of any moneys in the general fund in the state treasury to the division of independent study for the purpose of revitalizing civic education.<sup>13</sup>

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The policy scan reveals state emphasis on students acquiring knowledge about civics and government through traditional classroom instruction. Civic knowledge is necessary but not sufficient; citizens also need skills and dispositions to sustain and enhance American democracy. Some of these skills, such as writing letters, debating issues or making presentations, can certainly take place in the classroom regardless of whether it is an English or civics class.

According to NCLC there are three components, or “strands,” of civic competency: civic-related knowledge, cognitive and participatory skills, and civic dispositions.<sup>14</sup> Civic knowledge includes such things as understanding the structure and mechanics of constitutional government and knowing who the local political actors are and how democratic institutions function. Civic skills (and associated behaviors) include evaluating sources of information, political issues and candidates; working with fellow citizens and public officials; and developing a plan and implementing it. Civic dispositions – or values, attitudes and motivations for behavior – include things like a belief in liberty and equality, tolerance for diverse beliefs and commitment to the common good. (Refer to Chart 1)

### CHART 1

#### **Civic Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions**

An effective citizen needs civic skills and dispositions, as well as civic content knowledge. Civic knowledge, skills and dispositions should build on and reinforce one another, beginning in early childhood, and be seen as approximately equal in importance. Many, but not all, of these competencies already exist in state and local standards for civics. They also can be fostered through both school-related and out-of-school experiences (in family or neighborhood). Therefore, it is important that schools and communities work together to determine the civic competencies most important to them. Below are some examples of civic competencies a community might seek to cultivate among its citizens.

#### **Civic-related knowledge (both historical and contemporary)**

- ◆ Understanding of historical conflicts over the meaning of the constitution
- ◆ Understanding of the role of media and the press in a democracy
- ◆ Knowledge of the ways ordinary citizens can act and have acted in the past to create change
- ◆ Knowledge of local community assets, problems and important local actors, and their connection to broader issues.

#### **Cognitive and participatory skills (and associated behaviors)**

- ◆ Ability to understand, analyze and check the reliability of information about government from media sources and political communications
- ◆ Ability to articulate the meaning of abstract concepts such as democracy and patriotism
- ◆ Ability to express one’s opinion on a political or civic matter when contacting an elected official or media outlet
- ◆ Ability to envision a plan for action on community problems and to mobilize others.

#### **Dispositions (motivations for behavior and values/attitudes)**

- ◆ Patriotism and commitment to American democracy
- ◆ Support for justice, equality and other democratic values and procedures
- ◆ Respect for human rights and a willingness to search out and listen to others’ views
- ◆ Personal commitment to the well-being of others in the community and nation.

More information on civic knowledge, skills and dispositions can be found in the NCLC publication, *Developing Citizenship Competencies from Kindergarten Through Grade 12*, available online at [www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/69/96/6996.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/69/96/6996.pdf).

An effective citizen needs all three of these competencies. Yet most civics and government classroom instruction stresses civic knowledge, with less emphasis on skills and dispositions. This is also evident in most state standards; however, some states have created exemplary state standards in civics. The following list of states are not intended to be an exhaustive list, rather we highlight a group of diverse states to demonstrate how each were able to create a set of standards in civics education. The following states focus on civic knowledge, skills and/or dispositions.

## State Standards that Highlight Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions

Some state standards effectively address all three components of civic competencies. For illustrative purposes, the following eight states are highlighted below. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of effective state policies rather it is intended to highlight policies that effectively address the skills and dispositions of civic competencies, which policymakers often overlook.

### Maine

Maine's administrative code 05-071-131 (2006) outlines the content standards required of elementary and secondary students in civics education. These are knowledge-based standards that require the learning of individual rights, responsibilities of a democratic society, purposes and types of government, identification of key representatives in legislative branches and the heads of executive and judicial branches in Maine and the United States, and knowledge of enduring themes and events in history.

Additionally, Maine's revised statute 20-A M.R.S. § 6209 (2005) establishes guidelines that require students to obtain competencies in skills and dispositions. Specifically, Maine requires their students to become competent as:

- ◆ A clear and effective communicator who uses various modes of communication effectively including technological modes; understands messages from multiple sources; requires a second language
- ◆ A self-directed and life-long learner who creates career and education plans that reflect personal goals; demonstrates independent study; finds and uses information from various sources
- ◆ A creative and practical problem solver who observes situations to clearly and accurately define problems; identifies patterns and trends and is able to apply solutions; finds and generates a variety of solutions, builds case for best response and evaluates the effectiveness of response critically
- ◆ A responsible and involved citizen who recognizes the power of personal participation to affect community; demonstrates participation skills; understands the importance of accepting responsibility; knows how to achieve community health; recognizes and understands the diverse nature of society
- ◆ A collaborative and quality worker who understands the structure of the labor market; assesses individual skills and values in relation to a workplace; demonstrates concern for quality
- ◆ An integrated and informed thinker who comprehends relationships among different modes of thought and methods associated with the traditional disciplines including languages and the arts.

