

National Commission on Military, National and Public Service

APPENDIX C: Best Practices in Civic Education and Service Learning

Part I. Best Practices for K–12 Civic Education

The Commission encourages State educational agencies* (SEAs) and local educational agencies* (LEAs) to deliver high-quality civic education to all students by adopting and implementing the following practices for elementary school (grades K–5) instruction and assessment:

- Expose students to civic education, including the basics of government, history, law, and democracy.
- Provide and encourage guided use of civics-related materials in elementary school.
- Incorporate interactive, hands-on learning opportunities, including having students participate in plays about American history and take civics-oriented field trips.

The Commission encourages SEAs and LEAs to deliver high-quality civic education to all students by adopting and implementing the following practices for middle school (grades 6–8) instruction and assessment:

- Provide students with at least one semester of course work devoted to civic education, which incorporates age-appropriate, nonpartisan discussion of current events.
- Integrate civic education into non–social studies coursework, including math and science.
- Engage students in at least one interactive, student-led applied-civics project before they graduate from eighth grade.
- Encourage and facilitate extracurricular programs focused on civic responsibility and community service.
- Encourage students to participate in civics-oriented activities, such as student government, civics-based competitions (for example, quiz bowl, geography bowl, model UN, mock trial, history day, or essay contests on civic or political themes), and nationwide civics programs.

The Commission encourages SEAs and LEAs to deliver high-quality civic education to all students by adopting and implementing the following practices for high school (grades 9–12) instruction and assessment:

- Provide students with a full year of civic education as a condition of graduation and consider ways to integrate civic education into non–social studies coursework, including math and science.

In addition to State-specific elements of civic education (for example, State history), the Commission recommends that such coursework should include hands-on applied civics opportunities; civics simulations; age-appropriate lessons on and discussions of current events; lessons on Federal, State, local, and Tribal government functions; the military and its role in U.S.

society (including the importance and consequences of Selective Service registration); the roles and responsibilities of citizens; and voting (including how to vote, how to register to vote, how primaries work, and how to read ballots and referenda).

- Administer and require an end-of-course civics assessment designed to measure students' content knowledge and civic skills developed during formal instruction.
- Engage students in at least one interactive, student-led applied-civics project before they graduate from high school.
- Encourage and facilitate extracurricular activities and programs focused on civic responsibility and community service.
- Encourage students to participate in civics-oriented activities such as student government, civics-based competitions, and nationwide civics programs.
- Encourage in-class discussion of current affairs in a way designed to develop an understanding of different viewpoints using best practices—including by teaching social-emotional skills—in an effort to develop core ethical values critical to civic responsibility, including self-awareness, social awareness, respectful engagement, and responsible decision making.

The Commission encourages SEAs and LEAs to deliver high-quality civic education for all students by adopting and implementing the following practices:

- Ensure that curricular standards or frameworks contain robust guidelines for civic education, including applied civics, by implementing recognized best practices.
- Continue collaborating with other educational agencies and nonprofits to develop model standards or frameworks for civic education, applied civics, and service learning.
- Develop and publicly release metrics to measure performance and accountability for civic education, applied civics, and service learning.
- Commit additional funds to promote and expand civic education in K–12 public schools.
- Collaborate with philanthropic, corporate, and nonprofit entities to support civic education and ensure transparency regarding the origins of funds and resources provided by those entities.
- Promote the development of a cadre of content and instructional specialists that can travel the state to help train teachers in civics-related pedagogy and hands-on instructional techniques.
- Ensure that civic education materials are available for use in homeschooling environments and that homeschooled students have access to information and resources to pursue student-led civics projects and participate in civics-related field trips.
- Apply all State civic education graduation requirements to homeschooled students.
- Develop scholarship programs for students to participate in applied-civics projects.
- Create a recognition program for schools, teachers, and students who perform exceptionally in civic education coursework and projects.
- Form youth advisory councils, made up of local high school students, to advise government officials and legislators and raise issues of interest to area students.
- Allow students to obtain course credit for applied civics activities in excess of what the SEA or LEA already requires.

