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Civic Education: What are the High School Graduation Requirements Across the Nation?

Sam Evans

Western Kentucky University

Abstract

Americans are facing social, political, and economic uncertainty, and historically education in the United States has been given the responsibility for preparing individuals to participate in a democratic society. Accompanying uncertainty faced by many Americans is an increase in incivility across many sectors of society and a lack of unity. Cancel culture, identity culture, and “us versus them” patterns of behavior have increased along with a lack of communication. At the same time, the priority given to civics in our nation’s high schools has decreased over the past 4-5 decades. While states and national associations have adopted guidelines and standards relevant to social studies and civics, state high school graduation requirements do not provide evidence that civics education is a high priority in high schools. This low priority, along with the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress civics scores, raise questions about the priority states are giving to preparing our youth for participation in a democratic society.

Keywords: civics education, high school graduation requirements, education policy

Americans are currently living in a society characterized by political polarizations and significant levels of uncertainty. Americans are expressing themselves in a variety of ways some of which are considered by those holding opposing views to be offensive. Furthermore, Americans are members of many different communities, and for communities to exist, they must have things in common and a mechanism for communicating the aims, beliefs, aspirations, and knowledge associated with the community. The concept of a community is an accumulation of our past endeavors, and we need to objectively look at our past record and present endeavors to ascertain whether we are educating individuals to serve humankind or just themselves. Unfortunately, we have not always been adept when it comes to learning from our past. In a recorded conversation, former President Harry Truman stated: “The next generation never learns anything from the previous one until it’s brought home with a hammer. . . . I’ve wondered why the next generation can’t profit from the generation before... they never do until they get knocked in the head by experience” (Rushay, 2009).

The concerns expressed by former President Truman may be more relevant today than ever. We are in an unprecedented time, and we appear to be reliving lessons that were not learned from earlier generations that have resurfaced in different, but at the same time, familiar ways. While efforts to ignore the past may prove beneficial in the short run, the futility of such undertaking is best characterized in a statement by John Dewey 1916 (2013): “The past just as

past is no longer our affair... But knowledge of the past is the key to understanding the present. History deals with the past, this past is the history of the present” (p. 214).

Americans are feeling socially, economically, and politically alienated from society and many individuals have become prisoners to themselves and do not share their thoughts and feelings with others. The McCarthy Era is an example of a challenging event whereby many Americans did not always feel they could express their thoughts. One exception was Senator Margaret Chase Smith (1950) who expressed her thoughts on the floor of the Senate: “Those of us who shout the loudest about Americanism . . . , ignore some of the basic principles of Americanism: The right to criticize; the Right to hold unpopular beliefs; The right to protest; and the Right of independent thought” (pp. 621-622).

Lately, Americans have experienced the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the subsequent rioting and destruction of private and public property in several urban areas. In some cases, Americans have become “unhinged” from normal and expected patterns of behavior when dealing with societal issues. With the pandemic and the accompanying mandates related to the wearing of masks, limits on individual freedoms in restaurants and the closure of entertainment venues have all pitted one group of Americans against another. Likewise, the “us versus them” identity politics (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018) and cancel culture have denied many Americans their first amendment rights to present diverse viewpoints and have created communication barriers between and among groups. Most recently, the Capitol riot on January 6, 2021, demonstrated a lack of understanding of our Constitution and the peaceful transfer in the Office of the President.

Statement of Problem

Historically, our schools have been tasked with providing students with the knowledge and skills associated with living in and contributing to a democratic society. If this is the purpose, then all students should have the opportunity to engage in experiences to develop the knowledge and skills associated with authentic civic concerns (Muetterties et al., 2022). Social studies in general and civics in particular are areas of the school curriculum that has traditionally been tasked with providing the requisite knowledge and skills for democratic citizenship. Since the 1960s, there has been a reduced emphasis on civics in our schools (Wilson, et al., 2019); however, there has been an increase of uncivil behavior in our society. This increase in incivility and the subsequent polarization of society has resulted in a renewed attention on civic education (Blevins, 2022). While this is a national issue, education policy often determines priorities in our public schools across the 50 states and the District of Columbia. As such, the focus of this study is on the state high school graduation requirements in the area of civics.