### Montana

Montana requires that students demonstrate knowledge, skills and dispositions in social studies and civics. Mont. Admin. R. 10.54.6043 (2005) requires that students:

- ◆ Identify various documents and sources that have influenced the legal, political and constitutional heritage of Montana and the United States
- ◆ Identify how selected cultures and events change or influence each other
- ◆ Apply ideas, theories and methods of inquiry to analyze historical and contemporary developments
- ◆ Investigate, interpret and analyze the impact of multiple historical and contemporary viewpoints and ideas
- ◆ Analyze historical impact of technology on human values and behaviors
- ◆ Analyze issues such as freedom and equality, liberty and order, diversity and civic duty.

Mont. Admin. R. 10.54.6095 (2005) requires that students:

- ◆ Analyze and adapt an inquiry process to locate information and problem solve
- ◆ Analyze and critique the principles and power structures of authority and governance
- ◆ Demonstrate civic participation
- ◆ Independently demonstrate civic responsibility by participating meaningfully as a citizen
- ◆ Independently conduct geographic-related research to develop and extensively support a position on an issue
- ◆ Consistently analyze historical patterns and conduct independent research to thoroughly and effectively develop and defend a position on an issue
- ◆ Analyze unique impacts of the application of economic principles
- ◆ Independently analyze and critique the impact of human interaction on society and purposefully evaluate the effects of cultural diversity.



According to Mont. Admin. R. 10.55.1601 (2005), Montana also has social studies program delivery standards for teachers. The code states that teachers shall:

- ◆ Use strategies and methods that incorporate multiple perspectives as basic component of social studies
- ◆ Support democratic process to promote a learning environment to foster individual civic competence
- ◆ Integrate knowledge, skills, beliefs, values and attitudes within and across disciplines to promote active citizenship
- ◆ Incorporate inquire skills and strategies using both primary and secondary resources
- ◆ Promote social criticism and socialization as a commitment to social responsibility
- ◆ Analyze ethical dimensions and social policy implications of issues to provide an arena for reflective development of concern for individual needs and the common good
- ◆ Promote decisionmaking skills and civic responsibility through active participation.

## Nevada

Nevada Administrative Code 389.511.3 (2005) focuses on knowledge and skills. Specifically Nevada requires:

- ◆ Teaching of U.S. Constitution, the structure of the federal government and federalism
- ◆ Analyzing the effectiveness of the checks and balances of power
- ◆ Analyzing the roles and factions within the political parties
- ◆ Evaluating the significance of interest groups in the political process
- ◆ Assessing the process by which leaders are selected in the political system
- ◆ Analyzing the role that television and other media play in the process of political participation, and evaluating propaganda
- ◆ Examining historical, landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases regarding individual rights
- ◆ Examining the structure of local government; comparing and contrasting Nevada's Constitution to the U.S. Constitution
- ◆ Knowing the political and economic relationship between the U.S. and its citizens
- ◆ Analyzing the effectiveness of the foreign policy of the United States with regard to international problems and concerns.

## New Mexico

The New Mexico standards, which are grade-specific and age-appropriate, require the explanation of the structure and functions of New Mexico's state government as expressed in the New Mexico Constitution to include: roles and methods of voting; functions of executive offices; election processes (e.g., primaries and general elections); and the criminal justice system (e.g., juvenile justice). Some highlights from those standards include the following competencies and frameworks:

- ◆ Explain the roles and relationships of different levels of the legislative process including the structure of New Mexico's legislative districts
- ◆ Explain the structure of the New Mexico Legislature and leaders of the Legislature during the current session (e.g., bicameral, House of Representatives and Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Senate Pro Tem)
- ◆ Compare the structure and functions of the New Mexico Legislature with that of the state's tribal governments (e.g., Navajo, Apache and Hopi nations)
- ◆ Explain the structure and functions of the national government as expressed in the U.S. Constitution, and explain the powers granted to the three branches of government and those reserved to the people, states and tribes to include the federal system and the federal government
- ◆ Explain the Bill of Rights, amendments to the U.S. Constitution, individual liberty, central government, and the struggles over the creation of the Bill of Rights and its ratification
- ◆ Identify and describe a citizen's fundamental constitutional rights, First Amendment rights, right to a fair trial, equal protection and due process
- ◆ Explain and describe how water rights and energy issues cross state and national boundaries
- ◆ Understand how to exercise rights and responsibilities as citizens by participating in civic life and using skills that include interacting, monitoring and influencing
- ◆ Describe and analyze the influence of the non-elected (e.g., staff, lobbyists, interest groups)