Part II. Best Practices for K–12 Service Learning

The Commission encourages SEAs and LEAs to take steps to support service-learning and hands-on community service projects by students in K–12 by adopting and implementing the following best practices:

- Ensure that curricular standards or frameworks contain robust guidelines for service learning, by implementing recognized best practices.
- Continue collaborating with other educational agencies and nonprofits to develop model standards or frameworks for service learning.
- Develop and publicly release metrics to measure performance and accountability for service learning.
- Integrate service-learning methodologies into K–12 classrooms, including by providing appropriate training to teachers of all subjects.
- Encourage and facilitate extracurricular activities and programs focused on civic responsibility and community service.
- Support teachers who build service-learning opportunities into their regular curricula.
- Commit funds to support service-learning initiatives.
- Prioritize the development of a Summer of Service program for students completing grades 8–10.
- Prioritize the development of a Semester of Service program for students in grades 9–12.
- Collaborate with philanthropic, corporate, and nonprofit entities to support service-learning programs.
- Promote the development of a cadre of content and instructional specialists that can travel the state to help train teachers in service-learning teaching techniques.
- Ensure that service-learning, Semester of Service, and Summer of Service programs are made available to homeschooled students.
- Develop scholarship programs for students to participate in service-learning projects.
- Create a recognition program for schools, teachers, and students who perform exceptionally in service-learning projects.
- Allow students to obtain course credit for service-learning activities in excess of what the State or local education authority already requires.
- Encourage high school counselors to provide information to students on all streams of service not only as a potential career path but as a way to develop critical job skills.

Part III. Best Practices for Civic Education and Service Learning in Higher Education

The Commission encourages institutions of higher education (IHEs) to improve their civic education and service-learning efforts by adopting the following practices:

- Offer to undergraduates at least one course in civic education that includes an applied-civics component.
- Develop and make available at least one civic education course for online and adult education programs.

- Develop partnerships with area school districts to place undergraduate and graduate students at area schools to provide weekly lessons on civic education.
- Offer workshops for K–12 students to foster skill development in student leadership and community learning.
- Develop workshops to train teachers of all K–12 subjects to incorporate applied civics and service learning into their curricula.
- Offer a bridge-year program to enable incoming students to devote a full year to national service work in the United States or abroad prior to beginning academic studies.
- Incorporate civics and service-oriented goals into university charters, university learning outcomes, mission statements, and commitments.
- Create award and recognition programs to honor those students, student organizations, professors, and community partners who demonstrate excellence in civic engagement.
- Ensure that career services offices provide information to students on all streams of service as paths both for careers and for developing critical job skills.
- Partner with local and State governments to provide credit-earning internships for undergraduates in government offices and agencies.
- Allow students to receive college credit for applied civics and service-learning activities undertaken prior to college, similar to Advanced Placement credit programs.
- With respect to teacher education programs, (a) include specific training in the teaching of service-learning methodologies for all subjects and (b) provide civic education instruction to all teachers.

The Commission encourages IHEs to improve their civic education and service-learning efforts by exploring the feasibility of adopting one or more identified innovative practices:

- Develop applied-civics incubators that provide infrastructure and assistance for middle school students and high school students to engage in applied-civics work—engaging civically to address local and community needs.
- Develop partnerships with community organizations and local government to create community engagement centers to work together to create and implement innovative solutions to community problems.
- Create a social innovator accelerator program to foster innovative student initiatives to address pressing community, social, and global needs.
- Create a Public Service Academy to develop pipelines into all streams of service.
- Encourage all students to take part in student voting and governance by offering multiple levels of involvement and making it possible for the student body to meaningfully affect student life.
- Create financial incentives, such as loan reduction programs and scholarships, for (a) students who pursue careers in teaching civic education as well as service learning; (b) students who commit at least two years to military, national, or public service; and (c) national service alumni.
- Offer semester-long, spring break, or winter break options to perform service for credit, either domestically or abroad.
- Develop and offer "earn-and-learn" programs for low-income students who want to serve their communities. Such a program could be modeled on the U.S. Department of Labor's YouthBuild program.

- Conduct a survey of incoming freshmen on civic knowledge, civic participation, service history, desire to serve, and other salient topics and compare the results to those of an outgoing survey to establish data with which to evaluate the success of civic education initiatives.
- Participate in civic engagement programs.

Part IV: Sample Legislative Provisions

The Commission encourages States to consider the following provisions to supplement their existing legislation on civic education and service learning. The Commission developed these based on extensive research of legislation and best practices in States across the country.

SECTION 1. TITLE. This Act shall be titled the State Civic Education and Engagement Act.

SECTION 2. CIVIC EDUCATION.

- A. In all public or private schools of this State charged with elementary, middle, or secondary education that are supported or maintained in whole or in part by public funds or whose property is exempt from taxation, history of the United States of America and social science, including civics, shall be taught as required subjects to promote civic service and a greater knowledge thereof and to prepare students, morally and intellectually, for the duties of citizenship.
- B. The State educational agency (SEA) shall appoint a Director to carry out the purposes of this Act and shall provide said Director with such facilities, funding, and assistance as may be needed for the discharge of their duties.
- C. The Governor shall appoint a Special Advisor for Civic Education whose responsibilities shall be to advise the Governor on efforts to enhance civic education within the State.

