

Are schools ready to promote civic engagement?

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Session Description and Agenda

In this session, participants will explore the tensions associated with having schools prepare students for civic engagement and democratic discourse in the context of current political polarization and increased pressures for students to succeed in state and other tests. They will also uncover strategies for equipping school leaders and teachers with an understanding of what is necessary for schools to help students answer the question: How shall we live together?

Guiding question	Activity
1. What does civic engagement mean? What is the current state of civic engagement in the States?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic: Own characterization of civic engagement • Alignment of own characterization with civic competencies and aims • Recent data on civic engagement in the US
2. How should we define civic engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of definitions and identification of key indicators
3. What questions does a civically engaged person ask? In what school contexts should those questions be discussed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual and small group question identification • Coding of questions • Sharing of assumptions about coding
4. Why does civic engagement need to be positioned within a district's vision and mission?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wappingers Story and video clip
5. What does it look like to raise awareness and support for civic engagement among different stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dobbs Ferry Story • Giselle's Story (Civic Engagement Program) • Identification of additional strategies for raising awareness and support for civic engagement within a school district
6. What do teachers need to know and be able to do to promote civic engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wappingers Story • Identification of knowledge, skills and dispositions teacher need to promote civic engagement
7. What steps can we take to promote civic engagement in our schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorming • Session Reflection

Note Catcher

1. What does civic engagement mean to you?	2. Which of the aims and competencies we shared fit into your definition?
3. What questions or concerns do this data elicit?	

How should we define civic engagement?

Small Groups: Divide the nine definitions or characterizations found on pages 4 to 7 among your small group so that each of you reviews 3-4 definitions to extract what you think are possible indicators of engaged citizenship.

Definitions or Characterizations/Source	<i>Possible indicators</i>
<p>1</p> <p>“The issues that citizens face come from the world, and are resolved in the world, a complex place. Political activity involves dealing with complex problems, which requires the practical intelligence to embrace complexity and to deliberate on the issues. It also entails engaging these issues with others, forging bonds in common pursuit of public action, and discovering a shared identity despite profound differences. Finally, citizenship culminates in action taken in the world... These three dimensions of citizenship, involving the head, heart, and hands, develop over the course of a student’s academic career, and through civic activities in the community. Civic learning actually engages all aspects of the human person—the <i>head</i>, through thinking, judging, deliberation, and advocacy; the <i>heart</i>, through empathy and care for the beneficiaries of one’s civic action, as well as through friendship with those co-involved in the public work; and the <i>hands</i>, through voting, acts of service, and collaborative political action. These three aspects can be viewed along a spectrum of skills development—a civic spectrum, which, taken as a whole, reveals how different dimensions of the human person overlap, interact, and develop through civic work and in the growth of citizens.”</p> <p><i>Bernie Ronan- The Center for Civic Participation with The Kettering Foundation</i></p>	
<p>2</p> <p>“Civic engagement is the participation of private actors in the public sphere, conducted through direct and indirect interactions of civil society organizations and citizens-at-large with government, multilateral institutions and business establishments to influence decision making or pursue common goals.”</p> <p><u><i>The World Bank</i></u></p>	
<p>3</p> <p>“Teaching students to be good democratic citizens had two distinct elements: (1) providing student the analytical and critical thinking skills necessary to be well informed and make sound decisions in elections; and (2) instilling in students an appreciation for the benefits of liberal democracy as a system of governance, thereby guarding against demagogues who would undermine democratic principles.”</p> <p><i>Richard D. Kahlenberg and Clifford Janey, Putting Democracy Back in Public Education</i></p>	

Definitions or Characterizations/Source	Possible indicators
<p>4</p> <p>Indicators of political engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping up with news, discussing events with friends and family • Thinking that it is important to keep up with news • Participating in community groups and clubs • Using technologies, such as social media for civic purposes • Participating politically • Engaging in alternative activism, such as boycotting or buycutting • Participating in a presidential election cycle • Volunteering <p>Aims of the political classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Political equality</i>: treating all adult members of the polity as equally capable of contributing to public decisions. Deliberating with an understanding that members of society have equal claims to life, liberty and happiness • <i>Tolerance</i>: recognition that citizens should not use the coercive power of the state to unjustly outlaw or prosecute individuals or groups for holding reasonable views that others find objectionable • <i>Autonomy</i>: adults ought to be allowed to direct their own lives, including participating in decisions about the rules of the state. The educational aim related to autonomy is one of helping young people develop the skills, disposition, and knowledge to make well-reasoned decisions about how they want to live • <i>Fairness</i>: Students should approach political deliberation with the intention of finding a solution that promotes the common good. Students should habitually weigh self-interest against the interests of others and seriously consider who is being asked to sacrifice within each policy option • <i>Political engagement</i>: Increase interest in political issues and democratic activities • <i>Political literacy</i>: Students will not just become knowledgeable about issues, but will understand how issues map onto competing ideologies about what a more just, more democratic system requires. • <p><i>Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy, The Political Classroom, pp. 64, 77-80</i></p>	
<p>5</p> <p>“In my opinion, citizenship ... should encompass the values of being a good person. You should care about the rights and privileges of citizenship that have been acquired with great endeavor. So defend them. Defend and protect rights that the Constitution has bestowed on you—not just for yourself but for fellow and future citizens. Future citizens have the same desires that you had once upon a time. You should also care about society in general and the politics within it. So, care. Care about yourself, your family, your neighbors, your community, and your country. Care about the world. Be a world citizen and thus a good American citizen.”</p> <p><i>Tahmina Watson, immigration attorney, Seattle, Washington.</i></p>	

