

CIVICS -101-



“ Knowledge of our system of government, our rights and responsibilities as citizens, is not handed down through the gene pool... it must be taught and we have much work to do!”

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

STARTLING STATISTICS

23% of eighth graders attained PROFICIENT STATUS IN CIVICS.

18% of eighth graders attained PROFICIENT IN U.S. HISTORY.

27% of eighth graders attained PROFICIENT IN GEOGRAPHY.

36% of survey respondents COULD NAME ALL THREE branches of government.

35% of survey respondents COULDN'T NAME ANY branch of government.

Only 19% of Americans agree that they TRUST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT all or most of the time.

37% HAD LITTLE TRUST OR CONFIDENCE IN THEIR STATES.

Sources: NAEP 2014 Civics Assessment, Gallup, Annenberg Public Policy Center

WHY IS CIVIC EDUCATION IMPORTANT?

- **It is fundamental to effective government and citizen engagement.** Civic education equips citizens with the knowledge and capabilities to become community, state, national and international leaders.
- **People don't trust what they don't understand.** Functional democracy requires trust between citizens and their elected officials, which is more important than ever in today's highly polarized society.
- **Public schools serve an important role** in helping young people gain the skills and knowledge they need to participate in civic activities.
- **Today's students may not vote or run for public office** without understanding civic education fundamentals, putting future participation of citizens at risk.
- **Civic education can help build skills needed in the workforce,** such as understanding the perspectives of others, cooperation in groups and concern for other countries.



Why is Civics Being Ignored?



Education reforms, testing requirements and teacher incentives emphasize STEM curriculum.

With a limited number of hours in a school day, priorities are being placed elsewhere.



WHAT SHOULD COMPREHENSIVE CIVICS KNOWLEDGE INCLUDE?

- 1 Role/importance of state and local governments.
- 2 Key aspects of state policymaking (budgeting, state spending, etc).
- 3 The role of the executive branch and the courts.
- 4 How state and local government impacts the lives of students.

CHALLENGES FACING STATES

ABSENCE OF COMPETENT TEACHERS

Teachers often only receive one single American government course that is federally focused. Teachers aren't taught about state governments.

POLITICAL DIVISIONS

The growing partisan divide in the country has lead teachers to avoid talking about political issues and controversial topics with their students.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES from The Civic Mission of Schools

- Classroom instruction in government, history, economics, law, geography.
- Discussion of current events and controversial issues important to the lives of the students.
- Service-learning linked to formal curriculum and classroom instruction to promote public policy solutions to real world problems.
- Extracurricular activities that involve students in school/community projects outside of the classroom.
- School governance that involves student participation.
- Simulations of the democratic process.

LACK OF ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS

It is difficult to write a textbook about 50 different entities operating separately. It is also more difficult to sift through today's news to find up-to-date, non-partisan coverage of state government.

SCARCE RESOURCES

There is a need for greater assessment, teacher training and materials for students, but these all cost time and money that schools find difficult to allocate to civics.