SECTION 3. DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC EDUCATION STANDARDS.

- A. The SEA, as guided by the Director, shall develop standards or frameworks for instruction under this section and shall prepare a model curriculum for pupils in grades kindergarten to 12, inclusive.
- B. In developing standards or frameworks as well as a model curriculum, the SEA and the Director shall incorporate evidence-based and applied instructional practices for developing civic service-learning skills and shall identify the ways in which the model curriculum aligns with, and is supportive of, the State's educational standards, including standards for civic education.
- C. In developing the model curriculum under this section, the SEA and the Director shall consult with leaders of community organizations, pupils, parents, classroom teachers, school administrators, postsecondary educators, representatives of business and industry, and other persons with knowledge or experience that the Director deems appropriate to the task, and shall also take account of best practices implemented in this and other States.

- D. Such standards or frameworks and the model curriculum shall include instruction, at a minimum, in the following: (i) the history of the United States of America; (ii) the Constitution of the United States, including the Bill of Rights; (iii) the Declaration of Independence; (iv) the State constitution; (v) local history and government; (vi) the function, composition, and interaction of the branches of local, State, and Federal Government; (vii) the roles and responsibilities of a citizen in a democracy; (viii) the development of skills to access, analyze, and evaluate written and digital media as they relate to history and civics; (ix) proper etiquette and correct use and display of the flag of the United States; (x) opportunities for citizen participation and involvement in the governmental process; (xi) exposure to current government affairs; (xii) the importance and forms of military, national, and public service; (xiii) the role of the military in the United States and United States history; (xiv) the importance and consequences of voter registration and the role of voting in civic duty; (xv) arguments relating to the adoption of the United States' republican form of government, as they are embodied in its foundational documents; and (xvi) the importance, value, and history of the First Amendment, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion, and their unique roles in the U.S. Constitution and form of government.
- E. Any private, parochial, or denominational schools not subject to the standards or frameworks of the SEA shall prescribe courses of study in civic education for the schools under their control and supervision similar to those required for the public schools.

SECTION 4. CIVIC EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOLS.

- A. Elementary School. Elementary schools shall include in their third, fourth, and/or fifth grade curricula a program on democracy in which students engage in a participatory manner in learning about all branches of government.
- B. Middle School. As a prerequisite to graduating from the eighth grade, each pupil shall, in addition to other course requirements, successfully complete at least one semester of civic education coursework in accordance with the standards or framework adopted by the SEA. A standardized end-of-course assessment in civic education shall be administered and shall be required to receive course credit.
- C. High School. As a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma, each pupil shall, in addition to other course requirements, successfully complete at least one year of civic education coursework in accordance with the standards or framework adopted by the SEA. Civic education coursework may be divided into two semesters and include an experiential component. At the completion of a full year of civic education coursework, each pupil shall successfully pass an assessment designed to measure high-order skills and apply knowledge developed during formal instruction.

SECTION 5. SERVICE LEARNING AND APPLIED-CIVICS PROJECTS.

- A. The SEA shall encourage school districts to initiate, adopt, expand, and institutionalize service-learning programs, activities, and policies in kindergarten through grade 12. "Service learning" refers to a student-centered, research-based teaching and learning strategy that engages students in meaningful service activities in their communities.

Service-learning activities are directly tied to academic curricula, to standards, and to course, district, or State assessments in any academic subject.

- B. Each public school serving students in the eighth grade and each public high school shall ensure that each student complete at least one (1) student-led applied civics project. Applied-civics projects shall be consistent with the history and social science curriculum standards or frameworks adopted by the SEA and shall include structured, in-class learning time. Applied-civics projects may be individual, small group, or classwide, and they shall be designed to promote a student's ability to: (i) analyze complex issues; (ii) consider differing points of view; (iii) reason, make logical arguments, and support claims using valid evidence; (iv) engage in civil discourse with those who hold opposing positions; and (v) demonstrate an understanding of the connections between Federal, State, and local policies, including issues that may affect the student's school or community.

SECTION 6. TEACHER DEVELOPMENT.

- A. The SEA shall provide professional development opportunities for educators on the history and social science framework, and, subject to sufficient resources in the Civic Education Fund established under this Act, create tools aligned with the standards or framework developed by the SEA to support districts in the implementation process. Additional support and outreach may include statewide and regional trainings, and meetings or conferences, including opportunities for districts and stakeholders to assess and share evidence-based best practices in support of civic education and provide feedback and recommendations to the SEA.
- B. The SEA shall support the development of a group of individuals trained in the standards, frameworks, and curriculum adopted by the State in civic education and service learning who may provide training to teachers around the State. Development of this group of civic education and service-learning trainers may be funded by private funds contributed to the Civic Education Fund established by this Act.

