CIVIC EDUCATION:
A Key to Trust in Government

By Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene, CSG senior fellows
People generally don’t trust what they do not understand, and the same can be said of government in the United States. A 2015 study conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that Americans have a near all-time low level of trust in the federal government, with only 19 percent of respondents agreeing that they trust the federal government all or most of the time, and a 2016 Gallup poll indicated 37 percent of Americans surveyed had little trust or confidence in their states.

Pair this with the fact that only 36 percent of adults surveyed by the Annenberg Public Policy Center in 2014 could name all three branches of government, with 35 percent of participants unable to name any branch of government.

The most recent results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that only 23 percent of eighth graders tested as “proficient” in civics. Of the eight subject areas tested, only U.S. history fared worse, with 18 percent of eighth graders demonstrating proficiency.

Civic education stands at the core of what it takes to equip citizens with the knowledge and willingness to become community, state and national leaders. Without such civic fundamentals, the youth of today may not vote or run for public office tomorrow, and the future participation of citizens in America’s grand democratic experiment is at risk.

Public schools serve an important role in helping young people gain the skills and knowledge they need to participate in civic activities. Despite its importance, the quality of civic education in many states is declining. Part of this decline can be attributed to increases in standardized testing, which tends to emphasize science, technology, engineering and mathematics—or STEM—subjects, which are regarded as key to preparing students for college and career.

In addition to being essential to the protection of democracy, however, civic education also contributes to the building of skills students need to be successful in the 21st century workplace. A 2015 analysis conducted by the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools found that civic education in any form increased skills related to understanding the perspectives of others, cooperation in groups and concern for other countries.

I am pleased to share this new report from The Council of State Governments on civic education. It serves as a continuation of conversations that began several years ago among CSG’s leadership as they wrestled with the role of the states in our federal system under the CSG Focus on Federalism initiative. The co-chairs of that effort—CSG 2013 national chair, Alaska state Sen. Gary Stevens, and 2014 CSG national chair, Tennessee Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris—guided CSG down the broad path of advancing civility in government and advocating for increased civic education in the states.

The knowledge and skills obtained through civic education are critical to participating in the democratic system. The choice to invest—or not to invest—in civic education has a significant impact on our states and economies, but perhaps more important is the impact such an investment has on the future civic engagement of the next generation of Americans and those most vulnerable to having their voices lost within the political process.

David Adkins
Executive Director/CEO
The public’s sense that government isn’t serving them efficiently and effectively is particularly strong when it comes to their understanding of the federal government. But that’s little solace to those working in state governments, which are similarly targets of widespread mistrust. According to a September 2016 Gallup poll, some 37 percent of Americans surveyed had little trust or confidence in their states.¹

There are a number of reasons why this is true, including the kind of vicious electioneering that fills the television airwaves, and the growth of various movements dedicated to attacking, rather than improving, the very existence of government.

But one more factor that is particularly troublesome, given the fact that it can be resolved, has been the decline in civic education; particularly that which focuses on the states and localities. How, indeed, can anyone trust a powerful entity that they don’t understand? It’s a basic element of human nature that ignorance leads inexorably to mistrust.

The experts agree:

- Gerald Wright, professor and chair of the Department of Political Science at Indiana University: “Students are overly cynical now. To be effective citizens they need to understand how the system operates, and there is too much of a tendency just to say ‘Aw, they’re all corrupt.’ And they won’t participate and it takes them out of the game and then it leaves the space open for those who want to get in the game for their own self-interest.”²

- Randall Reid, director of performance initiatives at the International City/County Management Association: “Becoming a better civic creature helps you understand the place you’re in.”³

- Ted McConnell, executive director of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools: “Civics education is important because it’s the only way the vast majority of people know how our government works. It has cross benefits in that it helps develop skills like critical thinking that are essential to workplace competency.”⁴

The state of the art

Despite its importance, the quality of civic education in America, in many states, is abysmal. Although there have been a number of initiatives to bolster the field, the most recent results from the
National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, show only 23 percent of eighth graders attaining “proficient” status in civics. Of eight subject areas, only U.S. history showed worse results—with 18 percent of eighth graders showing proficiency.6

In 2014, the Annenberg Public Policy Center released a survey that tells a particularly gloomy tale of the state of knowledge about government in the United States. Of the 1,416 respondents, only 36 percent could name all three branches of government and 35 percent were unable to name any branch of government.6

At least 40 states have a requirement for a course in American government or civics.7 The remaining 10 have no requirements for any civic education. But even the states with a requirement don’t guarantee that young people are getting the necessary background they should be. Requirements for coursework have minimal impact unless they are accompanied by strong teacher development, rigorous standards, active learning and a broad-based civic curriculum.