Literature Review

Defining Civic Education

Historically, some people have felt alienated from their neighborhood and community (Light & Keller, 1979), especially in urban areas; and are reluctant to carry out their responsibilities as citizens of a given society. As such, communication is critical for the

transmission of common understandings and schools have been one of the agencies in our society assigned with this responsibility. As our country developed, there was a need for unity, and according to Webb (1981) schools offered a child exposure to the competing roles they would play during their lifetime as a member of different communities. The concept of unity was also emphasized by Campbell (2007) as important within an increasingly diverse society. One component of the school curriculum that has played a critical role in helping student develop the knowledge and skills relative to the different roles they will play is social studies with civic education being one aspect of the social studies curriculum. According to Spiegler (2021), “Civics education, at its core, is about understanding how government works and how to access government to achieve equity, justice, and a fair shot for all” (para 13). One state, Nebraska, has included the statement “A central role of schools is to impart civic knowledge and skill that help our youth to see the relevance of a civic dimension for their lives” (Nebraska Revised Statute 79-724, para. 1). Educating for American Democracy (2021) defines civic as denoting “the virtues, assets, and activities that a free people need to govern themselves well . . . They acquire and share the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective participation” (p. 9). The National Council for the Social Studies (2013) posits “Civics is not limited to the study of politics and society; it also encompasses participation in classrooms and schools, neighborhoods, groups, and organizations” (p. 31).

As citizenship involves participation in various communities that are both private and political in nature, formal education becomes a critical component relative to our interests and what we value individually and collectively. Campbell (2019) identified other mediating variables including what happens in the classroom, sources of information outside the classroom, extracurricular activities, service learning, school ethos, and public policy including testing requirements. Dunkin and Biddle (1974) have also identified teacher characteristics such as formative experiences and educator preparation as being important variables related to student learning along with context of the classroom, including textbooks and climate. However, the current polarization of our society, diminishing trust in government, and the breakdown of traditions and institutions (Westheimer, 2019), bring into question whether we are meeting desired outcomes of civics/ citizenship education.

Court Cases

State mandates related to P-12 education have often been related to funding and curriculum and citizens and school districts have gone to court to rectify what they perceive as disparities. While the disparities have often related to access to equal educational opportunities with *Brown v. Board of Education* being a landmark decision at the federal level, there have also been state cases relative to funding that have impacted public education at the local level. One such case was *Rose v Council for Better Education* (1989), where the burden of responsibility for providing funding for a quality education for all Kentucky students was placed squarely on the shoulders of the Kentucky General Assembly. Civics is no exception to concerns about education ending up in court. Student voice is a critical component of preparation for the workforce,

college, or the military and students have begun to express their views on the importance of civics within the high school curriculum.

In 2018, the case *Cook (A. C.) et al. v. Raimondo et al.* (2020) was brought before the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island by 18 student plaintiffs. They argued that the state failed to instruct them in the values and skills necessary to participate in a democratic society. On October 13, 2020, the Court handed down its decision. In handing down the ruling, the Court stated the students allege public officials failed to provide them: “. . . an education that is adequate to prepare them to function productively as civic participants capable of voting, serving on a jury, understanding economic, social, and political systems sufficiently to make informed choice, and to participate effectively in civic activities” (p. 2). In an acknowledgement of the importance of the plaintiffs’ efforts, the Court stated: “This case does not represent a wild-eyed effort to expand the reach of substantive due process, but rather a cry for help from a generation of young people who are destined to inherit a country which we – the generation currently in charge – are not stewarding well” (p. 5). Furthermore, the court stated that: “while it is clearly desirable – and even essential, as I argue in the Introduction – for citizens to have a deeper grasp of our civic responsibilities and governing mechanism and American history, this is not something the U.S. Constitution contemplated or mandates” (p. 45). “There is no right to civics education in the Constitution” (p. 47). The Court could not provide a relief.

