



# GUIDEBOOK: **SIX PROVEN PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE CIVIC LEARNING**

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# INTRODUCTION

Civic education in this country has been diluted over the years, pushed to the back burner in deference to more intense accountability systems in subject areas like math, science, and English language arts. In 2003, in an effort to help reinvigorate civic education, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) convened a diverse and dedicated group of civic thinkers to brainstorm strategies for what this “revitalization” might look like.<sup>1</sup> The group developed a set of six “promising practices” for effective civic learning designed to help teachers create civic curricula with robust, relevant learning experiences for students.

Despite subsequent promotion of these practices, students have shown little improvement in civic learning since that time. In 2010, students in grades 4, 8, and 12 participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics. While average scores at 4th grade improved somewhat in comparison to 2006 scores, those for 8th graders showed no statistically significant change, and 12th graders’ scores actually declined.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, this raised concerns for civic education advocates and generated the question: *What are we still missing?*

In 2011, after considerable research in civic education confirmed these practices as effective, the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools (CMS) followed with the *Guardian of Democracy*,<sup>3</sup> which included the “Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning.” Throughout this paper we reference the description of civic learning developed by CMS:

***“The necessary elements of effective civic education include classroom instruction in civics & government, history, economics, law and geography; service learning linked to classroom learning; experiential learning; learning through participation in models and simulations of democratic processes; guided classroom discussion of current issues and events, and meaningful participation in school governance.”<sup>4</sup>***

The authors of *The Guardian of Democracy* believe that “the well-being of our body politic is best served by an informed, engaged citizenry that understands how and why our system of government works.” Quality civic education “not only increases citizen knowledge and engagement, but also expands civic equality, improves twenty-first century skills, and may reduce the dropout rate and improve school climate.”<sup>5</sup>





# RATIONALE

The purpose of this guidebook is to serve as a resource—a *what's next?*—for teachers, administrators, policymakers, and other education leaders who want to put these practices in place but are not sure how to begin. For those who already are sold on the idea of the six proven practices but need ideas for how to promote and utilize them, this document highlights research that confirms these practices as proven strategies for implementing high-quality civic learning, and provides practical suggestions for how to implement each practice in schools and classrooms and how to model state-level policies that support these practices. This guidebook also outlines various programs that align with each practice.

# BACKGROUND

Earlier in our nation's history, civic education was broadly seen as integral to the purposes of public schools and universities. Civics teachers, however, adhered to more traditional teaching styles that did little to stimulate creativity in the minds of students. For many educators, lecture was the most common method of instruction, and students spent the majority of their time listening to their instructors' iterations from a text, memorizing important facts, dates, and cursory details of significant historical events. While lecture can be an effective strategy for instruction, we now know that developing the skills and dispositions necessary for engaged citizenship takes practice. Civic education course work should include opportunities for students to engage as citizens now rather than focusing on how they may engage as citizens in the future. In our 21st century world, technology provides students with a variety of ways to learn and engage as citizens by researching issues, seeking viable solutions to community problems, and communicating with individuals in different countries and on different continents. As technology advances, students' opportunities for learning abound, helping them to better understand their relationships with society and the world.

As academic pressures in schools intensify, many civics courses have morphed into more cursory, fly-by kinds of course requirements that students merely check off of a to-do list.<sup>6</sup> The disadvantage for students in courses like these is that they often do not provide the kinds of hands-on learning experiences that have a lasting impact or encourage the development of students' civic skills and dispositions. In order for students to cultivate a commitment to civic participation and to become active members of vibrant communities, students need regular opportunities to engage in civic learning activities from preschool through college. Students cannot be expected to be civically engaged simply by reading. They can only learn how to be civically engaged by *being* civically engaged.

*"Tell me and I forget.  
Show me and I remember.  
Let me do and I understand."  
~ Confucius*





The relative value of civics in the overall educational landscape is the subject of a great deal of discussion in the education field these days. The push to create students who are globally competitive, workforce ready, STEM proficient, and who possess the skills necessary for success in the 21st century makes the argument for ramping up civic education all the more challenging. Quality civic education that crosses subject areas, however, has the potential to help students meet all of these other expectations while simultaneously promoting the long-term civic health of our democratic society. Well-designed pedagogical approaches, integrated across the curriculum, can help to boost students' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions *and* drive improvement in academic performance and other student outcomes. Specifically, high-quality, school-based civic learning fosters civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes; promotes civic equality; builds 21st century skills; improves school climate; and lowers school drop-out rates.<sup>7</sup>

Young people who engage in and know more about their communities are more likely to want to improve those communities through better government, voting, political discussion, and other civic activities than their less engaged and knowledgeable counterparts.<sup>8</sup> These students also tend to be more interested in learning how to create change and make effective decisions in their civic work. Schools with a positive climate where students feel safe and valued tend to attract students who genuinely want to be there, who have a propensity for giving back to their community through activities that help develop civic skills and dispositions. Happy, well-adjusted students are much less likely to engage in destructive behaviors, and that benefits not only the immediate school community, but their families and the community at large.<sup>9</sup>

## BENEFITS OF CIVIC LEARNING

High-quality, school-based civic learning fosters civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes; promotes civic equality; builds 21st century skills; improves school climate; and lowers school drop-out rates.

### **Fosters civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes**

School-based civic learning broadens and deepens civic knowledge, hones civic skills, and nurtures civic attitudes, which collectively prepare students for informed, effective participation in our democracy.

### **Promotes civic equality**

Voter turnout is highest among white, affluent, highly educated Americans, and universally available civic learning opportunities close this empowerment gap.

### **Builds 21st century skills**

Students in traditional and interactive civics lessons work well with others, are economically knowledgeable, media literate, and aware of current events.

### **Improves school climate**

Through civic engagement activities, young people connect with the community, learn respectful dialogue, teamwork, and appreciate diversity.

### **Lowers drop-out rates**

Real-world civic learning opportunities improve students' chances of staying in school.<sup>10</sup>





# CHALLENGES OF CIVIC EDUCATION TODAY

If quality civic education can benefit so many, why hasn't it been identified as a priority in our schools? The answer is complex, and several variables are at play.

In her essay *The Challenges Facing Civic Education in the 21st Century*, Kathleen Hall Jamieson laid out five fundamental challenges confronting reformers working to improve the quality and accessibility of civic education in schools:

1. Ensuring civic education is high quality has not been a state or federal priority.
2. Social studies textbooks do not facilitate the development of needed civic skills.
3. Upper-income students are better served by our schools (both generally and specifically with regards to civic education) than are lower-income individuals.
4. Cutbacks in funds available to schools make implementing changes in civics education difficult.
5. The polarized political climate increases the likelihood that curricular changes will be cast as advancing a partisan agenda.<sup>11</sup>

Reform efforts are complicated by the fact that civic education can be overlooked on the national stage and education leaders continue to send mixed messages. Many appear to support the idea that quality civic education is crucial to the foundation of our democracy, but authentic support for civic education does not always follow in many states. Students in states that support civic education often get only one shot at an American government class in 11th or 12th grade. This move signals that civics is an afterthought, does not allow for students to build knowledge from year to year, and completely misses the large number of students who drop out before their senior year and are most in need of education regarding their rights and responsibilities as citizens.<sup>12</sup>

Taken together, the six proven practices for effective civic learning help students grasp a true understanding of and appreciation for how our democracy works by allowing them to examine and participate in a holistic manner. It is not enough to teach selected pieces about how our government works. Students gain a deeper understanding from:

- Examining the unique relationship between history, government, law, and democracy and how they work together and support one another
- Why we have the system of government we have
- What sacrifices our forefathers made to secure that system
- What democracy truly means
- The crucial role that every American plays in sustaining it.

Civic education strategies that allow students to investigate the complexities of our governmental system can equip them far more effectively to participate in that system than those that require little more of students than simply digesting key historical facts, dates, and events. And this is not the sole responsibility of teachers. It takes all of us as American citizens to move the needle on civic education.

Success requires the support of policymakers and the public to ensure that proven and effective classroom practices are employed in every classroom in every school in the nation.<sup>13</sup> Students' school years represent a pivotal time in the development of their values, attitudes, and perspectives. Young people are impacted more by their school experiences than almost any other environment they experience, so "in order to cultivate well-rounded democratic citizens, high-quality classroom instruction must remain at the foundation of civic learning."<sup>14</sup>

The ensuing sections of this guidebook drill down a bit deeper by describing what the practices look like on the ground and highlighting model programs, state policies, key research, and organizations that support high-quality civic education efforts around the country.





# 1

## PROVEN PRACTICE #1

Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy.

### WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM?

Gone are the days when a semester of U.S. government—rife with dates, events, and cursory discussions about what caused revolutions and uprisings—was considered enough to prepare young people for productive participation in a democratic world. Civic education likely would be more effective if integrated into all components of preK-12 curricula, not just a requirement for juniors and seniors in high school. A more holistic approach to civic coursework would allow students more time to delve into the heart of civic issues and the ripple effect of those issues on society as a whole. For example, it is not enough just to know *how* our government is structured. If young people are to be drawn to lives of civic engagement, they need time to examine things like *why* our governmental system works the way it does and the challenges inherent in that system. Due to the current polarized political climate in America, students can benefit from the discord by examining the complexities of our system and how to look objectively at different sides of issues.

“High-quality classroom instruction must remain at the foundation of civic learning.”<sup>15</sup> However, classrooms of today

are vastly different from traditional settings. There are new and exciting technologies available that provide students access to large amounts of information. Students can participate in more interactive, thought-provoking learning experiences aside from textbooks, handouts, paper quizzes, and the like.

While lecture still has its place in a teacher’s repertoire, lackluster lectures and PowerPoint presentations that drone on can be like anesthesia for students in that they are numbed to the really key ideas. Most students today are fairly tech-savvy and can use digital media, community, Internet research, large- and small-group presentations, and personal interviews to meet curricular objectives. Since technology is part of their everyday culture, students likely would benefit from frequent opportunities to stretch their technical abilities to more than just social networking. “To increase the probability of altering levels of information-seeking, knowledge, and efficacy over the long term, educators should be mindful that media use needs to be habitual, extending beyond one unit of a social studies course or even one course in high school.”<sup>16</sup>

### EXAMPLES

#### WE THE PEOPLE

*Milford High School and Applied Technology Center,  
Milford, New Hampshire*

David Alcox, a social studies teacher at Milford (N.H.) High School and Applied Technology Center, is the first to say that his students have a fortunate advantage when it comes to civic learning and engagement: location. The small town with a population of 15,000 is a magnet for candidates seeking higher office, with visits from Mitt Romney in 2011 and Barack Obama in 2008 being just a small sample. Alcox and his students, however, do everything they can to exploit their advantage. “I always tell my students that accessibility to the candidates is one of the best ways to get your voice heard,” Alcox says. “We always have good access, and that makes it really tangible for the students. It makes it real.”

In the classroom, Alcox employs *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* instructional program, which is sponsored by the Center for Civic Education and focuses on the principles of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights for elementary, middle, and high school students. He takes the lesson plan a few steps further by molding the curriculum to fit with what is happening in and around town. “Any time we have a candidate or Supreme Court justice come through town, I try to pull that into whatever unit we are discussing,” Alcox says. “If there’s a candidate for Congress visiting, we study the role of a congressman.” He stressed that there are opportunities outside of big-name candidates, such as a town commissioner or owner of a business. “We try to take people who are in the know and have them come in almost as a guest speaker helping teach that unit.”



## EXAMPLES

### DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOMS

*Corona High School, Corona, California*

Providing students with classroom instruction related to democracy is one method to developing a better-informed society. The process is taken even further, in some instances, when the entire classroom operates under a democratic structure. Democratic classrooms incorporate curriculum that actively engages students, allowing decisions to be made through a collaboration of students and staff. The power is shared, allowing an opportunity for students to manage and take ownership of their behaviors. There are different models, but democratic schools typically feature some common characteristics, such as the efforts to demonstrate learning in a public setting and receive feedback.

Marcos Torres, a language arts teacher at Corona, struggled with traditional teaching methods when he first entered the classroom. “When I first started out teaching, I walked into the classroom [with] lots of great ideas on how to educate kids. What I thought I needed to do was maintain control. ... I was met with a lot of resistance. It took me some time to realize that [a democratic classroom] was the best approach to achieve a successful classroom environment,” Torres says. Instead of trying to simply control his classroom, Torres employed more of a democratic approach. That, he says, allowed for control to come more naturally, by building a rapport and community. “There is an economy of power that involves an exchange” between the teacher and student, Torres says.<sup>17</sup>

## WHAT RESEARCH SUPPORTS THIS PRACTICE?

- Political knowledge is an important precondition for civic participation.<sup>18</sup>
- High-quality civic learning programs have positive impacts on students’ civic knowledge. For example, Kids Voting USA enhances students’ knowledge of politics (measured by current factual questions such as “Who is the governor of Texas?”), reduces gaps in knowledge between the most- and least-knowledgeable students, and increases the consistency between students’ opinions on issues and their own potential voting behavior.<sup>19</sup>
- Young people who know more about government are more likely to vote, discuss politics, contact the government, and take part in other civic activities than their less knowledgeable counterparts.<sup>20</sup>

## PROJECTS AND ORGANIZATIONS ALIGNED WITH THIS PRACTICE:

*Note: A list with descriptions of all the organizations and programs is included at the end of this paper.*

**American Bar Association Division for Public Education**  
[http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_education.html](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education.html)

**Bill of Rights Institute**  
<http://billofrightsinsstitute.org/>

**The Center for Civic Education**  
<http://new.civiced.org>

**The Center on Congress at Indiana University**  
<http://centeroncongress.org/about-center>

**Civic Action Project** (Constitutional Rights Foundation)  
<http://www.crfcap.org>

**Constitutional Rights Foundation**  
<http://crf-usa.org/>

**Democracy Web** (Comparative Studies in Freedom)  
<http://www.democracyweb.org>

**The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History**  
<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/>

**iCivics**  
<http://www.icivics.org>

**National History Day**  
<http://www.nhd.org/>

**Newseum Digital Classroom**  
<http://www.newseum.org/digital-classroom/default.aspx>

**Project Citizen** (Center for Civic Education)  
<http://www.civiced.org>

**Street Law**  
<http://www.streetlaw.org>

**What So Proudly We Hail**  
<http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/>

# STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

## FLORIDA

### *New High Stakes Test*

#### Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Civics Education Act, Chapter No. 2010-48

- Requires students entering 6th grade in the 2012-13 school year to successfully complete a one semester civics education course in order to meet the middle school promotion requirements.
- Phases in the administration of an end-of-course (EOC) assessment over a three-year period. Beginning with the 2014-15 school year, students' scores count as 30% of their course grade, but they must pass the EOC assessment to graduate. Student scores on the civics education EOC assessment will be considered in designating a school's grade.
- The middle school civic education course must address the roles and responsibilities of federal, state, and local governments; the structures and functions of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government; and the meaning and significance of historic documents, such as the Articles of Confederation, Declaration of Independence, and Constitution of the United States.
- Beginning with the 2011-12 school year, the reading portion of the language arts curriculum must include civics education content for all grade levels.

## ILLINOIS

### *Public-Private Partnership*

#### H.B. 4025

Passage of H.B. 4025 requires Illinois high school students to take a civics class to graduate, starting in the 2016-17 academic year. Passed with strong bipartisan support, the law is supported by the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and other business and civic organizations that have pledged at least \$1 million annually for three years for teacher training.





# 2

## PROVEN PRACTICE #2

Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.

### WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM?

Civic learning curricula often fail to include controversial issues. “As a result, young people may not learn how to engage productively with the issues and events that animate our political system today and will continue to do so in the future.”<sup>21</sup> Diversity in thought can help students appreciate others’ perspectives and understand the value of living in a place where differing views are embraced. Additionally, addressing difficult issues can help demystify conflicting beliefs and help students to approach those issues with greater objectivity. Thinking differently is not wrong or bad, but that is not always the message young people grow up with here in the states.

Students engaged in healthy civic discourse have opportunities to practice researching current issues in their local communities, our country, and the world, and to come up with feasible solutions. They can then share what they learned in a variety of ways with video presentations, debates, facilitated panel discussions, and dramatizations. There are many contentious issues at work today: the national debt, global warming, same-sex marriage, gun laws, racial profiling, immigration/border control, social security, and the list goes on. These are just a few examples of issues that can serve as the basis for powerful civic learning experiences for students.

### EXAMPLES

#### BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

*North Lawndale College Prep High School (NLCP), Chicago*

Drawing from her own experience and difficulties penetrating the world of science, Tiffany Childress explored new ways to make the subject relevant to her students, who largely are African-American. Childress, a science teacher and civic engagement director at NLCP, managed to combine chemistry with self-worth and social beliefs about beauty by teaching her students about sodium hydroxide, also known as lye, which can be used as a hair relaxer. The class first discussed the controversy of why a population of women use sodium hydroxide and what it can do. Childress then combined the discussion with videos and news articles before exploring the compound sodium hydroxide and its uses.

What does the perception of a young black girl’s idea of beauty have to do with chemistry or curriculum? “My argument is that kids don’t really care what sodium and hydrogen produce if it’s not related to something bigger,” Childress says. “Students would always tell me they hated chemistry or that it was too hard until we wrapped it into a relevant topic. This is a way to provide access to science.” Her program “Beauty and the Beast” allowed Childress to approach chemistry in the context of industry and society. While chemistry test scores improved at NLCP, Childress said there was yet to be a direct correlation to achievement, though there was a documented increase in engagement of the subject among students.

#### FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

*Various schools, Boston*

Facing History and Ourselves teachers foster reflective classrooms that engage students in the exploration of history and its connections to their own lives. For example, a Facing History class recently looked at the steps leading to the Holocaust, triggering a class discussion that captured students grappling with the different ways they understand and react to freedom of speech. Concerning book burning in Nazi Germany, one student said, “They said that some ideas shouldn’t be in society, and so they burned them. Who says what should be in society? It’s like limiting our freedom of speech.” Another student argued that some books should in fact be burned or banned, and that Hitler’s book is one that falls in that category. That discussion led students to larger themes: If a work by an infamous player in history is burned or suppressed, how will students today learn about that person? Won’t certain aspects of history be lost? “If we start burning books we disagree with, then someone might burn our books one day,” one student said, while another suggested that there are other avenues to learn about notorious moments in history. “We can learn about the Holocaust in other ways. I take Elie Wiesel as an example,” this student said. Each question seemed to raise another, such as who decides where and how people should learn about a controversial subject matter. The teacher facilitating this discussion later shared that these kinds of conversations demonstrate to her that students are engaged with the curriculum, with choice-making, and with creating a just society. “I often ask how educators can help create a more informed and active citizenry. After a discussion like this, I felt one step closer to the answer,” the teacher said.

## WHAT RESEARCH SUPPORTS THIS PRACTICE?

- Combining interactive-classroom and lecture-based teaching with a strong content base has an especially substantial influence on behavioral and attitudinal outcomes.<sup>22</sup>
- Planned, moderated discussions of controversial issues teach essential democratic skills and encourage student interest in current issues.<sup>23</sup>
- Peer-critical discussion is valuable for fostering youth political mobilization.<sup>24</sup>
- Discussion helps young people develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for effective political and civic engagement, and it also teaches them intrinsically significant content.<sup>25</sup>
- Recent research on the effects of the school-based Student Voices curriculum (<http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/political-communication/student-voices/>) found that deliberative discussions in the classroom (along with community projects and use of the internet for informational purposes) have a positive effect on political knowledge and interest.<sup>26</sup>

## PROJECTS AND ORGANIZATIONS ALIGNED WITH THIS PRACTICE:

*Note: A list with descriptions of all the organizations and programs is included at the end of this paper.*

### **Annenberg Classroom**

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

### **Deliberating in a Democracy** (Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago)

<http://www.crf-usa.org/deliberating-in-a-democracy/deliberating-in-a-democracy.html>

### **Democracy in Action** (Mikva Challenge)

<http://www.mikvachallenge.org>

### **Facing History and Ourselves**

<http://www.facinghistory.org>

## STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

### **NEBRASKA**

#### *Expansion of Civics Curriculum*

#### **Legislation: Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-724(5)(c)**

This legislation expands the topics required to be covered in the high school civic curriculum to include “active participation in the improvement of a citizen’s community, state, country, and world, and the value and practice of civil discourse between opposing interests.”





# 3

## PROVEN PRACTICE #3:

Design and implement programs that provide students with opportunities to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.

### WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM?

Service-learning is a unique teaching and learning strategy that encourages students to use academic knowledge and skills to find viable solutions to real community needs. It is neither a packaged curriculum nor a cut-and-dried program, and no two service-learning projects are completely alike. Service-learning is an experiential approach that engages students holistically in their learning, which allows them to identify and address issues in their school and community that really matter to them. The National K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Service-Learning Practice<sup>27</sup> provides a framework of critical elements that teachers can use to guide projects and ensure rigor, relevance, and student success throughout the learning process.

Making the connection between academic objectives and service to the community can be accomplished in two ways: 1) Start

with a service project and identify curricular objectives that align with the project, or 2) determine specific learning objectives and work with students to find a service project that will help them meet those objectives. Examples of service-learning project themes include food sustainability, hunger and homelessness, bullying, interracial families, and disaster preparedness, among others. Students can use Internet research and walk their local communities for specific ideas about how they can serve. The more involved they are in the process of selecting and mapping out their project, the more likely they are to buy into the work.

One of service-learning's greatest benefits is that it is a malleable approach that can be adapted to fit a variety of age levels, learning settings, curricular needs, and timeframes, and it gives students the opportunity to co-create their learning experiences.

### EXAMPLES

#### CALUMET IS MY BACKYARD (CIMBY)

*Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Chicago, Illinois*

For the past several years, CPS has been very intentional about moving 'service' from an experience students have outside the classroom to one closely connected to classroom learning. According to Jon Schmidt, CPS' service-learning manager, "I feel we've made a lot of progress, especially in our effort to be responsive to teachers and meet them where they are in their practice. We do not mandate service-learning, nor do we want that to be our approach, because we know that teachers who come to [service-learning] with enthusiasm and spirit will do great things, and those who come to it reluctantly will struggle. Our response has been to provide solutions for a wide range of teachers—from brand new teachers, teachers new to service-learning specifically, to teachers who know service-learning well and have a good deal of experience working with it."

CIMBY—the district's flagship program—is an example of what can happen when school and community come together to address local issues. Lake Calumet sits on the southeast side of Chicago—an area that in the early part of the 20th century was pristine wetlands and later became home to the thriving steel industry. Over time this area suffered environmental degradation and was overtaken by invasive plant species. Students began removing invasive species and uncovered native plants and grasses. CPS has 12 high schools working in 11 different natural areas and has developed a unique play-spaced, watershed, and environmental curriculum that introduces students to biodiversity, ecosystems, wetlands, historical natural development, social-political perspective on who stakeholders are, how to address environmental preservation, etc. "Kids from the inner-city don't typically have opportunities to experience nature," Schmidt says. "So they not only get to interact with the environment, but they can focus on ways to contribute to its preservation."

## EXAMPLES

### HEALTHY EATING ACTION TEAM (HEAT)

*New Foundations Charter School (NFCS), Philadelphia*

At NFCS, students learn in an academic environment that fosters a sense of community as well as personal achievement. NFCS's curriculum and standards allow students to gain a deep understanding of core content through engagement with the community. Students and faculty have worked to create a "caring community of learners." Shira Woolf Cohen, K-8 vice principal and K-12 dean of School and Community Programs says, "Everything we do here is focused on teaching young people how to be productive citizens in their community." Depending on a student's age, grade-level and past personal experience, "community" can mean different things. For example, it is difficult for kindergartners to assimilate how they can impact the country and the world, so "community" refers to their family and classroom. "As they grow and mature, the concept of community broadens considerably from classroom to school, to

neighborhood, community, city, country, and the world," Woolf Cohen says. "By the time our students reach 8th grade, they've had an opportunity to participate in service-learning projects that have had observable impact on all of those levels."

One of NFCS' strongest initiatives is called HEAT (Healthy Eating Action Team), established through a small Farm-to-School network grant. Students go to a local farm, where they learn the importance of healthy eating, farm-to-table, growing their own food, and food sustainability. Those students have since started several healthy initiatives at the high school: a health-conscious smoothie bar, expansion of a community garden, a study on what foods are offered in school cafeterias, and what kids are eating day-to-day. With funding from a small Lowes grant last year, students transformed an empty lot behind the school into a lush garden plot that yields eggplant, tomatoes, and a variety of other fresh, healthy vegetables.



## WHAT RESEARCH SUPPORTS THIS PRACTICE?

Student participation in high-quality service-learning is positively related to gains in the following key outcomes at statistically significant levels:

- Service-learning boosts academic engagement, educational aspirations, acquisition of 21st century skills, community engagement.<sup>28</sup>
- Involvement in service appears to contribute to lessening the achievement gap, with low-income students who serve doing better than students who do not serve.<sup>29</sup>
- Students who participate in service-learning activities have higher scores on reading and science achievement tests and are more likely to graduate from college than those who did not participate in service-learning.<sup>30</sup>
- Students' ratings of service-learning engagement, quality, number of different activities, and duration are significantly and positively related to school engagement, school attachment, valuing school, community engagement, civic skills, and civic dispositions for student in grades 3-5 and 6-12.<sup>31</sup>
- Students who participate in service-learning activities receive fewer in- and out-of-school suspensions than their peers who do not participate.<sup>32</sup>
- Service-learning and other classroom-based civic learning opportunities have a greater impact on students' commitments to civic participation than do neighborhood and family context.<sup>33</sup>
- Compared to their non-participating peers, students who participate in service-learning have a stronger set of job- and career-related skills and aspirations, including knowledge of how to plan activities, desire to pursue postsecondary education, and job interview skills.<sup>34</sup>



## PROJECTS AND ORGANIZATIONS ALIGNED WITH THIS PRACTICE:

*Note: A list with descriptions of all the organizations and programs is included at the end of this paper.*

### Earth Force

<http://www.earthforce.org>

### Generation Citizen

<http://generationcitizen.org>

### Innovations in Civic Participation

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

### National Action Civics Collaboration

<http://actioncivicscollaborative.org/>

### National Youth Leadership Council

<http://www.nylc.org>

### North Carolina Character Education Initiative

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/charactereducation>

### Youth Service America

<http://www.ysa.org>

## STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

### FLORIDA

*Support for service-learning as an instructional strategy to improve student achievement*

**Legislation: Fla. Stat. ch. 1003.497**

"The Department of Education 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 schools or communities. Service-learning activities are directly tied to academic curricula, standards, and course, district, or state assessments. Service-learning activities foster academic achievement, character development, civic engagement, and career exploration, and enable students to apply curriculum content, skills, and behaviors taught in the classroom."