One of the significant problems in civic education today is that the attention to state and local government has been squeezed. Most civics/political science courses in K-12 schools and colleges are focused on the federal government—not state and local government, said Dick Simpson, professor of political science at the University of Illinois at Chicago.8 They are also focused on government structure—the number of Supreme Court justices, the different branches of government, the two houses of Congress and so on. “You learn about the federal government and not about things you can actually affect like the city council and your state legislature,” Simpson said.

In a 2013 survey of teachers, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, or CIRCLE, overseen by Peter Levine, associate dean of research at Tuft University’s Jonathan Tisch College of Civic Life, found that 86 percent said the major emphasis or entire focus of the civics courses they taught was the U.S. Constitution.9

This hasn’t always been the case. Until the early 1970s, the vast majority of public schools devoted a reasonable chunk of time to state and local government. But that has waned. California, for example, used to have a half a semester course in high school devoted to the study of state government. “But that went away a long time ago,” said McConnell.

A 2014 study of time prioritization in elementary school classrooms noted that “research has consistently indicated that social studies receive the lowest priority.”10 In Illinois, as advocates of a required high school civic education course were gathering data, they talked to many teachers who said social studies in general—including civics—were getting no more than 20 minutes of instruction a week.11 That averages out to four minutes a day, far less time than most young people spend walking to and from classes.

“Presidents are visible and big international and national events make the front page of the newspaper,” said Tom Carsey, professor of political science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. “But if you explain to students and their parents that most of their daily lives are shaped by policies at the state and local level, then that becomes more relevant and exciting.” He said that making the connection to the impact of state and local government on students’ lives is easy, given a K-12 or college setting and the fact that students likely get to school on state or local roads and that their parents pay state and local taxes.12

“What should civic education include?”

Obviously, there is no good one-size-fits-all formula for a complete and thorough civic education program in K-12 or higher education. But experts cite at least four common elements that should be included in order for the curriculum to be complete and to help foster a better understanding of and trust in government.

• An overview of the broad role of state and local governments;
• The role of state and local governments as they relate to the federal system;
• Key aspects of state policymaking—outlining the importance of budgets, state-local relations, and major areas of state spending such as K-12 education, Medicaid, transportation, corrections and higher education—and the role of the executive branch, legislature and the courts; and
• (Perhaps most important) How state and local government touches the lives of citizens, including students themselves.

Teenagers may tend to think that government is remote, that governmental decision-making is carried out by a group of older adults they have never met making decisions that may or may not have a direct—or, at least, a perceived direct—impact on their lives. Sue Crawford, a political science professor and Nebraska state legislator, makes a point of teaching her students how legislative decisions may affect their careers and professional choices. “I’m communicating how critical the state government is in determining who gets to be in a profession, where the boundaries of the profession are, scope of practice fights,” she said.

She said it’s important to engage students, particularly at the college level, and help them “in understanding what’s involved in being in their (planned) profession. The state has a key role in (occupational) requirements and licenses. That’s one piece that people don’t know.”
Why the squeeze?

Tufts’ Levine believes that in general civic education has been undergoing a difficult period largely because of education reforms and testing requirements that have tended to emphasize the component parts of a science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM, curriculum. Incentives for teachers are very heavily geared to teaching STEM. Summer enrichment programs are generally STEM-based. So, as a result, just as music and art education have been placed on the back burner, so has civics.

Shawn Healy, a civic learning scholar at the Robert R. McCormick Foundation in Illinois, pointed out that, notwithstanding the trends toward math and science, there will always be a battle over how the hours in a limited school day are allocated. He recalled that there was considerable opposition to the 2015 civic education requirement in Illinois among rural schools that saw new civic requirements as a potential barrier to agricultural studies that farm-related organizations wanted to see in the classroom. “In lots of rural parts of the state agricultural education is big and they came out strongly against us,” said Healy. Just as civics advocates worry about being crowded out from a focus on science and math, advocates for a more agricultural focus worry about being crowded out by civic education.14

Hope for a change in momentum

Although the status quo for civic education is still worrisome, there has been recognition over the last decade or so that civic education is of critical value. As a result, there has been a growing focus on increasing the attention paid to educating America’s young people in the ways their government works. But these shifts are coming slowly and could take years or decades to lead to significant change.

At the top of the list of initiatives has been an effort to step up attention to social studies. This focus has been encouraged through the Common Core State Standards initiative and through the development of the C3 social studies framework, which includes civics, economics, geography and history. Developed in 2013 by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Council for the Social Studies, the C3 framework is also supported by a number of other organizations.15 It’s an integrated history-social studies approach with high quality standards and an emphasis on the importance of civics and social studies.16

This framework recognizes the need to move toward a much more active learning approach and a focus on civic engagement. The underlying notion is that simply learning how the government works and how politics works is one step, but to make it interesting and memorable, you also need action. “Just a dry set of facts is not sufficient,” said Simpson.17