- ◆ Analyze the rights and obligations of citizens in the United States including connections between self-interest, the common good, and the essential element of civic virtue as described in the Federalist Papers, obeying the law, serving on juries, paying taxes, voting, registering for selective service and military service
- ◆ Demonstrate the skills needed to participate in government at all levels including analyzing public issues and the political system, evaluate candidates and their positions, debate current issues
- ◆ Analyze factors that influence the formation of public opinion (e.g., media, print, advertising, news broadcasts, magazines, radio)
- ◆ Evaluate standards, conflicts and issues related to universal human rights and their impact on public policy.

## Oklahoma

Oklahoma Administrative Code 210:15-3-90 and 210:15-3-101 (2005) explicitly states that “civic competence is the knowledge, skills, and attitude.” The code also describes that the standards are intended to give students a basic understanding of civic life, politics and government. The goal of civics and government is to develop informed, competent and responsible citizens who are politically aware and actively committed to the fundamental values and principles of American constitutional democracy. The standards also discuss the role of economics in civic life. Social studies standards also require the following:

- ◆ Examine the evolution of the U.S. Constitution
- ◆ Explain how political parties and interest groups influence agendas
- ◆ Describe components of campaigns at the local, state and national levels
- ◆ Explain the rights, responsibilities and benefits of U.S. citizenship
- ◆ Compare and contrast the United States’ political and economic systems to that of the rest of the world
- ◆ Develop the skills necessary for informed participation in public affairs, including analyzing public issues.

## Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania’s civic and government standards require that “public schools [to] teach, challenge and support every student to realize his or her maximum potential and to acquire the knowledge and skills needed” to:

- ◆ Evaluate the major arguments advanced for the necessity of government
- ◆ Analyze the sources, purposes and functions of law
- ◆ Evaluate the importance of the principles and ideals of civic life
- ◆ Analyze the principles and ideals that shape the government of Pennsylvania and apply them to the government
- ◆ Evaluate the principles and ideals that shape the United States and compare them to documents of government
- ◆ Analyze the competing positions held by the framers of the basic documents of government of Pennsylvania and United States
- ◆ Analyze how the law promotes the common good and protects individual rights
- ◆ Evaluate an individual’s civic rights, responsibilities and duties in various governments
- ◆ Evaluate citizens’ participation in government and civic life
- ◆ Interpret the causes of conflict in society and analyze techniques to resolve those conflicts
- ◆ Analyze how participation in civic and political life leads to the attainment of individual and public goals
- ◆ Evaluate how individual rights may conflict with or support the common good
- ◆ Evaluate what makes a competent and responsible citizen
- ◆ Analyze and evaluate the structure, organization and operation of the local, state and national governments including domestic and national policymaking
- ◆ Analyze the responsibilities and powers of the national government
- ◆ Evaluate how the government protects or curtails individual rights and analyze the impact of supporting or opposing those rights
- ◆ Analyze the United States’ interaction with other nations and governmental groups in world events.<sup>16</sup>

## Utah

Utah Code Ann. § 53A-13-109 (2006) defines civics and character education as “the cultivation of informed, responsible participation in political life by competent citizens committed to the fundamental values and principles of representative democracy in Utah and the United States.”<sup>17</sup> The code also recognizes that the legislature believes that “civic and character education are fundamental elements of the public education’s system core mission as originally intended and established under Article X of the Utah Constitution.”<sup>18</sup> Finally, Utah seeks to create an integrated curriculum addressing and instilling the core civic values in their students:

- ◆ Honesty, integrity, morality, civility, duty, honor, service and obedience to law
- ◆ Respect for and an understanding of the Declaration of Independence and the constitutions of the United States and Utah
- ◆ The essentials and benefits of a free enterprise system; respect for parents, home, and family; the dignity and necessity of honest labor, and other “skills, habits, and qualities of character” which “promotes upright and desirable citizenry and better prepare students to recognize and accept responsibility for preserving and defending the blessings of liberty inherited from prior generations and secured by the constitution.”<sup>19</sup>