## MISSOURI

*Support for service-learning as an instructional strategy to improve student achievement*

**Legislation: Mo. Rev. Stat. § 170.037.1**

"The state board of education shall encourage the adoption of service-learning programs and projects among school districts. As used in this section, the term 'service-learning programs and projects' means a student-centered, research-based method of teaching and learning which engages students of all ages in solving problems and addressing issues in their school or greater community as part of the academic curriculum. As a result, service-learning fosters academic achievement, civic engagement, and character development."

## NEBRASKA

*Expansion of civic curriculum*

**Legislation: Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-724(5)(c)**

This legislation expands the topics required to be covered in the high school civic curriculum to include "active participation in the improvement of a citizen's community, state, country, and world and the value and practice of civil discourse between opposing interests."

## TENNESSEE

*Project-based assessment*

**Pub. Ch. 1036**

- Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, in conjunction with the social studies curriculum, all LEAs (Local Education Agency) must implement a project-based assessment in civics at least once in grades 4-8 and at least once in grades 9-12.
- The assessments must be developed by the LEA and designed to measure the civic learning objectives contained in the social studies curriculum and to demonstrate understanding and relevance of public policy, the structure of federal, state and local governments, and both the Tennessee and the United States constitutions.
- The department of education may seek the assistance of appropriate outside entities, including the Tennessee Center for Civic Learning and Engagement, to assist it with the implementation of any necessary professional development on the use of project-based assessments of civic learning.
- The legislation defines "project-based" as an approach that engages students in learning essential knowledge and skills through a student-influenced inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks.
- LEAs must submit verification of implementation of this amendment to the department of education.

## WEST VIRGINIA

*Support for service-learning as an instructional strategy to improve student achievement and graduation rates*

**Legislation: W. Va. Code § 18-2E-8**

"Guidelines for increasing the ability of all students to meet higher academic expectations and become self-motivated learners" include a number of "practices that increase the academic expectations for all students and help them to succeed in achieving those higher expectations" by "providing structured opportunities for students to participate in credit and noncredit learning activities outside the school that are integrated with and are an extension of the school-based program of study for the student through such activities as ... community service."

**Legislation: W. Va. Code § 18-5B-11**

For students identified as being at risk of not completing high school, "research identifies a number of effective strategies for engaging students that have the most positive impact on improving high school graduation rates. Some of these strategies are ... service learning opportunities."





# 4

## PROVEN PRACTICE #4:

Offer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities.

### WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM?

Since most extracurricular activities take place outside traditional classroom settings, students have opportunities to study in an environment where they can apply what they learn in class to real-life contexts. They are able to use their knowledge and skills in meaningful scenarios. For many young people, participation in extracurricular activities gives them a sense of self-efficacy and a feeling that they are part of something important. In this case, we are referring to extracurricular activities other than athletics. Students who have a strong sense of self and what they have to offer are more likely to find positive ways to contribute to their communities and society.

Young people today have access to a vast array of extracurricular activities, depending on their areas of interest. Programs like Read2Kids, yearbook club, school newspapers, and blog columns engage students in reading, writing, and general communication skills development. Habitat for Humanity, Rotary Club, Key Club, and vocational clubs like Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4H offer students the chance to work with their peers and community partners in addressing local community needs and aspirations. The arts provide an environment that encourages creative expression.

### EXAMPLES

#### THE CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

*Lick-Wilmerding High School, San Francisco, California*

The Center for Civic Engagement at Lick-Wilmerding High School, a private school with approximately 53% students of color, offers a large numbers of opportunities to get involved in their schools and communities. There is no requirement for service among the student population as a whole, but club leaders, student government leaders, and athletes all are required to complete at least one project. Additionally, the center is the hub for all student activities—leadership, clubs, fund-raising, student government—in addition to the service component, according to Christine Godinez, the school's director of student inclusion, leadership, and civic engagement.

Some of the projects include a voter registration drive, where the entire junior class, in conjunction with the history department, worked to register new voters and assist San Francisco residents in updating current voter registrations. The school also partnered with Rebuilding Together, an organization that provides free repair and renovation programs for low-income, elderly, and disabled residents, to refurbish homes. On an international level, the center focused on education-level construction projects in rural African villages. Students and faculty worked with locals in a rural village to build and furnish a two-room schoolhouse with bathrooms, as well as repair the village's clinic. "We try to make it a collaboration between students and teachers, and to provide as many opportunities as possible," Godinez said. Closer to home, the center set up a printmaking booth at a local arts and music festival and used the opportunity to create discussion of the different cultures in the communities surrounding the school.



## EXAMPLES

### SPEECH AND DEBATE TEAM

*Bronx High School of Science, Bronx, New York*

Bronx High School of Science has one of the most dominant high school speech and debate programs in the country and also one of the largest. In the 2012-2013 season, more than 300 students competed in speech and debate, largely because there are no try-outs and no cuts. Students who participate in speech and debate at Bronx Science come away from the experience with knowledge and skills that prepare them well for life after high school. Jon Cruz, the team's director and instructor of U.S. government and politics with economics, argues that speech and debate prepares students for life after school. "I am confident all of our graduates are well-informed about how the country works. They are politically literate citizens and community members."

Speech and debate fosters the development of important 21st century skills; the art of speaking and presentation; how to enunciate, develop poise, and effectively project their voices. Students learn to anticipate arguments their opponents will make, opponents' responses to their own compelling arguments, and how to research strategies for how to respond to those claims. Speech and debate teaches students how to win and lose with grace. "No debater will win every argument in a round, so students learn to weigh competing claims against each other. One argument very often can outweigh five other arguments, but only if a student understands how to make comparisons and synthesize disparate arguments," Cruz says.

## WHAT RESEARCH SUPPORTS THIS PRACTICE?

In a 2008 study of 4,057 students from 52 high schools in Chicago, Joe Kahne and Susan Sporte found that participation in after-school extracurricular activities other than sports was related to increased commitments to civic participation.<sup>34</sup> The results also showed that while civic learning opportunities and service-learning experiences had the greatest effect on students' commitment to civic participation, factors like prior commitments to civic participation, neighborhood social capital, parents who discuss current events, and after-school activities/other clubs were the next highest predictors of students' civic participation.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, this study illustrates the need for more equitable levels of civic participation across demographic and socioeconomic populations. Being part of a group or club can help students feel connected and vital. All too often, students who would benefit most from being part of extracurricular activities are the ones unable to take advantage of those experiences. According to some studies, school-group membership is an even better predictor of adult engagement than more commonly recognized factors such as education and income.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps extracurricular learning settings are conducive to helping students develop a clear sense of how they fit into the larger community, and how they can contribute, whether it be in a school group, community club, or a blend of the two.

Voluntary organizations in high school occupy a crucial place in the life course of American citizens; they are the primary mode of community engagement just before youth enter adulthood and just before minors become citizens with full voting rights.<sup>38</sup> Research stresses that students should choose extracurricular activities based on their genuine interest; activities should be structured, organized, scheduled regularly, and led by an adult; activities should require effort on the part of the student.<sup>39</sup>

In light of current research, it is not surprising that students who get involved in extracurricular organizations are generally more likely to stay in school and remain engaged as adults than their peers who are uninvolved or detached.





## PROJECTS AND ORGANIZATIONS ALIGNED WITH THIS PRACTICE:

*Note: A list with descriptions of all the organizations and programs is included at the end of this paper.*

### **4H Youth Developmental Organization**

<http://www.4-h.org>

### **Future Business Leaders of America–Phi Beta Lambda**

<http://www.fbbl-pbl.org>

### **Future Educators Association**

<http://futureeducators.org>

### **Key Club International**

<http://www.keyclub.org/home.aspx>

### **National FFA Organization**

<https://www.ffa.org>

### **National Honor Society and National Junior Honor Society**

<http://www.nhs.us/>

## STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

### **RHODE ISLAND**

#### *Rhode Island After School and Summer Learning Program Act*

**Legislation: Rhode Island S.B. 954**

This program requires the department of elementary and secondary education to begin planning an initial demonstration after school and during a summer learning program that meets high-quality standards. The goal is that the program meets high-quality standards; is age and grade appropriate; runs programming during the hours of 3 p.m. through 6 p.m. during the week; promotes the healthy development of youth; connects to the school day; builds on the existing after-school and summer learning infrastructure in the state (including child care, 21st century community learning centers program, child opportunity zones, community-based organizations, and public schools); incorporates experiential learning, social/emotional development, and project-based activities; and serves all children and youth from kindergarten to 12th grade with an emphasis on children and youth who attend high-poverty, low-performing schools.

