Evidence-based Lessons for Building for a Better Democracy through Civic Education

INSIGHTS FROM OUR STUDY OF MASSACHUSETTS AND FROM 20 YEARS FOCUSED ON CIVIC EDUCATION

CIRCLE
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A 20-Year Legacy in Equitable K-12 Civic Learning
Pioneering Research: Proven Practices to Reduce Inequity in Civic Education

- Content & Concept Knowledge
- Current & Controversial Issue Discussions
- Simulations of Democratic Processes
- Student Voice in Schools
- Service learning and Action Civics
- Inquiry to Informed Action
- News Media Literacy
- Social Emotional Learning
- Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
- School Climate Reform
CIRCLE’s unique expertise in following and evaluating implementation of state-level civic education policy and revision of standards/frameworks:

- Florida
- Illinois
- Massachusetts

- Nonpartisan, evidence-based advice to various civic ed policy stakeholders in Washington and California
Many Lessons Learned

- **Collaboration**
  - Cross-sector, diverse partnerships
  - Bringing administrators on board
  - Distributed leadership; regional experts & network

- **Investment in Teachers**
  - High expectations and support for all
  - Explain why changes are important
  - Create space for mutual support
  - Excellent training - "Show, don't Tell"

- **Data for continuous improvements**

- "Civics is the Plate" - Civics is not an "add-on"
Civic Education in Massachusetts: Context

• Acts of 2018 Chapter 296: An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement
  • Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition
  • Civics Trust Fund
  • Student-Led Civics Project Requirement

• 2018 MA DESE HSS Framework & Civics Project Guidebook
New Framework Calls on Teachers to Ensure Students Have the Civic Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions to Thrive in Democracy

- **Practice Standards** follow inquiry arc from civic knowledge/skills/dispositions through informed action.
- **Guiding Principles** include:
  - Inclusive, critical, culturally responsive instruction (GP 2)
  - HSS instruction from PreK-12 (GP 3)
  - Interdisciplinary learning (GP 5)
  - Critical thinking (GP 6)
  - Social-emotional skills (GP 10)
Legislated Student-Led Projects that Emphasize: Inquiry, Systemic Impact, and Action

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student-led Civics Projects Pedagogical Principles</th>
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<tr>
<td>● Student-led</td>
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<td>● Project-based</td>
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<td>● Rooted in understanding systems impact</td>
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Civics Project Guidebook
October 2020
Civic Education in MA: Preliminary Findings Show Promising Signs of Equitable Implementation

Civics Trust Fund: Priorities Placed on Underserved Districts

HSS Framework Revision: Reflection of diversity, Stronger emphasis on Elementary grades

Teacher familiarity with policies and competency in applying practice standards did not vary by demographic makeup of district's student population

Implementation of practice standards and confidence much lower among elementary teachers
Teachers are Aware of the Framework; Few Know How it Directly Applies to their Instruction

❖ Educators value the type of Civics described in the HSS Framework
  • Generally, educators at all grade levels, district and school administrators express strong belief in inquiry-based civics education

❖ Only 2 in 5 teachers know how the HSS Framework affects their instruction
  • Overall, 96% have at least heard of it.
  • And another 1 in 5 of teachers have "heard of it but don’t know its details."
  • 28% of Elementary know how the HSS Framework could influence instruction vs 65% of MS and HS teachers

❖ Only 1 in 5 Middle School & High School teachers know about the Civics Project legislation and how it affects their instruction
Equity-focused Funding Priority Pays Off: No Difference in Awareness by (District-Level) Demographics

CIRCLE’s previous research shows there are disparities in civic learning opportunities but in this study there were no significant differences in levels of awareness of the HSS Framework and Civic Projects legislation when comparing groups of districts by:

- Geographic region
- % of enrolled students with economic disadvantage
- % of non-white students and white students
- % of enrolled students who are English Learners
Secondary Teachers Reported More Awareness and Implementation than Elementary Teachers

- More clear understanding of the HSS Framework and its application in classroom among secondary teachers than elementary teachers