## Virginia

Virginia Code Ann. § 22.1-208.01 (2006) requires the teaching of character education. As part of its character education program, Virginia also describes the importance of responsible use of technology. Additionally, Virginia outlines the understanding of the following civic education concepts:

- ◆ The privileges and responsibility of good citizenship
- ◆ The importance of the rule of law to protect individual rights
- ◆ The structure of the U.S. economy and comparing it to other nations’ economies
- ◆ Correlations with the relationships between the past, present and future
- ◆ Diverse cultures and shared humanity
- ◆ Civic participation in a pluralistic democracy
- ◆ The relationship between history, music, art and literature
- ◆ The process of lawmaking, the role of government and the organization of constitutional governments.

## ANALYSIS

### *Common Characteristics of State Standards*

Common themes emerge from the above-mentioned state standards. The themes reach beyond knowledge and focus a great deal on skills and dispositions such as research, analysis and comparative thinking skills. Moreover, the state standards sought to instill dispositions that support and foster equality, liberty and diversity. More specifically the state standards seek to:

- ◆ Recognize the privileges and responsibility of good citizenship
- ◆ Evaluate the civic participation in a pluralistic democracy
- ◆ Evaluate citizen's participation in government and civic life
- ◆ Analyze the United States' interaction with other nations and governmental groups in world events
- ◆ Compare and contrast the United States' political and economic systems to that of the rest of the world
- ◆ Research and find pertinent information that would improve the students' civic knowledge and participation
- ◆ Develop the skills necessary for informed participation in public affairs, including analyzing public issues
- ◆ Analyze the sources, purposes and functions of law, including the U.S. Constitution.

### *Needed Assessment in Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions*

Assessment is an essential component to effective civics and/or citizen education policy. Because only 25 states measure student competencies, it is important for states to incorporate more assessment; yet assessment must reach further than knowledge and should target skills and dispositions. Most of the 25 states assess civic knowledge only. As states begin requiring the teaching of skills and dispositions, assessments must also follow. Some state policies require and assess skills and dispositions, examples include Maine and Montana.



## Maine

Maine assesses whether students have attained the skills necessary to become:

- ◆ A creative and practical problem solver: observes situations to clearly and accurately define problems; identifies patterns and trends and is able to apply solutions; finds and generates a variety of solutions; builds the case for best response and evaluates the effectiveness of response
- ◆ A responsible and involved citizen: recognizes the power of personal participation to affect community; demonstrates participation skills; understands the importance of accepting responsibility; knows how to achieve community health; recognizes and understands the diverse nature of society
- ◆ A collaborative and quality worker: understands the structure of the labor market; assesses individual skills and values in relation to a workplace; demonstrates concern for quality
- ◆ An integrated and informed thinker: comprehends relationships among different modes of thought and methods associated with the traditional disciplines including languages and the arts.<sup>20</sup>

## Montana

Mont. Admin. R. 10.54.6095 (2005) assesses students' ability to:

- ◆ Analyze and adapt an inquiry process to locate information and problem solve
- ◆ Analyze and critique the principles and power structures of authority and governance
- ◆ Demonstrate civic participation
- ◆ Independently demonstrate civic responsibility by participating meaningfully as a citizen
- ◆ Independently conduct geographic-related research to develop and extensively support a position on an issue
- ◆ Consistently analyze historical patterns and conduct independent research to thoroughly and effectively develop and defend a position on an issue
- ◆ Analyze unique impacts of applying economic principles
- ◆ Independently analyze and critique the impact of human interaction on society and purposefully evaluate the effects of cultural diversity.

## Professional Development

While state civics and government standards generally guide the development of students' knowledge about the principles and institutions of American democratic governance, they may be less helpful to teachers in designing opportunities for students to practice participatory civic skills or develop an orientation toward active citizenship. In fact, an examination of most state civics and government standards conveys the impression that the most important predictors of civic engagement are a strong understanding of the structures and functions of government and an awareness of the rights of citizens as described in our nation's founding documents. Yet, we can not assume that students will transfer this knowledge and become engaged citizens.

Administrators and teachers must help students become engaged citizens and develop civic and advocacy skills such as age-appropriate critical thinking and deliberation. Giving administrators and teachers ideas and tools to work with on behalf of students is a critical first step to fostering youth voice and ownership. Ideas and tools can be best delivered through professional development.