### **TEXAS**

#### *Expanded Afterschool Opportunities*

**Legislation: Texas S.B. 503**

Texas has created an Expanded Learning Opportunities Council that studies and makes recommendations concerning expanded learning opportunities for public school students. Such expanded learning opportunities may take a variety of forms and may include civic learning opportunities for students.

### **UTAH**

#### *State Capitol Field Trip Funding*

**Legislation: Utah H.B. 363**

This bill authorizes the state board to award grants to districts and charter schools to pay for transportation costs related to student field trips to the state capitol. It directs the state board to adopt rules establishing procedures for applying for and awarding grants, and specifying how grant money should be allocated among districts and charter schools. It provides an allocation for 2013-14 fiscal year.



# 5

## PROVEN PRACTICE #5:

Encourage student participation in school governance.

### WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM?

Students today can participate in school governance in a variety of contexts: student council, youth advisory boards, and department committees, to name a few. Many students have good ideas on how to improve their schools, and they will take action when given the opportunity to make change that is important to them. Students should be allowed to practice civic skills within the relatively controlled environment of the classroom and within school walls. Here they can learn from challenges and triumphs, responses and failures—all the varied realities of the democratic process.

The examples below provide more detail but, once empowered, students can affect real and meaningful change while learning and experiencing the process to enact these new school policies—as difficult and frustrating as that process can sometimes be. Thanks to their direct involvement and drive, students in a Chicago high school enacted a uniform policy change, a youth advisory council in Colorado drafted legislation that was unanimously passed by the state legislature (House Joint Resolution 1004) to reform teacher licensing laws to include suicide awareness prevention training, and students in New York managed to reverse budget cuts to programs deemed important to them.

### EXAMPLES

#### IOWA YOUTH CONGRESS (IYC) AND THE STATE OF IOWA YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL (SIYAC)

##### *Various schools*

IYC, an annual meeting of 100 Iowa high school students that holds elections; proposes, debates, and passes youth-centered bills; and presents its bills to state lawmakers, took on the difficult subject of cyberbullying protection in October 2012. It was decided that better prevention policies were needed, so the IYC amended the current Iowa bullying law and gave schools permission to address instances of cyberbullying among students on and off campus, including through students' personal social media and texts. The IYC then partnered with the SIYAC, the state's sole youth-led council that is outlined in Iowa Code and composed of 21 members between the ages of 14 and 21 from across the state who advise state legislators, state department leaders, city leaders, and the governor.

Together, the groups encouraged community leaders and policymakers to turn the youth bills—including cyberbullying prevention—into actual legislation addressed by the state. After combining the youth bill with similar bullying bills, the Iowa Legislature introduced HSB 196 in the Iowa House of Representatives. The bill passed out of committee but did not pass the full legislature. The bill, however, was reintroduced by the Committee on Education as HSF 593 and is set to be voted on in the 2014 legislative session.

#### COUNCILS OF EXCELLENCE

##### *Marvin Sedway Middle School, Las Vegas, Nevada*

In 2013, the National Association of Student Councils' (NASC) Councils of Excellence recognized Sedway Middle School's student council as an exemplary student organization. "We are all about service to the community," explains April Patterson, English teacher and faculty advisor to the council. "I work hard to instill in our kids the idea that we are leaders, and with that comes a moral obligation to give back—to lead by example, so that's what we spend the majority of our time doing." Council members have conducted a variety of projects, including collecting thousands of cans for local community food drives, creating personalized greeting cards for troops serving overseas, and participating in Pennies for Patients to raise money for patients battling leukemia.

Through their involvement on this council, students have unique opportunities to develop leadership skills and interact collaboratively in small and large groups. Recently, students developed ideas for ways to ramp up school spirit for Spirit Day. They worked in teams to create activities, discussed their options, chose the top two ideas, and then voted on their favorites. While this is probably how many student councils operate, the key is that the council environment is conducive to teaching young people how to be organized, prioritize, work with one another, and navigate differing ideas and opinions. It gives them a chance to practice democratic behaviors. "We're a family", explains Patterson, "so if a project is successful, we all celebrate."



## WHAT RESEARCH SUPPORTS THIS PRACTICE?

Student councils are “laboratories for practical experience in civics and the principles of democracy.”<sup>40</sup> Those who know how to make their voices heard at school will be best equipped to be active and effective in their communities at large. “Students learn and practice the skills necessary for effective citizenship in a context that can have real and lasting impacts on their local school communities,”<sup>41</sup> such as:

- Better academic success and engagement
- A higher likelihood of civic participation in the future, including voting
- Higher test scores
- A higher likelihood to volunteer and participate in campaigns and other political activities
- For students who attend schools where they feel student voice is honored, there is a higher likelihood that they will be trusting and civically engaged later in life.

## PROJECTS AND ORGANIZATIONS ALIGNED WITH THIS PRACTICE:

*Note: A list with descriptions of all the organizations and programs is included at the end of this paper.*

### California Association of Student Councils

<http://www.casc.net>

### Junior State of America and Junior Statesmen Foundation

<http://jsa.org/about/the-junior-statesmen-foundation>

### Mikva Challenge Youth Policy Council:

<http://www.mikvachallenge.org/policymaking>

## STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

### CALIFORNIA

#### *Youth Leadership Project*

**Legislation: 2012 Cal. Stat. 379**

This legislation established the California Youth Leadership Project under the state department of education “for the purpose of promoting youth civic engagement through meaningful opportunities to improve the quality of life for California’s disconnected and disadvantaged youth.” Specifically, the legislation provides for several established California programs that give youth opportunities to participate in their government to apply for scholarships to help fund costs for underserved youth ages 14-18 who would otherwise be unable to participate. Funding for the program comes from voluntary contributions made through a state income tax check-off.

### ILLINOIS

#### *Illinois Democracy Schools*

**Legislation: 2011 Sen. Res. 149**

This resolution acknowledges that the “original intent of public schools was to prepare children to participate constructively as adult citizens in our democracy” and encourages all schools to become Illinois Democracy Schools. Democracy Schools are an initiative of the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, part of the National Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools. Prospective Democracy Schools must first form a team of staff and administrators to complete a schoolwide civic assessment, evaluating civic learning across the curriculum, extracurricular opportunities, and school governance through indicators of the six proven practices of civic learning. The resolution further provides that each school district’s report card must designate which of the district’s high schools are Illinois Democracy Schools and which are not.



# 6

## PROVEN PRACTICE #6:

Encourage students' participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

### WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM?

Mock trials and elections are traditional, popular, and effective programs for many high school students, and they provide many benefits—increased civic knowledge, teamwork, analytic thinking, public speaking, and more. Aside from these established simulations, technology can and does play a meaningful role in the classroom. Students can simulate a professional

work environment by trading emails, planning meetings, and conducting research. Thanks to programs such as iCivics, online games not only offer a wide range of civic learning opportunities but also provide real-time feedback while grabbing and holding the attention of today's students.

### EXAMPLES

#### JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT (JA) BIZ TOWN

*Senita Valley Elementary School, Tuscon, Arizona*

Senita Valley is fortunate to be involved in a program through JA called Biz Town—a mini city housed in a large building complete with a bank, TV station, medical clinic, public utilities, city hall, and a variety of other organizations present in a typical community. Fifth graders at Senita Valley raise money to cover the cost of a trip to Phoenix to participate in the Biz Town experience. The goal is to enable students to relate economic terms through the hands-on experience of running an interactive town. They learn what it takes to run a business and how to manage finances—particularly important life skills to have in today's complex landscape.

Prior to visiting JA BizTown, students engage in a comprehensive 18-hour classroom curriculum that leads students through the study of business principles, career exploration, banking procedures, business decisions and economic terms. While this framework emphasizes business, economics, and financial literacy, students also experience the democratic process with their peers and learn the value of that process. Once on-site, students designate a CEO for each business, pay bills, elect a mayor, and pay taxes. They also elect a sheriff and judge, and if they break a rule they hire a lawyer and go before the judge to make their case. Connie Erickson, principal at Senita Valley Elementary says, "All of our kids look forward to 5th grade and the Biz Town experience. We're not just showing up to school and sliding by—we are always encouraging our kids to think about what they are doing for themselves, their community, and their world."





## EXAMPLES

### YOUTH COURT

#### *Garfield High School, Seattle, Washington*

By combining lessons on law, public speaking, and the responsibilities of attorneys and others inside the courtroom, mock trials provide an opportunity to serve as an effective learning tool for students in any grade level. Margaret Fisher, an attorney and longtime professor at the Seattle University School of Law, helped expand the learning opportunities by turning the mock trials into youth courts, where young people are sentenced by their peers for actual crimes and other problematic behaviors. This system differs from other juvenile justice programs because young people are directly involved in the process at all levels. In most cases, a youth offender already has admitted to a transgression before a peer jury assigns some type of sanction, including community service, conflict resolution training, restitution, and oftentimes an educational workshop.

