



- State Teams**
- Alaska
  - Arizona
  - Colorado
  - Idaho
  - Illinois
  - Louisiana
  - Oregon
  - Maine
  - Michigan
  - Nebraska
  - Nevada
  - New Hampshire
  - New York
  - North Carolina
  - Pennsylvania
  - Vermont
  - Wisconsin

BECAUSE THEY REACH ALMOST EVERY YOUNG PERSON IN THE NATION, SCHOOLS ARE BEST positioned to prepare the next generation of Americans for active citizenship. The public increasingly recognizes that students’ civic learning is important to maintaining our representative democracy, and parents are calling for schools to help prepare young people for civic and political participation.

However, over the last several decades, public schools have become increasingly less attentive to their civic purpose. Many public schools have drastically reduced opportunities for students to participate in civic-related instruction and extracurricular activities like service, school newspapers, and government. At the same time, young people’s civic and political participation outside of school has declined.

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools is working with advocates from across the political spectrum to dramatically elevate civic learning as an educational priority. Political and school district leaders have particular and significant opportunities to change public education policy and restore civic purpose to American schools.

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# Six Challenges to Civic Learning District Leaders Can Meet

## Challenge #1 | ELEVATE “EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY” AS A PRIORITY

Civic learning improves our schools and strengthens our democracy. District leaders, including school superintendents, their senior education colleagues, and local school boards, can link these priorities by establishing “Civic Learning: Educating for Democracy as a fundamental education priority. Messages must be explicit, consistent, and frequent enough to make civic learning a key theme in public conversation.

- **WRITE AND ISSUE** a civic mission statement, which defines civic learning to include civic skills and dispositions, as well as civic knowledge
- **SEEK** funding for varied civic learning approaches
- **USE** op-eds, media interviews, the school district website, and state-of-the-school addresses to proclaim “Civic Learning: Educating for Democracy” a fundamental education priority

## Challenge #2 | INTEGRATE CIVIC LEARNING INTO THE CURRICULUM

Based on research about what works, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, a 2003 report by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, identifies six promising approaches to civic learning. To integrate civic learning into the curriculum, district leaders must think and plan holistically, incorporating civic learning throughout curricular frameworks, assessments, and accountability systems.

- **IMPLEMENT** a K-12 civic learning scope and sequence
- **STRENGTHEN** civic components in all subject areas, particularly in elementary-level social studies
- **MANDATE** civic engagement activities at the elementary level, and promotion and graduation requirements at the secondary level
- **PROVIDE** professional development for school administrators and teachers in effective civic learning methods and programs
- **ALLOCATE** sufficient resources for district staff to adopt, monitor, support, and enhance civic learning approaches

### SIX PROMISING APPROACHES TO CIVIC LEARNING

- Instruction in history, law and government
- Guided discussion of civic and social issues
- Active learning experiences such as service-learning
- Civic-related co-curricular activities
- Simulations of democratic practices and procedures
- Participation in school governance

## Challenge #3 | IMPLEMENT SOUND CIVIC LEARNING STANDARDS

Over 40 states now cite civic learning in their educational statutes and policies, but many state standards are weak or impractical, and few states have mechanisms to translate standards into practice. District leaders can play a vital role in developing or adapting existing standards and mandating them statewide.

- **INVITE** school stakeholders, civic groups, business and community leaders to participate in developing or revising standards in light of the six promising approaches in *The Civic Mission of Schools*
- **ADVOCATE** through state organizations for these new civic learning standards
- **GUIDE** schools in following these standards

### CIVIC LEARNING STANDARDS SHOULD

- State clear expectations for the civic content, skills, and dispositions students must master
- Link overarching ideas, themes, and questions so that students can draw connections across subjects
- Apply to all students, regardless of school track
- Adopt a complementary K-12 scope and sequence

## Challenge #4 | DEVELOP BETTER ASSESSMENT METHODS TO EVALUATE STUDENTS' CIVIC LEARNING

Without knowing the status of students' civic learning, states cannot improve civic learning effectively. Yet fewer than half of all states include civic learning in their accountability systems. While being careful not to increase testing burdens, district leaders can hold schools, districts, and states accountable for meeting their civic mission.

- **SPONSOR** forums for school and community stakeholders to discuss desired civic outcomes
- **ESTABLISH** criteria for gauging the overall health of a school
- **REQUIRE** schools to complete an annual school-based performance index that includes civic indicators
- **TRAIN** teachers in how to use measures that assess students' civic skills and dispositions, as well as knowledge

### MAKE CIVIC LEARNING PART OF SCHOOLS' ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS BY

- Identifying specific student competencies by grade level
- Measuring students' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions
- Training teachers in administering and interpreting performance-based assessment
- Involving parents and community members in conversation about the school's civic mission

## Challenge #5

## IMPROVE TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' TRAINING IN CIVIC LEARNING

Schools of education must expand their course offerings and requirements to include civic learning, and professional development organizations must provide continuing training in civic learning for teachers already in the field. District leaders can make high-quality civic learning a reality in the schools by supporting these efforts with policies and funds.

- **MANDATE** K-12 professional development time for comprehensive civic learning training
- **CREATE** district staff positions to train, monitor, and support teacher and administrator professional development in civic learning
- **SEEK** grants and allocate appropriate funds for civic learning professional development
- **PROVIDE** incentives for teachers to continue civic learning preparation, including recognition awards, continuing education credits, or substitute coverage for teachers who participate in training
- **PURSUE** partnerships with high-quality civic learning providers to broaden in-service training and provide on-site support

## Challenge #6

## INCREASE COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

By drawing on each other's resources, schools and communities can mutually strengthen one another, as well as fully prepare the next generation of citizens to help solve community problems and see themselves as part of a greater civic whole. District leaders can increase opportunities for schools, families, and communities to share responsibility for young people's civic learning.

- **ASSIGN** staff to foster school-community collaborations
- **SEEK, IDENTIFY, AND ENCOURAGE** student civic internships with community agencies and public offices
- **IDENTIFY AND ENCOURAGE** community speakers and school visits
- **GUIDE** schools in instituting flexible scheduling to enable service-learning and community service

### ACTIVITIES LINKING SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES INCLUDE

- Service-learning and community service
- Bringing community activists, legal experts, and others into the classroom to speak about civic issues
- Visits to civic institutions and from local policymakers
- Coordinating programs and resources with youth-serving community based organizations