Definitions or Characterizations/Source	Possible indicators
<p>6</p> <p>“Active citizens seek to build, sustain, reform, and improve the communities to which they belong, which range from small voluntary associations to the world. Active citizens deliberate with peers to define public problems and then collaborate with peers to address those problems. In doing so, they honor certain virtues, such as equal respect for others and a degree of loyalty to their communities that does not preclude critical thinking and dissent. Collaboration—actual work—is just as important as deliberation. People who merely talk about public issues are ineffectual and often naïve or misinformed; we learn from acting together. By collaborating, citizens construct or build public goods: tangible goods like schools and markets, and intangible ones like traditions and norms. In doing so, they create civic relationships, which are scarce but renewable assets for civil society.”</p> <p><i>Peter Levine (drawing from recent testimony to the National Academy of Sciences’ Committee on Science, Technology, and Law and a forthcoming book on civic renewal.)</i></p>	
<p>7</p> <p>“In American history, the citizen has been not only a voter or a rights-bearing member of the nation or a consumer of services. The citizen has also been a producer, a public-spirited agent in problem solving and common work. ... Addressing the tough challenges, we face today will require people to reconceive of themselves as citizens. ... It will require widespread civic involvement that taps the common sense, energy, insight, and effort that comes from citizens with different talents and points of view working together, often across lines of sharp cultural, partisan, racial, and economic differences. Without active citizenship, we will continue to struggle with narrow, unfulfilling roles and ineffective institutions. With restored citizenship, we act as co-creators of history, reclaiming our birthright as democratic citizens to be full participants in shaping our common life.”</p> <p><u><i>Center for Democracy and Citizenship</i></u></p>	
<p>8</p> <p>“A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate.”</p> <p><i>Anne Colby and Thomas Ehrlich, introduction, to Civic Responsibility and Higher Education, edited by Thomas Ehrlich (Oryx Press, 2000)</i></p>	

Definitions or Characterizations/Source	<i>Possible indicators</i>
<p>9 An effective citizen:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • embraces core democratic values and strives to live by them. • accepts responsibility for the well-being of oneself, one’s family, and the community. • has knowledge of the people, history, and traditions that have shaped our local communities, our nation, and the world. • has knowledge of our nation’s founding documents, civic institutions, and political processes. • is aware of issues and events that have an impact on people at local, state, national, and global levels. • seeks information from varied sources and perspectives to develop informed opinions and creative solutions. • asks meaningful questions and is able to analyze and evaluate information and ideas. • uses effective decision-making and problem-solving skills in public and private life. • has the ability to collaborate effectively as a member of a group. • actively participates in civic and community life. <p><i>National Council for the Social Studies</i></p>	

1. Share the indicators you found and post them on chart paper.

2. Cluster the indicators that are related and refine them so that you can generate the shortest list that includes all the key indicators of civic engagement.

Questions a civically engaged person asks and contexts for the questions

Note-catcher

What are the questions that a civically-engaged person asks?	In what curriculum contexts (i.e., social studies, ELA, etc.,) or settings (i.e., student government, service learning, etc.,) could students engage with each of these questions?

In small groups, share your questions to get a combined list.

Color code each of the questions using the following criteria

- Green = easy to address in all the settings and contexts identified
- Yellow = may require specific training or skills on the part of teachers that is not always accessible
- Red: requires specialized training on the part of teachers/staff and may be considered too controversial or inappropriate for a school setting

Processing question: What assumptions are we making about the questions that are colored yellow and red?

Note Catcher

What other strategies could be used to raise awareness and support for civic engagement within a school district?	What do teachers need to know, be able to do and value to promote civic engagement?

Text Based Discussion: *Willing to Be Disturbed* by Margaret Wheatley
bit.ly/LF3326_1

What steps can we take to promote civic engagement in our schools?

Selected Resources on Civic Engagement

bit.ly/LF3326

Articles and Policy Papers

Articles and Policy Papers (last retrieved on October 31, 2018)

Bowie, L. [At Maryland high schools, teaching empathy in a time of controversy](#). *Baltimore Sun*, October 8, 2017.

Bowyer, B., & Kahne, J. (2017). [Facing Facts in an Era of Political Polarization: Young People's Learning and Knowledge about Economic Inequality](#). *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 50(4), 1056-1061.