Fisher completed the national curriculum on youth courts in 2001 for the American Bar Association. In 2012, she established the first-ever Youth Traffic Court in Seattle, in alliance with the Seattle Municipal Court and Garfield High School. This program

won the Seattle CityClub Youth Civic Education Award in 2012. Through resources developed by Street Law, Inc., youth courts are becoming a component of the juvenile justice system in communities across America. While youth courts are established and administered in a wide variety of ways, most are used as a sentencing option for first-time offenders aged 11 to 17 who are charged with misdemeanor nonviolent offenses.



## WHAT RESEARCH SUPPORTS THIS PRACTICE?

- “In addition to the obvious benefit of increased civic knowledge ... students learn skills with clear applicability to both civic and non-civic contexts, such as public speaking, teamwork, close reading, analytical thinking, and the ability to argue both sides of a topic.”<sup>42</sup>
- Recent evidence indicates that simulations of voting, trials, legislative deliberation, and diplomacy in schools can lead to heightened political knowledge and interest.<sup>43</sup>

## PROJECTS AND ORGANIZATIONS ALIGNED WITH THIS PRACTICE:

*Note: A list with descriptions of all the organizations and programs is included at the end of this paper.*

#### **Epistemic Games**

<http://edgaps.org/gaps>

#### **iCivics**

<http://www.icivics.org>

#### **State of America (JSA) and Junior Statesmen Foundation (JSF)**

<http://jsa.org/about/the-junior-statesmen-foundation>

#### **Mikva Challenge Programs**

<http://www.mikvachallenge.org/programs>

#### **Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate**

<https://www.emkinstitute.org/>

#### **Model UN**

<http://www.nmun.org>

#### **Walter and Leonore Annenberg Presidential Learning Center at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library**

<http://www.reaganfoundation.org/annenberg-presidential-learning-center.aspx>

#### **We the People**

<http://new.civiced.org/programs/wtp>

#### **U.S. Courts – Educational Resources**

<http://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources>

# STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

## ILLINOIS

### *Task Force on Civic Education*

#### **H.B. 2428**

This bill amends the school code, provides that the State Board of Education establish the Task Force on Civic Education, and sets forth provisions concerning the members of the task force. The task force is charged with the analysis of the current state of civic education in the state and other jurisdictions; identification of best practices in civic education in other jurisdictions; recommendations to the General Assembly focused on substantially increasing civic literacy and the capacity of youth to obtain the requisite knowledge, skills, and practices to be civically informed members of the public; and funding recommendations if a fiscal commitment is required.

## OKLAHOMA

### *Character Education*

#### **H.B. 2052**

This bill modifies grades in which character education programs may be offered (any single grade, combination of grades, or pre-kindergarten). Subject to funding, the state board may award grants to align character education with the state curriculum in reading, mathematics, science, or social studies, and demonstrate how character education teaches life skills that lead to career readiness. The bill requires the state department to make available a list of approved research-based character education programs, curricula, and materials that may be used by school districts.

## UTAH

### *Civic and Character Education*

#### **H.B. 269**

This bill directs each school district and the state charter school board to submit to the lieutenant governor and the commission on civic and character education a report summarizing how civic and character education are achieved in the district or charter schools through an integrated school curriculum and in the regular course of school work.

#### **H.B. 327**

This bill directs the state board of education to annually report to the education interim committee the methods used and the results being achieved to instruct and prepare students to become informed and responsible citizens through an integrated character and civic education curriculum taught in connection with regular school work.





**TABLE 1** What the New Civics Looks Like in Practice – The Six Proven Practices of Civic Learning that Promote Student Civic Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

Proven Practice	Old Civics	New Civics	Programs
<b>Classroom Instruction</b>	High-quality instruction is the foundation of civic learning, but students are unlikely to view tedious facts about dull procedures as essential to their future role as engaged, informed citizens.	Classroom instruction is relevant and interesting to students.	<b>We The People:</b> Promotes civic competence and responsibility among upper elementary and secondary students through interactive strategies, and a simulated congressional hearing.  <b>Project Citizen:</b> Teaches middle school students how to identify, research, draft, and present solutions for local problems.
<b>Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Issues</b>	Political controversy is a natural part of the democratic process; however, civic learning often fails to address or include such controversy. Consequently, students may not learn how to engage constructively with political issues and events that affect them.	Classroom discussions center on current local, national, and international issues and events, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.	<b>Facing History and Ourselves:</b> Requires students to investigate the events that led to the Holocaust and other recent examples of genocide and mass violence, in order for students to learn to fight prejudice with compassion, indifference with engagement, and misinformation with knowledge.  <b>Deliberating in a Democracy:</b> Teaches students how to deliberate controversial public issues.
<b>Service-Learning</b>	Past civic education typically required students to complete a number of service hours that were unrelated to course work. This was volunteerism, not service-learning.	Active civics encourages the design and implementation of programs that provide students with opportunities to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom activities.	<b>Chicago Public Schools Service-Learning Initiative:</b> Chicago uses service-learning to deepen and extend the classroom for high school students across subject areas to improve academic achievement, build social skills, and develop civic skills and dispositions.  <b>Guilford County Schools, NC Character Education Initiative:</b> Through Guilford County's Character Development Initiative (developed to address a district strategic plan goal of providing students "the tools and motivation necessary to positively impact [the] world") students may earn a Service-Learning Diploma.
<b>Extracurricular Activities</b>	Historically, extracurricular activities were viewed as peripheral to high-quality civic learning and instruction in general.	Active civics supports extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities. These activities must be viewed as indispensable to well-rounded civic education.	<b>Mikva Challenge:</b> Engages high school students in school and community issues through programs in youth policymaking, community problem solving, and electoral participation.  <b>Mock Trials:</b> Many state bar associations collaborate with schools to engage students of all levels in mock trial projects.
<b>School Governance</b>	In the past, student councils generally made inconsequential decisions on social matters rather than dealing with true governance issues and addressing student concerns.	Student councils and other school governance opportunities are viewed as laboratories for students to gain practical experience in civics and democracy.	<b>The California Association of Student Councils:</b> Involves students in activities and programs outside the classroom that build citizenship and encourage self-esteem.  <b>The Colorado Youth Advisory Council:</b> Supports students in examining, evaluating, and discussing the issues affecting Colorado youth. Through the Council, students formally advise and make recommendations to elected officials on such issues.
<b>Simulations of Democratic Processes</b>	Most civics courses were designed around textbook-heavy curriculums where students only read about civics.	Simulations of democratic processes and policymaking teach students 21st century skills such as public speaking, teamwork, close reading, analytical thinking, and the ability to argue both sides of a topic.	<b>Kids Voting USA:</b> Teaches students about democracy through a combination of classroom activities, family dialogue, and an authentic voting experience.  <b>iCivics:</b> Prepares students to become knowledgeable, engaged 21st century citizens through educational video games and other materials.

# CONCLUSION

If we aspire to cultivate generations of young people who desire to play vital roles in America's democracy, providing them with quality civic education is non-negotiable. It really is that simple. The way we get there, unfortunately, is not so simple. Various states have committed to making quality civic education an integral part of every child's educational experience, and others stand to glean valuable lessons from their renewed commitment to creating informed, impassioned citizens who can tackle real-life challenges. Here are some recommendations for taking civic education in your district or state to the next level:

- Utilize the six proven practices. Research continues to demonstrate measurable improvement in civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- Seek out schools successfully implementing the six proven practices and learn from their efforts. Reaching out to these schools and districts can demystify the implementation process by providing ideas on how to set effective goals and effective strategies for meeting them.
- Provide pre- and in-service teachers with quality professional development on the six proven practices, including strategies for how to address complex issues in meaningful, impactful ways. We cannot expect teachers to deliver high-quality results without investing in their growth and development.
- Develop and implement policies that support the six practices.

The consensus seems to be that we have reached a tipping point where civic education is concerned. Either we take concrete steps toward cultivating more civically engaged young people, or we risk losing the democracy our forefathers fought so hard to create. The six proven practices provide a way forward and clearly represent a step in the right direction.





# ECS RESOURCES

## **Citizenship Education: Online Database**

This database allows users to generate profiles of the state policies for citizenship education in individual states and view 50-state reports on state policies for citizenship education.

<http://www.ecs.org/citizenship-education-policies/>

## **Civics Assessment Database**

The database contains questions categorized by national civics standards that have been juried by civic learning experts for their clarity and meaningfulness in relation to the competencies of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

[http://www.ecs.org/Qna/splash\\_new.asp](http://www.ecs.org/Qna/splash_new.asp)

## **Education Commission of the States Policy Reports on Civics Education Topics**

Deeper Learning: A primer for state legislators, <http://www.ecs.org/deeper-learning-a-primer-for-state-legislators/>

The Civics Education Initiative of 2015, <http://www.ecs.org/the-civics-education-initiative-of-2015/>

State Civic Education Policy Framework, <http://www.ecs.org/state-civic-education-policy-framework/>

Different Paths to a Common Goal: Preparing students for civic life,

<http://www.ecs.org/different-paths-to-a-common-goal-preparing-students-for-civic-life/>

State Policies on Service-Learning, <http://www.ecs.org/state-policies-on-service-learning/>

## **National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement (NCLCE)**

This institute within the Education Commission of the States (ECS) assists education leaders in their efforts to promote, support, and reward civic education and service-learning as essential components of America's education system.