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools has identified a group of practices that can improve the civic understanding of young people. This includes student-centered participatory classroom activities rather than reading and memorizing information from a textbook, participation and discussion about student government, and involvement in community or political projects such as working through the city council and neighborhood organizations to turn a vacant lot into a neighborhood garden.18

Also recommended are the kinds of games and simulations that are available through iCivics, which was founded by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor in 2009 “to restore civic education in our nation’s schools.”19

YouTube videos also show how games are used in the classroom, as in a Pop-Up Game Show at the Griffin Middle School in Tallahassee, Florida.20

Project-based learning and action civics ensure that students get a real laboratory experience of being able to attack a problem and effect change. There are many opportunities at the local level to practice the skills to do that, said Marshall Croddy, president of the Constitutional Rights Foundation in California.21 So, for example, creating a class project aimed at persuading a city council to put up a stop sign at a busy intersection can be far more useful than studying a flow chart that shows the way public meetings can influence action and policy.

The emphasis in lower grades and high school is on simulations, speakers and internships. “It has a more active component,” said Simpson. It’s not just learning about how laws are passed in the abstract sense. “If we can get a student interested in passing a law, they’ll learn the rules of the legislative body.”22

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**Illinois Civic Education Bill**

Signed into law by Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner in August 2015, House Bill 4025 mandated civic education as a high school requirement for the state's incoming freshmen students, beginning in the 2016-2017 school year.

Key provisions of the law include:

- A requirement for future Illinois high school students to complete a stand-alone, semester-long course in civics;
- A mandate for course content to include instruction on government institutions, current and controversial issues discussions, service learning, and simulations of democratic processes; and
- An authorization for school districts to use private funding available for the purpose of providing civic education.
Despite a growing emphasis on active learning, it is still rare. In CIRCLE’s 2013 survey of teachers, only 13 percent included community service in their civics curriculum and a smaller percentage included participation in a political campaign or “nonpartisan election-related activities.”

A 2015 effort by Campus Compact, a national coalition of 1,100 college and universities, promotes more civic education and engagement at the college level. University presidents attending a meeting in Boston in 2015 signed a pledge to review the civic engagement programs of their campuses and create civic action plans. The Higher Learning Commission, which accredits colleges, also is reinforcing attention to civics as a priority.

The idea of Campus Compact, said Andrew Seligsohn, its president, is to facilitate higher education’s role in supporting a healthy democracy. It started many years ago with a commitment to promoting volunteerism. In recent years, there’s been a much clearer intention to build the student experience beyond a service ethic to a citizenship ethic. Otherwise, students don’t fully grasp how the issues they are interested in—helping the homeless, for example—connect to public policy.

There is also an effort to connect primary and secondary education in civics to college learning to create a coherent series of learning opportunities. “One of our strategic priorities is in partnerships with people involved in K-12 education to promote student learning and civic success across the education continuum,” said Seligsohn. The idea is to get K-12 students to undertake public service projects and connect them with college students, faculty and public offices for shared learning.

With a great deal of competition for student time, one of the stickiest questions for legislators and other state decision makers is how to promote the adoption of civics as a core part of the curriculum. The question is also how to set standards that provide flexibility and freedom to teachers while at the same time ensuring that the topic is taken seriously throughout the school system.

**Some bright spots**

Illinois was one of the states that most recently passed a requirement to teach civics in high school. In August 2015, Gov. Bruce Rauner signed HB 4025 (Public Act 99-0434) into law. Following an amendment that affected timing, the requirement started to apply to incoming first year high school students in the 2016-2017 school year. Notably, the law didn’t just require a civics course; it embedded best practice elements, as well. “They have to engage in conversations on current and controversial issues in class, service learning and simulation of democratic processes,” said the McCormick Foundation’s Healy. “That’s written into the statute. That’s a huge win. That’s what I’m most proud about.”

The new emphasis on civic education in Illinois came from a one-two punch, said Healy. The number one recommendation of a legislative task force devoted to the civics topic was to pass a law requiring a high school civics course. The second recommendation was to update state standards. “Over the course of a year, we worked with the (Illinois State) Board of Education to write new social study standards that are very civic-education friendly,” he said.

Adhering to strong social studies standards also has been a pivotal part of New York’s approach. New York state education law requires instruction in citizenship and patriotism and the State Social Studies Learning Standards include an understanding of the governmental systems of the United States and other nations; as our media outlets become more diverse, a strong background and understanding in our government and public policy is all that more important.”


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**Florida’s Justice Sandra Day O’Connor Civics Education Act**


Key provisions of the law require:

- The inclusion of civic education content in the reading portion of the language arts curriculum for all grade levels;
- The completion by students of at least a one-semester civic education class in order to be promoted from middle grades;
- The administration of a statewide end-of-course assessment in civic education at the middle school level;
- Instruction on the roles and responsibilities of the federal state and local governments; structures and functions of the three branches of government; and the significance of historic documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution; and
- Inclusion of civic education end-of-course assessment data in determining school grades.
Signed into law by President Barack Obama in December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and replaced No Child Left Behind. In addition to reforming academic assessment, accountability and standards, ESSA also authorized new funding streams for American history and civic education. ESSA authorized federal funding for:

• Presidential and congressional academies for American history and civics to provide history and civics teacher workshops and student education programs;
• Grants for local education agencies to develop, implement and strengthen programs that teach traditional American history, civics, economics, geography or government education; and
• Grants that support innovation and research in teaching American history and civics.