The U. S. District Court ruling was appealed to the U. S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit as *Cook (A. C.) v. McKee*. The Court affirmed the judgment of the district court on January 11, 2022; however, in dismissing the case, Judge wrote “the Students have called attention to critical issues of declining civic engagement and inadequate preparation for participation in civic life at a time when many are concerned about the future of American democracy” (p. 20).

Prior to Judge Smith handing down his decision, Chief Justice John Roberts included the following statement in his 2019 Year-end Report on the Federal Judiciary: “. . . we have come to take democracy for granted, and civic education has fallen by the wayside” (p. 2). Furthermore, “each generation has an obligation to pass on to the next, not only a fully functioning government responsive to the needs of the people, but the tools to understand and improve it” (p. 4).

Curricular Perspectives and Guidelines

Over time, issues change, and cases are filed in respective jurisdictions. One of the current issues facing our society relates to the broad area of civility which impacts many if not all sectors of society. Whether it be the workplace, governmental entities, businesses and industries, or educational institutions, the various forms of media are replete with incidents of behavior that could be classified as noncivil. Historically, our P-12 schools have taken on the responsibility of helping individuals acquire the knowledge and requisite skills associated with becoming a participating member of our democratic society, and the instruction has been found in coursework identified as civic education. Instruction identified as civic education has been included in coursework beginning at the elementary level and continuing through high school.

Essential learnings associated with civic education were included in the 1942 edition of *Missouri at work on the public school curriculum: Courses of study for elementary grades* (State Superintendent of Public Schools). The document included objectives of civic responsibility as part of the courses of study. These objectives included: social justice, social activity, social understanding, critical judgment, tolerance, etc. (p. 3). As part of the 8th grade curriculum, students were expected to “develop habits of good citizenship, . . . developing habits of respecting the rights of others as guaranteed to them in the Bill of Rights, . . . and strengthening habits of tolerance” (p. 506). Essential learnings for 5th grade students included: “strengthening habits of group cooperation and discussion” and “continuation of the habit of considering facts on both sides of all questions” (p. 475). Expectations associated with citizenship were also included in the 1980 Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education *Guide to social studies curriculum development for Missouri educators*. “Assumptions about citizenship in American society” (p. 34) and “assumption about responsibilities of social studies teachers to help students become more effective citizens” (p. 35) were included in the *Guide*. The *Guide* also included suggested course sequences for grades 7-12 with Government being suggested; however, it was not required for graduation. At the time of the publication of the *Guide*, only one unit of social studies was required for graduation and the unit did not have to be Government and Civics and was not included in the examples of course sequences for grades 7-12. However, Citizenship/Law Related – American Studies was suggested in the sample scope and sequence for grades K-6 (pp. 72-79).

Implied in the assumptions for social studies teachers is the expectation that individuals would be prepared to provide learning experiences in their college/ university preparation program; and one indicator of preparation is based on the inclusion of civic education in social studies methods textbooks. A review of methods textbook provided a mixed perspective on whether civics was emphasized in the methods courses and in several instances, civics was embedded under political science. This could be problematic if one accepts the following statement from Clark: “while all political science applies to citizenship education, the primary difference being that citizenship education has a much broader scope than government-oriented courses” (1973, p. 217). Of the methods books reviewed with copyrights prior to 1990, three provided a section devoted to the teaching of civics, three minimally referenced political science in the index, and one briefly mentioned civics in the text. One methods textbook with a 1991 copyright did not mention civics/civics education. The two older methods textbooks, Clark (1973) and Gross et al. (1969) provided the most extensive sections on civics/ civics education. Although the available textbooks were limited, those available indicated a diminished emphasis on civics in the later part of the 20th Century. More recently, four methods textbooks (Chapin, 2015; Douglas, 2021; Larson, 2016; Singer, 2015) include sections on civics and other books are available as resources to educators. Pedagogical knowledge along with an understanding of content relative to civics is important for the classroom teacher. Likewise, teachers need access to professional development to facilitate their skills relative to civic education engagement (Blevins, et al., 2016).