- Two-thirds of middle and high school teachers are teaching civics in a required course (stand-alone or integrated in another course)
  - 28% of MS & HS teachers said they have implemented student-led civics projects

- In elementary school, modeling and teaching about being "good citizens" may be happening, but there's less teaching about concepts and content related to civics such as the principles of the U.S. Constitution
  - Only 8% Elementary teachers say they teach social studies 4+ hours a week; 38% teach it 2-3 hours per week
I’m very, very cautious with teaching civil rights because of all the unrest in the country [at this time]. I was going to videotape all my lessons like I’d done earlier, but I was afraid that if I did that and I said even something remotely off the cuff it’s now out in the video world. So I scaled it back and did a bunch of worksheets and stuff that I had which was kind of lame. But I also didn’t want to offend anybody, or have my name in the paper for, 'Mr. X said this.'
However, 42% of Teachers have NEVER Received Civics-Focused PD
Professional Development & Teacher Confidence Predict Civic Teaching Competency

- Government and Institutions Content
- Inquiry
- Real-World Learning
- Interdisciplinary Learning
- Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
- Discussions
- Student-Centered Classroom Climate
### PD is Correlated with Different Domains of Civic Teaching Competency in Elementary vs. Secondary Teachers

#### Elementary Teachers
- **PD is correlated with:**
  - Civil discourse/Discussion
  - Culturally Responsive teaching
- **PD was NOT correlated with:**
  - Core civics content
  - Inquiry + informed Action
  - Information literacy

#### Middle and High School Teachers
- **PD was correlated with:**
  - Content
  - Inquiry
  - Student-centered
  - Interdisciplinary teaching
- **PD was NOT correlated with:**
  - Democratic Classroom climate + Controversial Issue Discussion
  - Culturally Responsive teaching
Elementary Teachers Feel Less Supported and Prepared to integrate Civics than Secondary Teachers

- Too much pressure to incorporate other content**: 88% Elementary-Grade Teachers, 53% Secondary-Grade Teachers
- Lack of enough time**: 85% Elementary-Grade Teachers, 69% Secondary-Grade Teachers
- Lack of access to training to develop skills in this area**: 79% Elementary-Grade Teachers, 44% Secondary-Grade Teachers
- Lack of enough resources**: 79% Elementary-Grade Teachers, 54% Secondary-Grade Teachers
- Lack of enough information**: 75% Elementary-Grade Teachers, 34% Secondary-Grade Teachers
“There was a big discussion about the [Black Lives Matter] protests that are happening right now. A few students did a project on a timeline that’s the history of racism in the United States, when it started, all the events that had happened from 1600s to now.

There’s a big protest that happened in the community that I work in, so many of the students were involved in that and they were very interested in how [racism has] been going on for so long and still happening now.

They came away with [the idea] that history is continuing to repeat itself. It was fascinating. We talked a lot about what they could do going forward. How could they make sure that this doesn’t continue and what steps could they take?”
Recommendation: Continue to Prioritize Equitable Implementation & PD across Massachusetts

- Equitable Implementation of HSS Framework + Student-led Civics Project
- Collaboration b/w schools + teachers
- Sustained support to teachers + administrators
- Pre-service training
- Equitable PD
- PD aligned to framework + standards
- PD that meets teachers where they are
- CIRCLE
Recommendation: Invest in Professional Development & Curricular Resources

Professional Development

- 42% of all teachers have NEVER had Civics-focused PD
- “More equitable classroom, more equitable curriculum”
- Interdisciplinary Teaching; Social-Emotional Learning; Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Curricular & Instructional Resources

- The critical role of PD providers
- Developmentally appropriate, especially for elementary and middle school
- Explicit connect to the HSS Framework & Civics Project Guidebook
Recommendation: Teachers Need More Support for Civic Projects through PD & Peers

**Student-led Civic Project Support**
- More training on how to implement projects
- Civic Project exemplars

**Support from Peers**
- Learning and collaborating with fellow teachers is really important to teachers
Recommendation: Educate MA Administrators & Provide Incentives

Support & Educate School & District Administrators

Incentive Structures & Creative Accountability Systems
Questions?
Thank You!
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