American History and Civics Academies Grant Programs

Authorized by ESSA, the American History and Civics Academies Grant Program supports the establishment of Presidential Academies for Teachers of American History and Civics to provide workshops and training for both veteran and new teachers of American history and civics. The program also supports the establishment of Congressional Academies for Students of American History and Civics for high school students to develop a broader and deeper understanding of these subjects. For more information on applications and award schedules, visit innovation.ed.gov.

the United States Constitution; the basic civic values of American constitutional democracy; and the roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship, including avenues of participation.”

In addition, the New York state Board of Regents has required the passage of a one-semester class, Participation in Government, for high school graduation. This class has six units covering government structures, obligations of citizenship, voting, running for office, public policy and civic rights.

“Our state has always recognized the importance of having a knowledgeable citizenry,” said New York state Sen. Carl L. Marcellino, chair of the Senate Education Committee and past chair of The Council of State Governments. “Our Participation in Government classes provide our seniors with the information and skills to understand our local, state and national governments, and to make informed decisions. As our media outlets become more diverse, a strong background and understanding in our government and public policy is all that more important.”

Perhaps the state that has gone furthest in embracing civic education is Florida. Its effort got off the ground with a 2007 meeting convened by former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham, who also served as governor of Florida, and former U.S. Rep. Louis Frey. Together, they released a white paper, which made the case that the state’s below-average voting participation and civic engagement could be addressed through a greater focus on civic learning in schools. A 2009 speech to a joint session of the state Legislature by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor helped to build enthusiasm and in 2010, the Justice Sandra Day O’Connor Civics Education Act (CHAPTER 2010-48 Committee Substitute for House Bill No. 105) was passed.

The act required civics content to be integrated into English and language arts standards in every grade from kindergarten through high school and includes a full-year course in seventh-grade. An important feature of Florida’s approach is a rigorous seventh grade test. A sample test can be found on the Florida Department of Education website.
The test was first given in 2013 and passing scores among test takers have risen from 61 percent to 68 percent in the 2015-2016 school year. In addition, the percentage of seventh graders in the highest performing category is increasing while the proportion of students in the lowest performing category is decreasing. “The evidence points to a systematic improvement in teaching and student learning outcomes,” said Doug Dobson, executive director of the Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government, a partner of the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship, or FJCC. The FJCC is funded by the state Legislature to provide support for teachers and students in implementing the Sandra Day O’Connor Act at the K-12 level.

Challenges and potential solutions

While there’s strong momentum for improving civics education, a number of obstacles stand in the way.

An absence of competent teachers

One of the biggest gaps in civics education is teacher training and development. While teacher education programs often include a required course in American government and politics, these courses are almost always focused on the national level.

Nebraska state Sen. Sue Crawford noted that this basic American government course is often “the only political science or government course that people who teach get.” The federal/national focus of this course reinforces the idea that only the federal government is important. “This is what our teachers are learning,” she said.

Providing more training, however, requires resources, which are scarce. “The amount that has been spent for teacher professional development has been minimal,” said Croddy. “Something at the state level which would provide funding either through the state budget or the state education budget for support of that kind of teacher professional development or evaluation is really needed.”

At the federal level, for a long time programs in support of civics received enthusiastic verbal support, but little financial support. The situation has brightened recently with the signing of the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. The act authorizes a limited amount of grant funding for teacher development programs, as well as for efforts to expand evidence-based practices, to innovate and to assess what’s working. The availability of grants through the American History & Civics Academics Grants Program was announced in the spring with applications due during the summer of 2016.

Even with funding, getting teachers trained statewide is a challenge that requires multiple partnerships, creative thinking and considerable effort.

When Florida’s program started in 2013, 3,000 teachers had to transition from teaching world history or geography in seventh grade to teaching civics. “Many were not well prepared to do that,” said Dobson.

In the first year, $400,000 was provided by the Legislature to get civics education rolling. With these dollars and additional amounts in subsequent years, the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship and the Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government have worked intensively to provide teacher preparation all around the state and to develop substantial website resources. This includes teacher content and professional development materials that help teachers prepare the year-long curriculum for middle school civics.

The university also worked with Miami-Dade County Public Schools to create “Civics in a Snap” resources for younger grades—ideas for integrating short 15 to 20 minute bites of civics into lesson plans. A new student review website, developed with Escambia County Schools in the western part of Florida, provides readings, videos and other instructional videos and is heavily used by students.

