

## Legislative Updates

Updated by Molly Ryan and Paul Baumann

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## Introduction

Since 2003, the National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement (NCLCE) at the Education Commission of the States (ECS) periodically has conducted a comprehensive 50-state civic education policy scan to identify adopted policies that encourage, support, and advance civic learning and engagement for P-20 students. Whether and how state policymakers include civics in state policy is imperative, not only to ensure that students learn the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be educated and engaged American citizens, but also to send the message “that preparation for active, informed citizenship is the co-equal purpose of education along with preparation for higher education and career.”<sup>1</sup>

While the role that civic education plays in public schools has been reduced in the past 50 years, the civic education field continues to make significant strides in identifying best practices for civic education.<sup>2</sup> As evident in NCLCE’s most recent 50-state policy scan (highlighted below), some states have recognized such best practices by enacting policy on “civics,” “citizenship education,” and “social studies.”

*Visit the Civic Education Policy Database:*

[http://www.ecs.org/html/educationIssues/CitizenshipEducation/CitEdDB\\_intro.asp](http://www.ecs.org/html/educationIssues/CitizenshipEducation/CitEdDB_intro.asp)

## Policy Scan Summary

The table below provides a summary of the data collected through this policy scan update. The policy scan focused on three broad areas:

- State standards, curricular frameworks, graduation requirements, statutes, and administrative codes that show whether and through which mechanisms states attend to civic education
- Assessments and state tests that show the extent to which states measure students’ acquisition of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions
- Accountability systems that show the extent to which states hold districts and schools accountable for student learning in these areas.

In general, our findings show that all states have some requirement for civic education, though such requirements come through a variety of mechanisms. While all states have some requirements related to civic education, only about half of the states assess student learning in this area and hold schools accountable for such learning.

State Policy	Number of States
<b>Civics, citizenship education, or social studies included in state standards</b>	All states and the District of Columbia
<b>Civics or citizenship education included in curriculum frameworks</b>	44 states and the District of Columbia
<b>Civics or citizenship education included as high school graduation requirement</b>	All states and the District of Columbia

State Policy	Number of States
Civics, citizenship education, or social studies included in other state statutes	48 states
Civics, citizenship education, or social studies included in state administrative codes	24 states
Civics, citizenship education, or social studies included in state assessments	33 states
Social studies included as a required state assessment	23 states
Social studies included as a test students are required to pass in order to graduate high school	10 states
Civics, citizenship education, or social studies included in state accountability system	24 states

## Highlighted Policies

Since our last policy scan, a number of states have adopted policies to sustain and advance civic education for their students. The sections below highlight a number of these new policies, broken down according to five categories in which we saw civic education policy advancing:

- Recognizing the need for civic education
- Establishing task forces focused on civic education
- Assessment and accountability
- Expanding and integrating opportunities for civic learning
- Teacher licensure.

### Recognizing the Need for Civic Education

Policies that fell into this category were generally symbolic in nature and did little to establish formal programs and funding streams for civic education. While these policies may seem to be only paying “lip service” to civic education, they can be extremely useful for establishing favorable precedent for civic education, recognizing pockets of excellent practice, and providing support for local districts and schools to implement civic education programs.

#### *Arkansas*

The “Whole Child-Whole Community” recognition program includes five tenets that collectively set out the necessary elements of well-being—including preparation for success in “college, career, and citizenship” for children in Arkansas. (2013 Ark. Acts 1326)<sup>3</sup>

#### *Vermont*

Preparation to “engage actively in civic life” must be included in the personalized learning plans required by Vermont’s Flexible Pathways Initiative. (Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 16 § 942(10))

#### *Washington*

The Washington legislature included citizenship in the list of areas for which a high school diploma shows that a student is prepared. (Wash. Rev. Code § 28A.230.090)

### Task Forces

States often use task forces across a multitude of areas to study and develop consensus on what policy changes may be needed prior to their introduction through formal legislation. Since our last policy scan, states have created task forces focused specifically on civic education (Illinois), as well as task forces that include civic education in broader education reform efforts (Minnesota).

