



Quick Guide: Civics

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Recent surveys raise concerns about the decline of civic education and the willingness of young people to assume active citizenship roles (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002; National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999). These studies indicate greater political disengagement among youth, a tendency to avoid voting and political activity, and a lack of essential knowledge about American history and government (Carnegie Corporation & CIRCLE, 2003; Flanagan & Faison, 2001). Schools also give less attention to civic education than they once did, requiring fewer civics courses and neglecting civics outcomes in state assessments (Miller & Piscatelli, 2003). Yet, according to research, “Formal education is almost without exception the strongest factor in explaining what citizens do in politics and how they think about politics” (Nie et al., 1996, p. 2).

Citizenship is complex and involves more than academic knowledge and skills. Effective citizenship education should prepare young people in three areas:

- **Civic literacy** – Fundamental knowledge of history and government, political and community organizations, and public affairs; skills for making informed judgments, engaging in democratic deliberation and decision making, influencing the political process, and organizing within a community.
- **Civic virtues** – Values, beliefs, and attitudes needed for constructive engagement in the political system and community affairs, such as tolerance, social trust, and a sense of responsibility for others.
- **Civically-engaged behaviors** – Habits of participating and contributing to civic and public life through voting, staying politically informed, and engaging in community service.

Studies confirm the ability of service-learning to strengthen citizenship development and link engagement in service-learning to civic outcomes (Carnegie, 2003; Melchior, 1999; Yates & Youniss, 1998). Students active in service-learning and community service during high school are more likely to be active in communities and politics as adults. However, the connection between service-learning and civic education is not automatic. Instead, it occurs when service-learning programs address specific civic knowledge and skills, and the link between service-learning activities and civic development is made explicit to students as a core learning outcome.

Well-designed service-learning activities with civic objectives have been shown to increase several student capabilities, including:

- Knowledge of community needs;
- Awareness of social problems;
- Acceptance of diversity;
- Personal and social responsibility;
- Knowledge of government;
- Willingness to work toward social change; and
- Involvement in and commitment to service.

The following resources will help you better ground your service-learning program in the civic education responsibilities of your school.

References

Carnegie Corporation of New York, and CIRCLE. *The Civic Mission of Schools*. New York: Carnegie Corporation, and College Park, MD: University of Maryland, School of Public Affairs, 2003. <http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/CivicMissionofSchools.pdf>

Flanagan, Constance, and Nakesha Faison. "Youth Civic Development: Implications of Research for Social Policy and Programs." *Social Policy Report* 15, no. 1 (2001): 3–14.

Keeter, Scott, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins. *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), 2002. http://www.servicelearning.org/wg_php/library/index.php?library_id=5302

Melchior, Alan. *Summary Report: National Evaluation of Learn and Serve America*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, Center for Human Resources, 1999.

Miller, Jeffrey, and Jennifer Piscatelli. *State Policy Report for Citizenship Education*. Paper presented at the 3rd Annual International K–H Service-Learning Research Conference, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2003.

National Association of Secretaries of State. *New Millenium Project–Part I: American Youth Attitudes on Politics, Citizenship, Government, and Voting*. Washington, DC: Author, 1999.

Nie, Norman, Jane Junn, and Ken Stehlik-Barry. *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Yates, Miranda, and James Youniss. "Community Service and Political Identity Development in Adolescence." *Journal of Social Issues* 54, no. 3 (1998): 495–512. http://www.servicelearning.org/wg_php/library/index.php?library_id=4037

Web Resources

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement)

<http://www.civicyouth.org>

Funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Carnegie Corporation, CIRCLE funds research on youth civic development and education. The Web site offers a variety of resources, including the highly praised report, “The Civic Mission of Schools” (P-12).

Center for Civic Education

<http://www.civiced.org>

The Center for Civic Education seeks to promote citizenship education at home and abroad. CCE specializes in civic education, law-related education, and international education programs. CCE is the source of two widely used civics curricula, “Project Citizen” and “We, The People,” as well as the document, “Civitas: A Framework for Civic Education.” CCE’s web site includes numerous ideas for lesson plans and activities to promote civic skills. (P-12).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Report Card. Washington, DC: National Center for Education and Statistics, 1998.