SECTION 7. RECOGNITION PROGRAMS.

- A. The SEA, as guided by the Director, shall establish a State Civics Challenge and shall establish guidelines for implementation. The challenge shall be available to all eighth-grade students to showcase student-led civics projects that promote and demonstrate an understanding of civic engagement, citizenship, and community service. The SEA may partner with a college, university, museum, library, or other similar nonprofit entity for the establishment of the State Civics Challenge.
- B. The SEA, as guided by the Director, shall establish a State Seal of Civic Engagement designation for high school students who have demonstrated excellence in civic education and civic participation. In developing criteria for the State Seal of Civic Engagement, the SEA shall consult with a diverse group of credentialed, current classroom teachers who teach civic education and service learning in secondary schools. The SEA shall also consider including criteria based on each of the following: successful completion of history, government, and civics courses, including courses that incorporate

voluntary participation in community service or extracurricular activities, and any other related requirements as it deems appropriate.

- C. The SEA, as guided by the Director, shall establish a nonmonetary State Civics All-Star award for schools and teachers that have performed exceptionally in civic education and civic participation. The SEA shall develop criteria for the State Civics All-Star program.

SECTION 8. HOME SCHOOLING.

- A. The SEA shall make supplementary materials available for use in a home school environment.
- B. To receive a high school diploma, all homeschooled pupils shall be required to pass an assessment in civic education as described in Section 4(C) and shall complete a student-led applied civics project as described in Section 5(B).

SECTION 9. CIVIC EDUCATION FUND.

- A. There shall be established a separate fund to be known as the Civic Education Fund. The Fund shall have a dedicated administrator (the Fund Administrator). The Fund shall be credited with: (i) revenue from appropriations or other money authorized by State or local governments, (ii) interest earned on such revenues, and (iii) funds from public and private sources such as gifts, grants, and donations to further civic and history education and professional development. Amounts credited to the Fund shall not be subject to further appropriation, and any money remaining in the Fund at the end of a fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund of the State.
- B. Amounts credited to the Fund may focus on underserved communities across the State, including those school districts with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students, and may be expended, without further appropriation, by the Fund Administrator for the following purposes: (i) to assist with the implementation of civic education and service learning in the State, including professional development training; (ii) for the development of the history and social science curriculum framework, including civic education; (iii) for collaboration with institutions of higher education and other stakeholder organizations; and (iv) to establish a competitive evaluation of student-led applied-civics projects.
- C. Amounts received from private sources shall be approved by the Fund Administrator and subject to review before being deposited in the Fund to ensure that pledged funds are not accompanied by conditions, explicit or implicit, on the implementation of civic education programming that may be detrimental to the neutral and rigorous teaching of civics or unduly influence the direction of civic education policy. The review shall be made publicly available.
- D. Contributions to the Civic Education Fund by private sources shall be subject to tax credits or charitable deductions in a manner and amount to be determined by the State legislature.
- E. The Fund Administrator shall submit a report on an annual basis to the State legislature regarding the Civic Education Fund's activity. The report shall include, but not be limited to: (i) the source and amount of funds received; (ii) the amounts distributed and the purpose of expenditures from the Fund, including but not limited to funds expended to

assist school districts in meeting the requirements of this Act; (iii) any grants provided to institutions of higher education and other stakeholder organizations; and (iv) anticipated revenue and expenditure projections for the next year.

SECTION 10. STATE LEGISLATIVE YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL.

- A. The State Legislative Youth Advisory Council is established to examine issues of importance to youth, including but not limited to education, employment strategies, youth participation in State and municipal government, safe environments for youth, substance abuse, emotional and physical health, foster care, poverty, homelessness, criminal justice, and youth access to services on a statewide and municipal basis.
- B. The Council shall consist of students ages 14 to 18 who are enrolled in a public high school. Members shall represent the demographic diversity of the State and shall include participants from rural and urban areas. The size of the Council and the manner of selecting members shall be determined by the State legislature.
- C. Members of the Council shall be selected for two-year terms and shall select a chair and other leadership from their members. Members shall meet at least 3 and no more than 6 times each year.
- D. The Council shall have the following duties: (i) advising the legislature on proposed and pending legislation, including State budget expenditure and policy matters relating to youth; (ii) advising the standing committees of the legislature and study commissions, committees, and task forces regarding issues relating to youth; (iii) conducting periodic seminars for its members regarding leadership, government, and the legislature; and (iv) reporting annually by December 1 to the State legislature on its activities.