Kahlenberg, R.D and Janey, C. [Putting Democracy Back into Public Education](#). The Century Foundation. November 10, 2016.

Kahne J. Bowyer, B. [Educating for Democracy in a Partisan Age: Confronting the Challenges of Motivated Reasoning and Misinformation](#). *American Educational Research Journal* February 2017, Vol. 54, No. 1, pp. 3–34.

Kolbert, E. [Why facts don't change our minds](#), *New Yorker*, February 27, 2017
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds>

Montas, R. [Democracy's Disappearance](#), *Chronicle of Higher Education*. October 6, 2017.

Parker, W. [Listening to strangers: Classroom discussion in a democratic classroom](#). *Teachers College Record* Volume 112, Number 11. November 2010, pp.2815-2832. (requires an account)

Renwick, M., [Helping Students Search for Truth in an Era of 'Fake News'](#), *Front and Central*

Ronan, B. [The Civic Spectrum: How Students Become Engaged Citizens](#). *Kettering Foundation*. 2011

Wineburg, S. [Why Historical Thinking is Not about History](#), *AASLH History News*, Spring 2016

Books

Hess, D. *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2009. Book Website: thepoliticalclassroom.com

Hess, D. McAvoyn, P. *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education*. New York, Routledge, 2015.

Noddings, N. & Brooks, L. *Teaching Controversial Issues: The Case for Critical Thinking and Moral Commitment in the Classroom*, Teachers College Press, New York, 2016.

Zimmerman, J. and Robertson, E. *The Case for Contention: Teaching Controversial Issues in American Schools*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. 2017

Teaching Resources

[Center for Civic Education](#): The Center’s website offers numerous podcasts, such as a monthly Education for Democracy podcast, in addition to curriculum, information about civics education programs, and other multimedia resources appropriate for middle and high school students.

[The Choices Program](#): At the center of each Choices curriculum is an “Options Role Play,” in which students take on the personas of people and groups from pivotal historic moments, discussing their options and deciding what to do next.”

[Constitutional Rights Foundation](#): CRF is a non-profit, non-partisan, community based organization dedicated to educating America’s young people about the importance of civic participation in a democratic society. CRF develops and distributes programs and materials to teachers, students, and public-minded citizens across the nation, including lessons and activities about democracy with specific attention on deliberation.

[Facing History and Ourselves](#): Teaching Strategies - [The Fishbowl](#). Their mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives.

[Games for Change](#) (G4C): G4C provides support, visibility, and shared resources to individuals and organizations using and designing digital games for social change. Its website offers free game channels and online series on numerous social issues. G4C also provides an opportunity for educators to connect with one another and an annual festival.

[iCivics](#): Justice Sandra Day O’Connor was the driving force behind this web-based civics education project featuring curriculum units, lesson plans, and highly interactive games.

[Mikva Challenge](#): Non-partisan, not for profit founded on the premise that youth voice and participation matter, and that our civic and political life will be stronger when youth participate and help shape their own destinies. Check out their action civics framework and their curriculum materials.

[National Council for Social Studies](#). Powerful, Purposeful Pedagogy in Elementary School Social Studies. *A Position Statement of the National Council for the Social Studies*.

[Reimagining Migration](#): The mission of the organization is to ensure that all young people grow up understanding migration as a shared condition of our past, present, and future in order to develop the knowledge, empathy and mindsets that sustain inclusive and welcoming communities. Their section on civics for immigrants and undocumented students has a framework for civics lessons in schools.

[Teaching Tolerance](#), [Controversial Subjects in the Classroom](#): Their mission is to help teachers and schools educate children and youth to be active participants in a diverse democracy. Their program emphasizes social justice and anti-bias. The anti-bias approach encourages children and young people to challenge prejudice and learn how to be agents of change in their own lives. Their Social Justice Standards show how anti-bias education works through the four domains of identity, diversity, justice and action.

[Pro.con.org](#): A great set of resources to stimulate debate and analysis of controversial issues. The teacher’s corner of this site contains resources for critical thinking and educating without bias. The available materials present controversial issues in a direct, nonpartisan, and primarily pro-con format.

Stanford History Education Group

- [Beyond the Bubble](#) - History Assessments
- [Civic Online Reasoning](#)
- [Evaluating information: The cornerstone of civic online reasoning](#)

[Unbounded.org](#): A solid collection of resources for teaching about bias in the US. Includes facilitator notes, case studies, lessons and power points

Videos

[Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes Simulation Replication](#)

Evans, H. [What does it mean to be an engaged citizen of the world?](#), TED Talk

Hess, D. [Political Education in Polarized Times](#). ED Talk, A great AERA talk to help us understand the role of schools to prepare students to live in a democracy

Hess, D.. [The power of dialogue: Controversial issues in the classroom](#). An interview about the importance of teaching students how to engage in civic dialogue and discussions;

Quattromani, Caitlin and Arledge, Lauren. [How our friendship survives our opposing politics](#). TED Talk.

Wood, Zachary. [Why it is necessary to listen to people you disagree with](#). TedTalk