

EDUCATING FOR AMERICAN ★ DEMOCRACY

STAKEHOLDER BRIEF FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY LEADERS

This brief is meant for **people who are active in the civic life of their communities**: nonprofit leaders, volunteers, local government officials, community organizers, and others who have a stake in how well residents work together to address the community's issues. If you are one of these people, you should care about civic education in your local schools. You need schools to help prepare and inspire the next generation to become civic leaders.

YOUR ADVOCACY IS IMPORTANT

Principals, district leaders, and other officials responsible for education report that adults hardly ever ask them about civics and history. Educational leaders rarely receive pressure or support to emphasize those disciplines. In contrast, educators receive constant pressure to raise test scores and graduation rates, and to prepare students for jobs.

Insofar as schools hear about civics, they mostly receive complaints about materials, assignments, or discussions that are perceived as controversial. They rarely receive encouragement to educate students to participate in controversial issue discussions.

When schools are held accountable for civic and history education (which happens only in some states), the main question is whether students know specific facts that are measured on standardized tests. Educators are rarely encouraged to teach skills for civic participation.

For these reasons, we badly need clear, positive, constructive, and sustained voices for history and civics in all communities. Local leaders are well-positioned to be the leading voices.

When talking to fellow members of your community, and especially those with influence over education, you may consider making these points, which are presented and justified in greater detail in the *EAD Roadmap*:

- ▶ **Strengthening** history and civic education is a strategy for preserving and improving America's constitutional democracy and for addressing specific deficits in our public life, such as hyper-partisanship and false information.
- ▶ **History** and civic education have been neglected.
- ▶ **Despite** deep disagreements in our society as a whole, the *EAD Roadmap* demonstrates that a consensus exists about the core topics and issues to study in history and civics. That consensus includes an agreement about the deep and worthy disagreements that young Americans should understand and learn to navigate.
- ▶ **All young people** deserve an excellent education in history and civics and a curriculum that connects to their own backgrounds and experiences.

THE CASE FOR HISTORY AND CIVIC EDUCATION



VISIT

www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org
to download a copy of the Roadmap.

For more specific information about what you can do, click on "Take Action," and look for the stakeholder brief that best matches your role. For comments or questions, please contact us at EAD@iCivics.org.

WHAT YOU SHOULD ASK

These are questions to consider asking school leaders in your community:

- ▶ Have you reviewed the quality, equity, and impact of history and civic education in our schools?
- ▶ Do you have a plan for strengthening civics and history education?
- ▶ Do curricula align with the themes of the *Roadmap*?
- ▶ Are teachers following the recommended pedagogical practices for civics and history?
- ▶ Are teachers prepared and supported to teach these disciplines?
- ▶ What do our youth think about history and civic education in their schools?
- ▶ How can we—adults from outside the school—help?

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN AND CANNOT DO

Schools are by no means the only institutions that educate young people about American history and civics. Families, neighborhoods, religious congregations, community groups, social movements, and all kinds of media (from classic literature to video games) also play powerful and sometimes valuable roles.

As an activist in your community, you may have strong beliefs about political issues. That is understandable and appropriate. However, it is worth acknowledging that schools play a somewhat different role. They must strive for a high degree of impartiality as well as philosophical and ideological diversity while emphasizing broad and lasting themes. By teaching American history and civics in a relatively impartial and academic way, schools complement groups that can be more activist. Schools can offer students valuable core knowledge and skills and an ability to discuss issues with people who strongly disagree. They can also ensure that all young people gain knowledge and skills for civic life.

Therefore, even if your own values do not align perfectly with the range of ideas and topics explored in schools, social studies educators need your support. Your support does not preclude constructive criticism when you perceive that certain valuable ideas are missing or distorted. A constructive conversation among community leaders, concerned parents, professional educators, and the students themselves can enrich and improve history and civic education and help preserve our republic.



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