Tennessee Civics Portfolio Assessment

In 2012, the Tennessee General Assembly passed Public Chapter 1036, which required school districts to assess students in civics at least once in grades four through eight, and at least once in grades nine through 12. Implementation of the law began in the 2012–2013 school year.

According to a February 2013 legislative brief by the Tennessee Office of Research and Education Accountability:

- The legislation represented the first time Tennessee required an assessment for civics.
- The new civics assessments were to be developed and implemented by school districts rather than by vendors according to state-determined specifications, and were required to be project-based—involving student-driven projects that related to civics instruction but reflected a real-world application.
With an ongoing and very troubled Illinois budget situation, the civic learning initiative in that state relied on the McCormick Foundation and other private sources, which provided $1.4 million worth of professional development for teachers to help them meet the new civic education requirement.

These resources have helped the state develop a network of organizations to provide teacher training and curriculum development. Online courses prepare mentors to go into individual schools, provide presentations and otherwise help local programs develop. The Illinois program also has involved the CIRCLE initiative at Tufts University to assess its workshops.

In addition, Illinois is working with the Golden Apples Scholars program to focus on recruiting teachers from disadvantaged populations and injecting civics into their summer training program. Chicago-based universities with expertise in service learning also are working with K-12 teachers on the service learning aspect of this.

Sharp political divisions

The intensely partisan environment nationwide has led some teachers to avoid talking about political issues with their students. While most teachers say they are supported by their principals or other administrators in discussing controversial topics, in the 2013 CIRCLE survey of teachers, 25 percent said they believed that parents or other adults would object to political discussions in the classroom.

The key here is not to avoid controversial subjects but to make sure presentations on controversial subjects are balanced and that teachers are not ideologues who sway the conversation. It is also important to help students learn how to discuss public issues with civility and how to sort fact from fiction. In CIRCLE’s 2013 survey of teachers, only 42 percent of respondents “practiced how to discuss public issues with civility on a regular basis,” and only 39 percent knew how to find the resources they needed “to teach students how to sort fact from fiction in a digital age.”

While intense partisanship may have cut off political dialogue in some schools, it also underlines the need to have such discussions in the first place. “What teachers do with respect to discussing politics is even more critical because of polarization,” said Healy. “Research tells us that schools are some of the most heterogeneous environments we ever will occupy. On top of that, you have trained professionals with expertise in facilitating the conversations.”

Lack of accessible materials—including those in the media

According to Indiana University’s Gerald Wright, for the public as a whole, access to non-partisan, up-to-date coverage of state government is diminishing. Not only has there been a big decrease in the number of reporters covering statehouses, “legislators have told me that those who are doing the coverage are younger and less experienced,” he said. “It used to be the prized beat—the person who really understood the issues and the candidates would get a lot of ink. Now it’s not considered a desirable beat.”

Beyond information that can be garnered in the press, there’s an understandable logistical obstacle to providing textbooks about state governments. If you’re producing a textbook about the federal government, there’s one, albeit complex and multifaceted, entity that you’re covering. If you write about states, you have 50 different sets of information for 50 different markets.

Crawford offers a suggestion: “We’ve talked about the creation of some kind of supplement for that American government class.

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Washington Legislative Scholar Program

Washington's Legislative Scholar Program offers teachers of social studies, history, government and civics from across the state an opportunity to learn first-hand about the state legislative process and the ways in which the Legislature and the state Supreme Court interact.

The interactive program equips teachers with valuable resources and ideas to teach civics in their classrooms through:

- Meetings with legislators, state Supreme Court justices, lobbyists and other policymakers;
- Training on how the three branches of government interact;
- Engagement with public and nonprofit civic education organizations;
- An interactive simulated committee hearing; and
- Development of curricula about state government.
Instructors purchase the big fat textbook,” but they could also purchase one or two supplements focusing on (their) individual states.\textsuperscript{45}

The public demand for transparency has made it easier to find information about states online, but there is a great deal of variation in how easy it is to find information on budgets, bills, hearings, or easy-to-understand results measures or evaluations that focus on state performance. “States could go a long way toward making it more interesting to study them if they made it easy to search and find bills under consideration, or to find budget data, not only this year, but in the past,” said Carsey.\textsuperscript{46}

At the end of this paper are some examples of states that stand out for the way they present information and the details they provide to the public about how government works.

The need for more assessment

One of the challenges for this field is developing mechanisms to assess and evaluate the impact of civic initiatives. “I would love it if states would research what works,” said Tufts’ Peter Levine.

Of course, this takes time and money. One aspect of assessment focuses specifically on students and the impact of classes on them. In addition, it’s important to know what teaching methods work best and ultimately, how significant an impact these efforts have on building civic engagement down the road.

Tennessee has made steps in this direction with a portfolio assessment, in which high school seniors demonstrate what they’ve learned through written and audio-visual materials. This includes documentation of community projects that civic courses may have spawned. This effort is promising, but under-funded, Levine said.