#### *Illinois*

The state board of education is required to establish a Task Force on Civic Education, which will present its report to the state legislature in May 2014. (2013 Ill. Laws 98-301)

### *Minnesota*

In its charge to the state's career pathways and technical education advisory task force, which is to structurally redesign secondary and postsecondary education, the legislature included the goal of "provid[ing] graduates of two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions with the foundational skills needed for civic engagement." (2013 Minn. Laws 116)

### **Assessment and Accountability**

While assessment and accountability structures for social studies are fairly common, they tend not to be for civics. Since our last policy scan, two states (Florida and Tennessee) have put in place assessment and accountability structures for civics. The approach to assessment and accountability in these states is very different, with Florida choosing a model that is very much in line with assessments used for other curricular areas, and Tennessee choosing a project-based model that does not utilize standardized tests.

### *Florida*

Beginning with the 2014-15 school year, a middle school student must earn a passing score on the end-of-course assessment in civics education in order to pass the course and be promoted to high school. (Fla. Stat. § 1008.22(3)(c)(2)(b))

### *Tennessee*

Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, all school districts must implement a project-based assessment in civics at least once in grades 4 through 8, and at least once in grades 9 through 12. (Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1028(d))

### **Expanding and Integrating Opportunities for Civic Learning**

States are using a number of approaches to ensure students have the necessary opportunities for high-quality civic learning. These approaches include allowing students to take online civics courses (Florida), expanded learning opportunities in civics (Texas), and integrating civics throughout the school curriculum (Utah).

### *Florida*

The Florida Approved Courses and Tests Initiative, which begins in the 2015-16 school year, will expand student choices in selecting high-quality online courses, including massive open online courses (MOOCs), in civics that are required for promotion or graduation. (Fla. Stat. § 1003.499)

### *Texas*

Texas has created an Expanded Learning Opportunities Council that studies and makes recommendations concerning expanded learning opportunities for public school students. Such opportunities may take a variety of forms and may include civic learning opportunities for students. (2013 Tex. Gen. Laws 531)

### *Utah*

Utah requires all districts and charter schools to submit annual reports to the lieutenant governor and Commission on Civic and Character Education. These reports are required to summarize how civic and character education are achieved in the school district or charter schools through an integrated school curriculum and in the regular course of schoolwork. (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-13-109) Further, the state board of education is required to report annually on how schools in the state are preparing students to "become informed and responsible citizens through an integrated curriculum taught in connection with regular school work," as statutorily required. (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-13-109(6))

### **Teacher Licensure**

A key component of ensuring that students receive high-quality instruction in civics is to make certain that teachers are prepared to deliver such instruction. Few developments in this area have occurred in the past few years, however.

### *Virginia*

After July 1, 2014, middle school civics and economics teachers and high school government and history teachers who are seeking licensure renewal must have completed a module or professional development course specifically related to Virginia history or state and local government. (2013 Va. Acts ch. 726)

*This ECS StateNote was updated by Molly Ryan, Associate Policy Analyst, and Paul Baumann, Director, National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement. They can be reached at [pbaumann@ecs.org](mailto:pbaumann@ecs.org).*

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## Appendix:

### Arkansas

The “Whole Child-Whole Community” recognition program aims to measure the comprehensive well-being of Arkansas children according to five tenets, one of which is to “provide a well-rounded curriculum that prepares students for success in college, career, and citizenship through rigorous instruction in all core academic subjects, including ... civics.” (2013 Ark. Acts 1326)

### Illinois

The state board of education is required to establish the Task Force on Civic Education. The Task Force on Civic Education is charged with: (1) Analyzing the current state of civic education in Illinois; (2) Analyzing current civic education laws in other jurisdictions; (3) Identifying best practices in civic education in other jurisdiction; (4) Making recommendations to the General Assembly focused on substantially increasing civic literacy and the a capacity of youth to obtain the requisite knowledge, skills, and practices to be civically informed members of the public. No later than May 31, 2014, the Task Force shall summarize its findings and recommendations in a report to the General Assembly. (2013 Ill. Laws 98-301)

### Florida

Beginning with the 2014-15 school year, a student must earn a passing score on the end-of-course assessment in civics education in order to pass the course and be promoted from the middle grades. The school principal of a middle school shall determine, in accordance with Florida State Board of Education rule, whether a student who transfers to the middle school and who has successfully completed a civics education course at the student's previous school must take an end-of-course assessment in civics education. (Fla. Stat. § 1008.22(3)(c)(2)(b))

During the 2012-13 school year, an end-of-course assessment in civics education shall be administered as a field test at the middle school level. During the 2013-14 school year, each student’s performance on the statewide, standardized end-of-course assessment in civics education shall constitute 30% of the student’s final course grade. (Fla. Stat. §1008.22(3)(c))

Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, the Florida Approved Courses and Tests Initiative shall be implemented to expand student choices in selecting high-quality online courses, including, but not limited to, massive open online courses (MOOCs) and instruction included for promotion or graduation. MOOCs may be authorized in the following subject areas: Algebra I, biology, geometry, and civics. (Fla. Stat. § 1003.499)

### Minnesota

A career pathways and technical education advisory task force is established to recommend to the legislature how to structurally redesign secondary and postsecondary education to: (1) Improve secondary and postsecondary outcomes for students and adult learners; (2) Align secondary and postsecondary education programs serving students and adult learners; (3) Align secondary and postsecondary education programs and Minnesota's workforce needs; and (4) Measure and evaluate the combined efficacy of Minnesota’s public K-12 and postsecondary education programs. Advisory task force members, in preparing these recommendations, must at least consider how to: “(8) provide graduates of two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions with the foundational skills needed for civic engagement, ongoing employment, and continuous learning.” (2013 Minn. Laws 116)

### Tennessee

Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, in conjunction with the social studies curriculum, all school districts shall implement a project-based assessment in civics at least once in grades 4 through 8, and at least once in grades 9

through 12. The assessments shall be developed by the school district and designed to measure the civics learning objectives contained in the social studies curriculum and to demonstrate understanding and relevance of public policy, the structure of federal, state, and local governments, as well as both the Tennessee and the U.S. constitutions.

- The department of education may seek the assistance of appropriate outside entities, including the Tennessee Center for Civic Learning and Engagement, to assist it with the implementation of any necessary professional development on the use of project-based assessments of civics learning.
- For the purposes of this section, “project-based” means an approach that engages students in learning essential knowledge and skills through a student-influenced inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks.
- School districts shall submit verification of implementation of this section to the department of education. (Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1028(d))

### **Texas**

The Expanded Learning Opportunities Council studies and makes recommendations concerning expanded learning opportunities for public school students. Such expanded learning opportunities may be provided by offering: (1) Rigorous coursework; (2) Mentoring; (3) Tutoring; (4) Physical activity; (5) Academic support; or (6) Educational enrichment in one or more subjects, including fine arts, civic engagement, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The Council shall focus on innovative, hands-on learning approaches that complement rather than replicate the regular school curriculum. (2013 Tex. Gen. Laws 531)

### **Utah**

By December 30 of each year, each school district and the State Charter School Board is required to submit to the lieutenant governor and the Commission on Civic and Character Education a report summarizing how civic and character education are achieved in the school district or charter schools through an integrated school curriculum and in the regular course of school work. (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-13-109)

Each year, the state board of education “shall report to the Education Interim Committee, on or before the October meeting, the methods used, and the results being achieved, to instruct and prepare students to become informed and responsible citizens through an integrated curriculum taught in connection with regular school work,” as statutorily required. (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-13-109(6))

### **Vermont**

All personalized learning plans required by the Flexible Pathways Initiative must “define the scope and rigor of academic and experiential opportunities necessary for a secondary student to complete secondary school successfully, attain postsecondary readiness, and be prepared to engage actively in civic life.” (Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 16 § 942(10))

### **Virginia**

After July 1, 2014, any individual licensed and endorsed to teach middle school civics or economics, or high school government or history, who is seeking licensure renewal must demonstrate “knowledge of Virginia history or state and local government by completing a module or professional development course specifically related to Virginia history or state and local government that has value of five professional development points.” (2013 Va. Acts ch. 726)

### **Washington**

The legislature finds that the “purpose of a high school diploma is to declare that a student is ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and is equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner.” (Wash. Rev. Code § 28A.230.090)

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<sup>1</sup> *The Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools* (Silver Spring: Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011) p. 41, <http://civicmission.s3.amazonaws.com/118/f0/5/171/1/Guardian-of-Democracy-report.pdf> (accessed August 12, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Baumann and Molly Ryan, *The Progress of Education Reform: The New Civics*, April 2013, p. 1, <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/06/96/10696.pdf> (accessed August 23, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Complete descriptions of the policies listed here can be found in the appendix and in the online database: [http://www.ecs.org/html/educationIssues/CitizenshipEducation/CitEdDB\\_intro.asp](http://www.ecs.org/html/educationIssues/CitizenshipEducation/CitEdDB_intro.asp)