

# EDUCATING FOR AMERICAN ★ DEMOCRACY

## STAKEHOLDER BRIEF FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

**T**he U.S. faces significant internal threats from polarization and misinformation, while also having an electorate poorly trained to meet the challenges of self-governing in a constitutional democracy.

According to a 2020 survey conducted by notable Republican pollster Frank Luntz, Americans of all political stripes see civic education as the most positive and impactful lever to strengthen national identity, drawing more bipartisan support than national service, limiting money in politics, and voting access by wide margins<sup>1</sup>.

**H**igh-quality, school-based K–12 history and civics for all learners is foundational to our shared civic strength and is enshrined in most state constitutions.

However, while 42 states require at least one civics course, too few incorporate proven pedagogical principles like classroom-based deliberation and decision-making, project-based learning, or media literacy<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, state social studies standards informing instruction in history and civics are either outdated or too general, lack content guidance, and fail to facilitate students' civic development.

Lackluster student performance in these subjects is thus predictable. On the most recent iteration of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) in Civics and U.S. History for 8th graders in 2018, only 24% and 15% of students demonstrated proficiency in these subjects, respectively. However, eighth graders whose social studies teachers spent at least three hours per week on the subject significantly outperformed peers on NAEP Civics compared to those with less instructional time<sup>3</sup>.

A healthy constitutional democracy requires a rising generation that desires to live in a democracy and has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for effective participation. Renewal of history and civics will require both respect for state autonomy and local diversity, as well as a harmonization of effort across all jurisdictions—local, tribal, state, and national. Success will depend on clear guidance for what should be learned coupled with local adaptation, state-level accountability strategies that support continuous improvement, and public and private investment in development of a corps of history and civics teachers.



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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](mailto:EAD@iCivics.org).

# THE ROADMAP TO EDUCATING FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

- ▶ **Was written** between October 2019 and March 2021, by an ideologically and demographically diverse national network of scholars, educators, and practitioners who synthesized expert judgment from the fields of history, political science, law, and education about the content and instructional strategies needed for excellent history and civics for all learners;
- ▶ **Lays out** a series of questions to be explored over the course of a K–12 education, and organizes the questions around a set of design challenges for educators;
- ▶ **Recommends** approaches to learning that: (1) motivate agency to sustain the republic; (2) narrate America’s plural, yet shared story; (3) simultaneously celebrate and critique compromise; (4) cultivate civic honesty and reflective patriotism; and (5) balance the chronological and the thematic;
- ▶ **Maintains** a consistent commitment to all learners to ensure that excellent history and civics are delivered equitably throughout the country.

## The policy implications of EAD include:

- ▶ **Setting** ambitious goals to ensure that all students have access to opportunities for excellent civic-learning opportunities
- ▶ **Adopting** social studies standards that align with EAD
- ▶ **Supporting** educator professional development by building networks across LEAs and by promoting pre-service civic learning
- ▶ **Requiring** EAD training as part of educator preparation or licensure requirements
- ▶ **Requiring** Civic Learning Plans from local education agencies
- ▶ **Publishing** Civic Learning Plans to allow comparisons and assessments of progress
- ▶ **Integrating** the Civic Learning Plan data within state accountability systems as a component of school performance indicators
- ▶ **Accrediting** schools for EAD excellence

## At the federal level, we are advocating two policies that states should participate in:

- ▶ **NAEP assessments** in history and civics should generate results for each state. (Today, the NAEP in history and civics only yield national results.)
- ▶ **A new Prince Hall Fellowship** modeled after the successful James Madison Fellowship program. Humanities and social sciences graduates—with recruitment directed energetically toward people of color—who have preparation in EAD as well as pedagogy would receive a stipend for the first five years in the profession to incentivize them to join the teaching profession.

*The Educating for American Democracy project is a cross-ideological effort, grounded in scholarship, that empowers local educational agencies to implement successful history and civic learning for all learners, and that helps rebuild America’s foundations for a healthy constitutional democracy.*

<sup>1</sup> CivXNow. 2020. “Civic Education Has Massive Cross-Partisan Appeal as a Solution to What Ails Our Democracy.” Available online: <https://www.civxnow.org/sites/default/files/resources/CivXNow%20infographic%20-%20Luntz%20polling%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Hansen, Michael, Mann Levesque, Elizabeth, Valant, John, and Diana Quintero. 2018 Brown Center Report on Civic Education: An inventory of state civics requirements. 2018. Available online: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/2018-brown-center-report-on-american-education-an-inventory-of-state-civics-requirements/>

<sup>3</sup> Heafner, Tina. 2020. “The Sky Is Not Falling, But We Need to Take Action.” *Social Education* 84 (4), pp 250–260.



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