His group is heavily involved in assessment and is working with states on figuring out better ways to measure progress. The Illinois program is using CIRCLE to assess its teacher development workshops. Florida has entered into a research and evaluation partnership with CIRCLE, using a student attitude and engagement survey to measure short-term effects of civic instruction. Campus Compact is working with the Educational Testing Service to develop ways to measure the impact of civic education at the post-secondary level.

In general, more time is needed before any longitudinal studies can determine the impact of current civic education initiatives on civic engagement in adulthood.

Civic education without the teachers

Not all routes to improved civics are founded in the traditional teacher-student relationship. For example, a number of states and local governments have budget simulation tools on their websites. These have the potential to teach people of all ages how a budget is formed in a hands-on way. On California’s budget simulation website, a headline asks: “How Will You Balance California’s Budget?”\textsuperscript{47}

The opening text likely would resonate with legislators all over the U.S. “What should California do to plan for long-term pension and retiree health care costs? How much should be invested in programs that were cut during the recession? What can the state do to make revenues more stable?”\textsuperscript{48}

Many legislative websites also offer pages designed to engage young people, explain how decisions are made and provide some entertainment in the process. Iowa, for example, has a prominent tab on the main page of the Legislature’s website that offers “Resources and Civics Education.”\textsuperscript{49}

Resources include short pieces on how a bill becomes a law and what legislators do, a few educational games, a map of the week and a good deal of information about visiting the Iowa Capitol, including a virtual tour.

In Nebraska, a section of the website for students and teachers offers a history of the unicameral Legislature, information on lawmaking, and a list of specific student-oriented programs.\textsuperscript{50} In addition, there is a unicameral kids program designed for fourth graders, information about the state’s Unicameral Youth Legislature, a policy development exercise, and simulations of committee hearings and floor debates.

Many civic education organizations encourage legislators to visit K-12 classrooms or campuses that have civic courses so they can speak, in first person, about how their government really works from their perspective. For example, the National Conference of State Legislators provides resources on its website to help legislators who are visiting classrooms.\textsuperscript{51} Unfortunately, the funding for that program has dwindled over time.\textsuperscript{52}

“If citizens can see an elected official in the flesh, (they can see) that they’re not corrupt and they’re not monsters,” said Wright.\textsuperscript{53} Research in Florida shows the impact of visits by local or state officials. The greatest impact comes from participating in a community service project. But even one visit from a local or state official has a significant impact, based on test score data collected by the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship.

North Carolina’s Carsey suggested that institutes that help train new legislators could also provide lectures to legislators about how to communicate what they do to young people. “These are skills that can be learned,” said Carsey. “A little bit of training might not just give legislators some tips but also a little more confidence.”\textsuperscript{54}

Another way to involve legislators is through civic action projects. The Constitutional Rights Foundation showcases ways in which young people have engaged in their communities. “What we found very helpful is to bring politicians and legislators and government officials into the process helping the students understand how to make change in a positive, proactive way,” said Croddy. “We have the showcases and we invite politicians and legislators and work with the groups, critique the approaches and offer suggestions.”

A collection of 53 civic action projects from the foundation is available on YouTube. These projects cover student work on such topics as gentrification, body cameras for police, underage drinking and animal rights.\textsuperscript{55}

Students “are required to reach out to public officials,” said Croddy. “There’s a whole web of opportunities for young people to interact. You can’t do high-quality civic action unless you interact with the people who are charged with the public policy function. You learn through that process.”\textsuperscript{56}
Additional Resources

There are multiple organizations that are involved with civic education and provide resources that are useful in promoting greater knowledge and understanding of how government works at all levels.

Key national organizations and resources

**American Association of Colleges and Universities** has several publications on the civic education/engagement topic, including “Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future,” by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement and “Student and Institutional Engagement in Political Life.”
https://www.aacu.org/crucible
https://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/2015/fall

**The American Bar Association’s Division for Public Education** supports public understanding of law and its societal role, utilizing classroom resources, holding special events and training teachers. Work takes place through a network of law-related education coordinators, established through state bar associations.
http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education.html

**American Legion Boys State and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State** provide programs “for teaching how government works while developing leadership skills and an appreciation for the rights of a citizen.” Their summer programs provide participants with the chance to create and participate in a working government.
http://222.boysandgirlsstate.org/

**American Political Science Association** provides resources on civic education and engagement.
http://www.apsanet.org/RESOURCES/For-Faculty/Civic-Education-Engagement

**America’s Legislators Back to School program** provides free materials geared to all grade levels to support legislators who visit their state’s classrooms.