<http://www.ecs.org/initiatives/national-center-for-learning-civic-engagement/>

## **The Progress of Education Reform**

The following issues of ECS' bi-monthly publication, *The Progress of Education Reform*, discuss issues on:

- Service-Learning: <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/84/95/8495.pdf>
- Citizenship Education <http://www.ecs.org/the-progress-of-education-reform-citizenship-education/>
- Digital Citizenship <http://www.ecs.org/the-progress-of-education-reform-civic-engagement-through-digital-citizenship/>

and provide concise review of other research relevant for civics and civic engagement in general.

## **Service-Learning: Online Database**

<http://www.ecs.org/state-policies-for-service-learning/>

# ORGANIZATIONS THAT CAN SUPPORT YOUR WORK

## **American Bar Association Division for Public Education**

The ABA Division for Public Education developed lesson plans to help middle school and high school teachers incorporate news literacy with the social studies classroom.

[http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_education.html](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education.html)

## **Amigos de las Américas**

Amigos de las Américas inspires and builds young leaders through collaborative community development and immersion in cross-cultural experiences in an effort to help each young person to become a life-long catalyst for social change.

<http://www.amigoslink.org>

## **Annenberg Classroom**

In news of the week, lesson plans, such videos as “Habeas Corpus: The Guantanamo Cases,” plus discussion topics (“How should towns handle their drug crisis?”) the Annenberg Classroom offers teachers an array of free resources.

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

## **Bill of Rights Institute**

The Institute supports teaching constitutional principles by developing educational resources on American history and government, provides professional development opportunities to teachers and runs student programs and scholarship contests. It offers the free, digital Freedom: History, Government and Economics through Primary Sources.

<http://billofrightsinstitute.org/>

## **California Association of Student Councils (CASC)**

CASC is a student-led, nonprofit organization with the express purpose of improving the quality of life in the world by developing skilled, ethical, and sensitive leaders of diverse backgrounds and cultures. The council provides leadership development for elementary, middle, and high school students and their advisors in California and around the world through peer training. Programs emphasize authenticity, ethics, and collaborative decisionmaking and enhance learning outside of the classroom.

<http://www.casc.net/>

## **Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools (CMS)**

CMS is a coalition of 40 organizations committed to improving the quality and quantity of civic learning in American schools. The campaign’s goal is to increase and improve civic learning in grades K-12 by working for policies that implement the recommendations of *The Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools* report.

<http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/the-campaign/guardian-of-democracy-report> and <http://www.civicmissionofschools.org>

## **Campus Compact**

A national coalition of more than 1,100 college and university presidents—representing some 6 million students—who are committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education. They do this by promoting public and community service that develops students’ citizenship skills, helping campuses forge effective community partnerships, and providing resources and training for faculty seeking to integrate civic and community-based learning into the curriculum.

<http://www.compact.org>

## **Center for Civic Education**

A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization in California, the center’s programs are implemented with the assistance of a network of public- and private-sector organizations and educational leaders in every state and congressional district in the U.S. and more than 80 other countries, many of which are emerging and advanced democracies. The center is dedicated to promoting an enlightened and responsible citizenry committed to democratic principles and actively engaged in the practice of democracy in the United States and abroad.

<http://civiced.org>

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

CIRCLE conducts research on civic education in schools, colleges, and community settings, and on young Americans’ voting and political participation, service, activism, media use, and other forms of civic engagement. It is based at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University.

<http://www.civicyouth.org>



### **The Center on Congress at Indiana University**

Because each new generation of citizens must be taught how to become capable participants in the process of governing, the Center works with teachers to determine best ways to inspire young people and adults to take part in revitalizing representative government.

<http://centeroncongress.org/about-center>

### **Chicago Public Schools Service-Learning website**

This site provides a toolkit for teachers with background information on service-learning, a planning tool, rubric for assessing the quality of service-learning projects, and reflection resources and aids. It also offers complete curriculum guides on some topics such as aging, hunger, and poverty.

<http://www.servicelearning.cps.k12.il.us>

### **The Character Education Partnership (CEP)**

CEP is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to fostering effective character education in the nation's K-12 schools, and to developing civic virtue and moral character in our youth for a more compassionate and responsible society.

<http://www.character.org>

### **The Civic Canopy**

The Civic Canopy works with residents to affect change in neighborhoods and communities, and individuals to affect change in organizations and institutions. The goal in working with individuals is to increase the capacity of all people, including youth, to positively influence the decisions, problems, and solutions that affect their quality of life.

<http://www.civiccanopy.org>

### **Close Up Foundation**

Close Up informs, inspires, and empowers young people to exercise the rights and accept the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy.

<http://www.closeup.org>

### **Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC)**

This council, made up of over 40 youth members from across the state and 4 members of the legislature, is designed to give young Coloradans voice in the policy-making process. Youth get to know their legislators, study the issues affecting their state, learn the fundamentals of public policy and state government, and work collaboratively to address important issues.

[www.coyac.org](http://www.coyac.org)

### **Connecting Thinking and Action: Ideas for Service-Learning Reflection**

This guide, from RMC Research Corporation, provides a variety of reflection activities for different subjects and grade levels. Activities are included for each phase of reflection, including the service activity, pre-service, during, and post-service.

<http://www.rmcdenver.com/Default.aspx?DN=55330b93-2c5e-4325-9704-d80a4b17d30b>

### **Constitutional Rights Foundation**

Passing the ideas and practices of participatory democracy to young people by making history, law and government real is the Foundation's goal. This is accomplished by offering hands-on experiences, internships for underserved students, publications and teacher professional development.

<http://www.crf-usa.org>

### **Deliberating in a Democracy, Constitutional Rights Foundation and Street Law, Inc.**

This program, funded with grants from the U.S. Department of Education is designed to promote the teaching and learning of democratic principles and the skills of civic deliberation.

<http://www.deliberating.org>

### **Discovering Justice**

Discovering Justice prepares young people to value the justice system, realize the power of their own voices, and embrace civic responsibility by connecting classrooms and courtrooms.

<http://www.discoveringjustice.org>

### **Earth Force**

Earth Force envisions a nation where young people from all walks of life are actively making positive change to the environment at their schools, in their neighborhoods, and in partnership with their communities.

<http://www.earthforce.org>

### **Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate**

Dedicated to educating the public about the role of the Senate in government, encouraging participatory democracy, invigorating civil discourse, and inspiring the next generation of citizens to engage in the civic life of their communities.

<https://www.emkinstitute.org/>

### **Epistemic Games: David Williamson Shaffer and colleagues**

These games were developed with the idea of helping students use computers to simulate the kinds of work environments they can expect when they enter the workforce. Students compose emails, plan, and organize meetings and events, and carry out a variety of tasks that typical adults would be expected to do when pursuing civic goals.

<http://edgaps.org/gaps>

### **Everyday Democracy**

The goal of Everyday Democracy's programs and services is to help create communities that work better for everyone because all voices are included in public problem solving, and to link that work to creating a stronger democracy.

<http://www.everyday-democracy.org>

### **Facing History and Ourselves**

Facing History and Ourselves is an international educational and professional development nonprofit organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry.

<http://www.facing.org>

### **Freedom Forum First Amendment Center**

A nonpartisan center dedicated to helping people understand and appreciate the values of the First Amendment.

<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org>

### **Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge**

The purpose of Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge is to educate and inspire citizens of all ages and encourage them to make a positive contribution in their communities. This foundation is dedicated to helping students, teachers, and citizens gain a greater awareness and appreciation of the principles of a free and democratic society.

<http://www.freedomsfoundation.org>

### **Generation Citizen**

Generation Citizen teaches teenagers about direct political action. Through an innovative in-class curriculum, students work with local leaders to fix local problems. Through this real-world experience, teens are building an active democracy.

<http://www.generationcitizen.org>

### **The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History**

Founded in 1994, the Institute is devoted to the improvement of history education. Offerings include an AP U.S. History Study Guide, Teaching Literacy through History, an online master's degree, and a free Affiliate School Program that provides exclusive resources.

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/>

### **Guilford County Schools, NC Character (Education Initiative)**

An initiative developed in response to a district strategic plan goal of providing students "the tools and motivation necessary to positively impact the world." Guilford's Character Development program encompasses quality character education, civic education, and service-learning, implemented together to prepare students for engaged civic life beyond school and the classroom.