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/civics/>

This site presents the results of the 1998 national assessment of what U. S. students in Grades 4, 8, and 12 know and can do in civics. It includes an explanation of the framework for the assessment, sample questions, results on teaching practices in social studies, and test results for students overall in different grade levels and from different groups. (P-12).

The IEA Civic Education Study

<http://www.wam.umd.edu/~iea/>

This site reports the results of an international study of the civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes of approximately 90,000 14-year-olds in 28 countries. (P-12).

Kids Voting USA

<http://www.kidsvotingusa.org/>

Kids Voting USA seeks to promote citizen development by educating young people about voting and other types of civic engagement. The site includes teacher-developed lesson plans and activities for students in Grades K–12. (P-12)

National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC): A project of the Education Commission of the States (ECS)

<http://www.ecs.org/nclc/>

Consistent with the mission of ECS, NCLC has developed several useful publications about civic education for state education policy makers, many of which highlight the educational value of service-learning. Publications include “Citizenship Matters”, a monthly newsletter, and “Every Student A Citizen: Creating the Democratic Self”(P-12).

Our Documents Initiative

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/>

The Our Documents Initiative is a collaborative effort by the U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, National History Day, and USA Freedom Corps. Its purpose is to strengthen student mastery of American history and democratic principles by encouraging the integration of historical documents into the curriculum. The initiative provides teachers and students with access to online versions of 100 foundational documents, such as laws, treaties, and speeches. (P-12).

Print Resources

Carnegie Corporation of New York, and CIRCLE. *The Civic Mission of Schools*. New York: Carnegie Corporation, and College Park, MD: University of Maryland, School of Public Affairs, 2003. <http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/CivicMissionofSchools.pdf>

This report outlines components of high quality citizenship education agreed upon by well-known experts in the field. It discusses elements of effective citizenship education, including goals, the fundamental role of the schools in civic education, and suggestions for schools and policymakers for improving civic education. (P12).

Special Section on Democracy and Civic Engagement. *Phi Delta Kappan* 85, no. 1 (2003, September): 8–67.

In this special section on the civic education responsibilities of schools after September 11, 2001, articles address topics, such as a new consensus on educating for democracy, ideas for designing democratic schools, and strategies for promoting civic engagement among marginalized youth. (P-12).

Quigley, Charles N., and Charles F. Bahmueller, eds. *CIVITAS: A Framework for Civic Education*. Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education, 1991. http://www.servicelearning.org/wg_php/library/index.php?library_id=5167

CIVITAS provides standards for civic education in Grades K–12. Included in the document are a rationale for the framework, as well as goals and objectives for the development of civic virtues, civic participation, and civic knowledge and intellectual skills across the grade levels. (P-12).

National Association of Secretaries of State. *New Millenium Survey: American Youth Attitudes on Politics, Citizenship, Government, and Voting*. Executive Summary, 1999. http://www.stateofthevote.org/survey/NASS_execsumm.html

The New Millennium Survey (1999) asked young people questions about their political knowledge, attitudes, and involvement. It concluded “young Americans have only a limited, vague understanding of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society” (p. 1). The survey’s results demonstrated that U.S. youth are skeptical and distrustful of politics and politicians, and even though they are active in community service, these activities are primarily social and unconnected to the political sphere. (General)

The National Commission on Civic Renewal. *A Nation Of Spectators: How Civic Disengagement Weakens America and What We Can Do About It*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 1999.
http://www.puaf.umd.edu/Affiliates/CivicRenewal/finalreport/table_of_contentsfinal_report.htm

This report provides the results of a measure of the state of U.S. political and civic health, the Index of National Civic Health (INCH). INCH combines trends for political participation, political and social trust, associational membership, family integrity and stability, and crime. The report also includes sections on the role of civil society in U.S. democracy, its relationship to business and government, current status, and steps citizens can take to revitalize it. (General).

Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

This volume is an outstanding comprehensive analysis of the extent and types of participation in American political life and the factors that lead some citizens to be more active and influential than others. (General)