**Annenberg Classroom: Best Civic Sites for Teachers** provides its own list of resources, including various sites that supply lesson plans, access to historical documents and strategies to engage young people.
http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/page/best-civics-sites-for-teachers

**Campus Compact** is a coalition of nearly 1,100 colleges and universities dedicated to campus-based civic engagement and to helping colleges and universities educate students “for lives of citizenship.”
http://compact.org/

**Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, or CIRCLE**, is based at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life. It has focused on research into youth civic engagement, particularly with regard to young people who are “marginalized or disadvantaged in political life.”
http://civicyouth.org/

**Center for Civic Education** is dedicated to “promoting an enlightened and responsible citizenry” in the United States and other countries. It also provides links to other organizations with an emphasis on civic learning and citizenship.
http://www.civiced.org/resources/civic-education-links

**Civics Renewal Network** is a consortium of organizations “committed to strengthening civic life in the U.S.” by increasing the quality of civic education in schools and by improving access to “no-cost learning materials.”
http://www.civicsrenewalnetwork.org/

**Close Up Foundation** is a citizenship education organization that promotes informed participation in the democratic process through varied programs, teacher training and experiential learning.
http://www.closeup.org/

**Constitutional Sources Project, or ConSource**, facilitates research and encourages discussion about the U.S. Constitution, with attention devoted to a document-rich history of how it was created, ratified and amended.
http://www.consource.org/

**Constitutional Rights Foundation** is dedicated to increasing understanding of citizenship through “values expressed in our Constitution and its Bill of Rights” and guiding young people toward becoming “active and responsible participants in our society.” It also provides information on its Civic Action Project and offers links to useful research websites.
http://www.crfcap.org/
http://www.crf-usa.org/links/crf-links.html

**Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago** provides curriculum and teacher development programs nationwide to strengthen American democracy through “hands-on learning about the Constitution.”
http://www.crfc.org/
DoSomething.org provides a vehicle for young people to get involved in national campaigns “without needing money, an adult or a car.” Causes include such topics as bullying, animal cruelty and homelessness.
http://www.dosomething.org/

Generation Citizen provides a semester-long “action civics” program for classrooms, with students selecting an issue, taking action and then reflecting on their experiences. At the end of the program, a Civics Day offers a chance for students to share what they’ve done with other program participants, communities and public officials.
http://www.generationcitizen.org

Federal Judicial Center's Teaching and Civic Outreach Resources provides resources focusing on federal judicial history and famous federal trials.
http://www.fjc.gov/history/home.nsf/page/teaching.html

iCivics was founded by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor in 2009 “to restore civic education in our nation’s schools.” The website includes games and multiple other resources for teachers.
https://www.icivics.org/

Joe Foss Institute supports the idea that education prepares students not only for college and career, but also for citizenship. Its civic education initiative promotes the idea that in order to graduate from high school, students should be able to pass the U.S. citizenship test.
http://joefoxisnstitute.org/
http://civicseducationinitiative.org/

Junior Statesman Foundation and Junior State of America, a national organization with local chapters, provides afterschool and summer civic education and leadership programs for students.
http://jsa.org/

MacArthur Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics, or YPP, works through “research and targeted action projects, to support best practices around “youth engagement in participatory politics.”
http://ypp.dmlcentral.net/

Mikva Challenge engages young people in “action civics, an authentic and transformative learning process built on youth voice and youth expertise.”
http://www.mikvachallenge.org/

National Center for State Courts’ website includes materials designed to educate teachers, students and the community about the way courts work. It also provides a resource guide.

National Center for Learning & Civic Engagement is a part of the Education Commission on the States that is dedicated to “strengthening civic learning and engagement opportunities for students across the country.” It also provides a 50-state comparison of policies relating to civic education.
http://www.ecs.org/initiatives/national-center-for-learning-civic-engagement/
http://www.ecs.org/citizenship-education-policies/

National Constitution Center provides innovative and standards-based lesson plans, activities and other resources to build a connection between curricula and the U.S. Constitution and to bring history to life.
http://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/

ProCon.org provides a nonpartisan platform and well-sourced research to aid in the discussion of controversial issues and evaluate opposing views.
http://www.procon.org/

Street Law is a nonpartisan nonprofit with decades of experience in developing classroom and community programs for young people about law and government.
http://www.streetlaw.org/en/home

Teaching for Democracy Alliance is a national alliance that seeks to bolster student understanding of elections and informed voting.
http://www.teachingfordemocracy.org

Selected state-based resources

Arizona State University’s Center for Civic Education and Leadership
http://ccel.asu.edu/teachers/index.shtml

California YMCA Youth and Government Resources
http://calymca.org/programs/resource-portals

Power of Democracy—a California organization that works to improve civic learning in that state.
http://www.powerofdemocracy.org/

California Democracy School Civic Learning Initiative
Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago, with student programs focused on Chicago and Illinois. (Also listed above for its more nationally focused teacher and curriculum development programs). http://www.crfc.org/

University of Massachusetts Civic Initiative http://www.donahue.umassp.edu/business-groups/civic-initiative/expertise-services/civic-education-research


Teaching Civics’ civic education resources for Minnesota http://teachingcivics.org/civic-resources/

Note: A number of national organizations have state-based affiliates, which are listed on the resource sections of their own websites.