[http://www.gcsnc.com/pages/gcsnc/Parents\\_Students/Character\\_Development](http://www.gcsnc.com/pages/gcsnc/Parents_Students/Character_Development)

### **iCivics**

iCivics prepares young Americans to become knowledgeable, engaged 21st century citizens by creating free and innovative educational materials. iCivics offers the nation's most comprehensive, standards-aligned civics curriculum that is available at no cost on the Web.

<http://www.icivics.org>

### **ICONS Project**

A project at the University of Maryland designed to create simulations and scenario-driven exercises to advance participants' understanding of complex problems and strengthen their ability to make decisions, navigate crises, and think strategically

<http://www.icons.umd.edu>



### **Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP)**

A global initiative, ICP envisions young people in every nation engaged in improving their lives and communities through civic participation. It pursues this goal by incubating innovative models for youth and creating and expanding global networks.

<http://www.icip.org>

### **Junior State of America (JSA) and Junior Statesmen Foundation (JSF)**

JSA and JSF work to strengthen American democracy by educating and preparing high school students for life-long involvement and responsible leadership in a democratic society. Participants learn statesmanship as they engage in political discourse. They cultivate democratic leadership skills, challenge one another to think critically, advocate their own opinions, develop respect for opposing views, and learn to rise above self-interest to promote the public good.

<http://www.jsa.org>

### **KIDS Consortium**

Dedicated to assisting teachers, students, and facilitators to create and implement meaningful service-learning.

<http://www.kidsconsortium.org>

### **Learning to Give**

Learning to Give is the curriculum division of The LEAGUE, the world's leading developer of lessons and resources that teach giving and volunteerism, civic engagement, and character through service-learning. With a mission to educate young people about the volunteer sector, Learning to Give offers lessons, units, and resources for teaching about philanthropy and skills for giving back to the community. Lessons are standards-based and searchable by content and grade level.

<http://www.learningtogive.org>

### **Mikva Challenge**

Mikva Challenge develops the next generation of civic leaders, activists, and policymakers by providing young people with opportunities to actively participate in the political process. They believe that the best way to learn leadership and democracy is to experience both.

<http://www.mikvachallenge.org>

### **Model UN**

This academic simulation of the United Nations aims to educate participants about current events, topics in international relations, diplomacy, and the United Nations agenda. The participants role play as diplomats representing a country or NGO (non-governmental organization) in a simulated session of a committee of the UN, such as the Security Council or the General Assembly.

<http://www.nmun.org>

### **National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)**

NASSP is the preeminent organization of and national voice for middle-level and high school principals, assistant principals, and aspiring school leaders from across the United States and more than 45 countries around the world. The mission of NASSP is to promote excellence in school leadership through research-based professional development, resources, and advocacy so that every student can be prepared for postsecondary learning opportunities and be workforce ready.

<http://www.principals.org>

### **National Coalition for Academic Service-Learning (NCASL)**

NCASL's primary focus is to support state education agencies and education professionals by providing leadership and resources that lead to the intentional and sustainable use of academic service-learning as an engaging pedagogy in the instructional setting.

<http://www.ncasl.org>

### **National Council for the Social Studies**

Social studies educators teach students the content knowledge, intellectual skills, and civic values necessary for fulfilling the duties of citizenship in a participatory democracy. The mission of National Council for the Social Studies is to provide leadership, service, and support for all social studies educators.

<http://www.socialstudies.org>

### **National History Day**

NHD offers year-long academic programs that engage over half a million middle- and high-school students in conducting original research on historical topics of interest. These research-based projects are entered into contests at the local and affiliate levels. NHD also improves history education by providing professional development and curriculum materials.

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

### **National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC)**

NYLC promotes service-learning in schools and communities across the United States by providing programs and services that develop young leaders, support educators, and advance the field of service-learning.

<http://www.nylc.org>

### **Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21)**

P21 advocates for 21st century readiness for every student and strives to serve as a catalyst to position 21st century readiness at the center of K-12 education by building collaborative partnerships among education, business, community, and government leaders.

<http://www.p21.org>

### **PeaceJam**

PeaceJam is an international education program, headquartered in Colorado, which brings together Nobel Peace Prize winners with young people to inspire a new generation of peacemakers to transform themselves, their communities, and the world.

<http://www.peacejam.org>

### **Project Citizen, Center for Civic Education**

A curricular program at the middle school through adult levels promoting competent and responsible participation with government at all levels. This program helps participants learn how to monitor and influence public policy while developing support for democratic values and principles, tolerance, and feelings of political efficacy.

<http://new.civiced.org/programs>

### **Project REAL: Relevant Education About Law**

Project REAL, a Nevada nonprofit, strives to meet the challenges of teaching K-12 Nevada students the importance of the law. Their primary goal is to prepare Nevada's children to become involved, participating citizens who understand their social responsibilities and rights. All programs are provided to schools at no cost.

<http://www.projectreal.com>

### **Robert R. McCormick Foundation**

McCormick Foundation is a Chicago-based nonprofit charitable trust that helps develop engaged citizen leaders and makes life in communities better through philanthropic programs and grants.

<http://www.mccormickfoundation.org>

### **Rock the Vote**

Rock the Vote's mission is to engage and build political power for young people in the United States. Rock the Vote uses music, popular culture, new technologies, and grassroots organizing to motivate and mobilize young people to participate in every election, with the goal of seizing the power of the youth vote to create political and social change.

<http://www.rockthevote.org>

### **Senior Project.net**

Senior projects are culminating projects completed by students in their last year of high school. Typically a senior project includes conducting research and generating a research paper on a topic of interest, participating in field work related to the topic, documenting the service or field work accomplished, connecting it back to the topic of research, assembling a portfolio, and providing an oral presentation on the research and fieldwork using a thesis statement, supporting arguments supported by research, summary of field work, what was learned, and conclusions.

<http://www.seniorproject.net/>

### **Service-Learning: The Classroom Companion to Character Education: A Resource Guide for Teachers & Facilitators**

This guide to all steps in developing a service-learning project contains creative ideas for culminating events and demonstrations, such as the Au Revoir Circle. It also offers celebration ideas for specific types of projects, including civic, environmental, and peer mentoring projects.

[http://www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/precoll/service\\_learn/home.html](http://www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/precoll/service_learn/home.html)

### **Service Nation**

Service Nation—a campaign of Be the Change, Inc.—defines its mission as working to rekindle an ethic of civic responsibility in America through universal national service.

<http://www.servicenation.org>



### **Street Law, Inc.**

Street Law is a nonprofit organization that creates classroom and community programs that teach people about law, democracy, and human rights worldwide. Their accessible, engaging, and interactive programs empower students and communities to become active, legally savvy contributors to society.

<http://www.streetlaw.org>

### **Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center**

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society. The Teaching Tolerance program works to foster school environments that are inclusive and nurturing—classrooms where equality and justice are not just taught, but lived.

<http://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do/teaching-tolerance>

### **U.S. Courts – Educational Resources**

One resource allows students to work with federal judges in their courtrooms or team up with students in classrooms to apply Supreme Court precedents to realistic teen situations. Another offers students a chance to deliberate Supreme Court decisions, pointing up the burden of balancing individual rights with public safety.

<http://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources>

### **Walter and Leonore Annenberg Presidential Learning Center at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation (APLC)**

The Annenberg Presidential Learning Center (APLC) hosts programs designed to aid the development of proactive, informed, educated, and conscientious citizens. These programs include a Student Speaker Series, educator programming, and civics and pedagogy based professional development sessions.

<http://www.reaganfoundation.org/annenberg-presidential-learning-center.aspx>

### **We the People, Center for Civic Education**

This program promotes civic competence and responsibility among the nation's upper elementary and secondary students. The curriculum utilizes interactive strategies, relevant content and simulated congressional hearings to make teaching and learning exciting for both students and teachers. The program enjoys active support from state bar associations and foundations, and other educational, professional, business, and community organizations across the nation.

<http://new.civiced.org/programs>

### **What So Proudly We Hail**

A one-stop source for free, literary-based curricula to aid in the classroom instruction of American history, civics, social studies, and language arts. Explore this site to find lesson plans, video seminars, primary resources and more.

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

### **Youth and Government—YMCA**

This YMCA program in the United States allows high school students to serve in model governments at the local, state, and national levels. The purpose of the program is to bring the workings of state government alive for students by giving them opportunities to discuss current state issues with state administrators, elected officials, and students from high schools and YMCA's throughout the state.

<http://www.ymca.net/youthandgovernment>

### **Youth on Board (YOB)**

YOB helps young people and adults think differently about each other so that they can work together to change society. YOB supports the power of students to transform their communities by recognizing that when young people are fully engaged—when their voices are heard, their opinions matter, and their unique perspective is respected—they commit themselves to making their schools, their communities, and their own lives better.

<http://www.youthonboard.org>

### **Youth Service America (YSA)**

YSA seeks to improve communities by increasing the number and the diversity of young people serving in substantive roles. YSA supports a global culture of engaged youth committed to a lifetime of service, learning, leadership, and achievement.

<http://www.ysa.org>

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