High-quality professional development will increase the awareness, importance and relevance of civic competencies among education leaders and teachers. Professional development must be designed and delivered to ensure that key players will understand citizenship education and are able to demonstrate the skills and policy frameworks necessary to sustain it. As a result, professional development will expand opportunities for citizenship education, and will improve the curriculum, academic achievement and the overall community climate. Additionally, professional development programs must be ongoing in order to sustain the teaching of civic dispositions and improve academic achievement.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSION – QUESTIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

State education leaders should ensure that state standards convey equal importance among civic knowledge, skills and dispositions, and that teachers are able to help students meet the standards in the time they have available in the classroom. States must recognize the time constraints that exist in schools and make decisions about what is critical and what may be taught if additional time is available. States should ensure that these priorities are clearly understood by teachers, and that state assessments and any professional development opportunities offered by the state are aligned with these priorities.

Reviewing and rewriting state standards is, of course, a significant undertaking – especially when accompanied by the redesign of professional development guidelines, assessments and other programs to reflect any changes. Our recommendation is not that states immediately revamp their standards, but that state education leaders recognize the equal importance of civic knowledge, skills and dispositions, and take steps to support the efforts of school districts to provide opportunities for students to acquire these competencies. When the time comes to revisit the standards, states should include educators from districts that have already begun to refashion their application of standards and vision to support the preparation of effective citizens.

Another key component in developing civic competencies is to measure student outcomes. Traditional knowledge-based tests have a role but will not account for and determine whether students have the skills or dispositions to be effective citizens.

Policymakers and supporters should ask themselves the following questions to ensure effective state standards and accountability:

1. What civic competencies (knowledge, skills and dispositions) do we want students to develop?
2. Are these competencies best achieved through a social sciences or interdisciplinary pathway?
3. Are those civic competencies addressed in the state standards and assessments?
4. Are civic competencies addressed in standards in an appropriate scope and sequence from kindergarten through 12th grade?
5. Is there sufficient accountability implemented to measure whether knowledge, skills and dispositions are being achieved?

States have a responsibility to create policies that acknowledge education purposes, effective practices, infrastructure, school climate, outcomes and impacts. States are making progress on citizenship education content standards yet it is essential for policymakers and education leaders to focus on the competencies students need to be active principled citizens and corresponding assessments. NCLC has created a set of resources identifying competencies, corresponding assessments and characteristics of civic school climates to ensure schools are structured to support effective citizenship teaching and learning. These resources are available on the NCLC Web site [www.ecs.org/nclc](http://www.ecs.org/nclc). This brief is based upon data contained in NCLC's Citizenship Education Database. State policy data may be accessed at [www.ecs.org/citizenshipeducationdatabase](http://www.ecs.org/citizenshipeducationdatabase).

## RESOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Tiffani Lennon is an assistant policy analyst, National Center for Learning and Citizenship, Education Commission of the States.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Minn. Stat. §120B.024.4
- <sup>2</sup> MO. Ann. Stat. 170.011 (2006).
- <sup>3</sup> MO. Ann. Stat. 170.011 (2006).
- <sup>4</sup> Nebraska Admin. Code 92-004.02A (2006).
- <sup>5</sup> MO. Ann. Stat. 170.011 (2006).
- <sup>6</sup> ARS 15-203, 15-1626 and 15-1802.
- <sup>7</sup> HCR 33 (2006).
- <sup>8</sup> HJR 1109 (2006).
- <sup>9</sup> HB 867 section 29 (2006).
- <sup>10</sup> JHR 25 (2005).
- <sup>11</sup> MD ST § 10-202 (2005).
- <sup>12</sup> HB234 and SB 139 (2005).
- <sup>13</sup> NDCC § 15.1-02-02 (2005) (HB 1013).
- <sup>14</sup> Education Commission of the States, *Developing Citizenship Competencies From Kindergarten Through Grade 12: A Background Paper for Policymakers and Educators* (2004). [www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/51/35/5135.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/51/35/5135.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Judith Torney-Purta and Susan Vermeer, *Developing Citizen Competencies from Kindergarten to Grade 12: A Background Paper for Policymakers and Educators*, ECS National Center for Learning and Citizenship, 19-21, April 2004.
- <sup>16</sup> 22 Pa. Code § 4.11-5.1.12 (2006).
- <sup>17</sup> Utah Code Ann. § 53A-13-109 (2006).
- <sup>18</sup> Utah Code Ann. § 53A-13-109 (2006).
- <sup>19</sup> Utah Code Ann. § 53A-13-109 (2006).
- <sup>20</sup> CMR 05-071-131 (2006).
- <sup>21</sup> Bruce Boston, *Restoring Balance Between Academics and Civic Engagement in Public Schools*, American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), 19, 2005.



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