Selected state legislature civics pages

Iowa https://www.legis.iowa.gov/resources

Massachusetts State House Resources for Teachers and Kids https://malegislature.gov/Engage/TeachersKids


Nebraska Legislature’s page for students and teachers http://nebraskalegislature.gov/feature/teach.php

Nevada Legislators Back to School Program http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/nvlegbacktoschool-prgm/index.html

New Jersey Legislature’s teacher resources http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/kids/teacherindex.asp

Vermont General Assembly Civic Education http://legislature.vermont.gov/the-state-house/civic-education/

Virginia General Assembly’s Capitol Classroom http://capclass.virginiageneralassembly.gov/Resources/Resources.html


Note: There are also many legislative fellowship programs that allow undergraduate students to assist legislators or legislative staff. One example of this type of program is the Georgia Legislative Intern Program, which takes 35 students each year from both public and private universities in Georgia, providing first-hand experience in the process of lawmaking.


The National Conference of State Legislators provides a state-by-state list of legislative internship programs.


Many states also have programs in which high school students take on the role of legislators or other government leaders for a day. An example is the long-standing Student Government Day in Massachusetts, which annually offers 400 high school students a chance to take on roles and “replicate activities of Senators, Representatives, Supreme Court Justices or Constitutional Officers.”

https://malegislature.gov/Engage/EducationalOpportunities/Student-GovernmentDay

Footnotes


2 Gerald Wright, interview by Barrett and Greene, April 13, 2016.

3 Randall Reid, interview by Barrett and Greene, July 7, 2016.

4 Ted McConnell, interview by Barrett and Greene, June 28, 2016.

5 National Center for Education Statistics, The National Assessment


8 Dick Simpson, interview by Barrett and Greene, April 5, 2016.


12 Tom Carsey, interview by Barrett and Greene, April 7, 2016.

13 Wright interview.

14 Healy interview.


17 Simpson interview.


19 A wide variety of civic resources are available from iCivics at https://www.icivics.org/; other activities can be found in the resources section at the end of this paper.

20 Civics Game Show, November 6, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3hiFJFlbcs


22 Simpson interview.


24 Andrew Seligsohn, president, Campus Compact, interview by Barrett and Greene, June 27, 2016.

25 Ibid.

26 Healy interview.

27 Ibid.


29 Debbie Peck Kelleher, committee director, NYS Senate Education Committee e-mail message to Barrett & Greene, October 20, 2016.

30 Stephen Masyada, director of the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship, and Doug Dobson, executive director of The Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government, interview with Barrett and Greene, September 15, 2016.

31 Ibid.

32 Dobson interview.

33 Stephen Masyada, director of the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship, email message to Barrett & Greene, September 19, 2016.

34 Levine interview.

35 Crawford interview.

36 Croddy interview.


40 Healy interview.


42 A National Survey of Civics and U.S. Government Teachers, 8.


44 Wright interview.
Crawford interview.

Carsey interview.


The California Budget Challenge is produced by an organization called Next 10, which uses “The Budget Challenge” for interactive sessions in classrooms and for adult audiences around the state. In its in-person appearances, Next 10 uses clickers to get audiences to weigh in on policy options and see budget impacts. https://www.budgetchallenge.org/pages/about


For Students and Teachers, Nebraska Legislature, http://nebraska.gov/feature/teach.php


Wright interview.

Carsey interview.

Student Created Videos, Civic Action Project, Constitutional Rights Foundation. https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0ic-NIZMKHR_7ZM-WKjgnzD1dcS1sUW2

Croddy interview.
ABOUT CSG

Founded in 1933, The Council of State Governments is our nation’s only organization serving all three branches of state government. CSG is a region-based forum that fosters the exchange of insights and ideas to help state officials shape public policy. This offers unparalleled regional, national and international opportunities to network, develop leaders, collaborate and create problem-solving partnerships.

The 56 U.S. states and territories are members of The Council of State Governments, and six Canadian provinces also partner with CSG. State leaders from all three branches of government guide the organization. CSG serves the nation through offices in Lexington, Kentucky, that house the headquarters and affiliated organizations; the CSG Justice Center headquartered in New York; and four regional offices in Atlanta, Chicago, New York and Sacramento, California. The CSG Associates program allows representatives of the private sector to offer their perspectives to public-sector members.

ABOUT BARRETT & GREENE

CSG Senior Fellows Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene are experts on state government who work with Governing magazine, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Volcker Alliance, the National Academy of Public Administration and others. As CSG senior fellows, Barrett and Greene serve as advisers on state government policy and programming and assist in identifying emerging trends affecting states.

The Council of State Governments
1776 Avenue of the States
Lexington, KY 40511