While the content of social studies methods textbooks is an indicator of what might be included in college methods courses, it is not the only indication of the course content. College faculty can use textbooks as a guide for organizing their methods courses, with supplementary materials, and accreditation requirements include expectations relative to learned society guidelines. The *National Standards for Civics and Government* (Center for Civic Education, 1994) and the National Council for the Social Studies document, *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (NCSS, 2013) have set forth standards/ learner outcomes relative to civic education. For illustrative purposes, the following outcomes to be met by the end of grade 12 are taken from the NCSS document.

1. “D2. Civ.4.9-12. Explain how the U.S. Constitution establishes a system of government that had powers, responsibilities, and limits that have changes over time and that are still contested” (p. 32).
2. “D2. Civ.7.9-12. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others” (p. 33).
3. “D2. Civ.14.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights” (p. 34).

Educator preparation programs are also accredited by the various states and numerous states follow national accreditation guidelines and standards. States also establish guidelines for P-12 schools including high school graduation requirements. The guidelines are a strong indicator of instruction in P-12 schools. As posited by Campbell (2019) and Dunkin and Biddle (1974), what happens in the classroom is extremely important and research findings indicate student engagement relative to civics is important (Blevins, et al., 2016; Kahne, et al., 2016).

Current literature in civics education provides a wealth of findings related to curriculum. Fitzgerald et al. (2021) posits a greater need for “more active, experiential, and relevant” experiences. While part of a larger conversation, Dabach et al. (2018), Fitzgerald, et al. (2021), and Tichnor-Wagner et al. (2022) report findings positing that current strategies and state policies may not provide an inclusive learning environment for marginalized students. Furthermore, Saye et al. (2018) suggests in order to develop civic competency, students must be in a learning environment based on authentic pedagogy and challenged intellectually. Unfortunately, this pedagogical approach is not congruent with assessments of civic knowledge based on multiple choice questions as evident on naturalizations tests and other high-stakes assessments. Furthermore, there are few research findings related to state curriculum requirements at the high school level. In a study reported by Wilson, et al., (2019) the researchers reported an increase in policies during the period of 2004-2016 in the areas of coursework, assessments, and accountability. Relative to coursework, there was considerable variation in the curricula. All states required students to pass a course covering civics content; however, there was no value placed on the quality of civic education experienced by the students. Similar findings were found in assessment. Overall, findings from the study indicated 30 states increased

their policies related to civic education. An earlier report on state education policies related to civic education was reported in 2016 by the Education Commission of the States. The report included as summary statement indicating every state required coursework in civics or social studies to graduate; however, the requirements vary from state to state. Furthermore, 37 states required students to demonstrate proficiency in civics in order to graduate.

Although there is an appearance by some states to increase their emphasis on the importance of civic education for our students, Shapiro and Brown (2018) reported a wide variation in what states were doing to address the need for preparing individuals to become responsible citizens in our country. One indication of the importance of specific knowledge and skills related to civics can be found in requirements specific to the completion of a course in civics as part of the high school graduation requirements. Therefore, what are the high school graduate requirements in civic education across the United States? To answer this question, the following research questions were posed for this study.

Methodology

The general research question for this study was, what states are doing to promote civic education at the 9-12 level, with specific questions as follows:

1. What are the high school course graduation requirements relative to civic education?
2. What are states doing relative to the inclusion of learner outcomes related to civic education?

The researcher employed a document analysis method relative to accessing data to help answer the research questions. Individual state high school graduation requirements were accessed digitally during the months of January through June 2021, using the following search inquiry “state” high school graduation requirements for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Course and assessment requirements were digitally accessed and rechecked in 2022. In most cases, these inquiries led directly to the state high school graduate requirements, and in other cases, the information was obtained using weblinks to the state departments of education. In all cases, the official website for the state departments of education was consulted. This approach was used as official web sites are the public face of state information related to public P-12 education. Likewise, for “most people, the term civic education refers to classroom instruction” (Campbell, 2019, p. 36) and the websites reflect the official policy of public education in each of the states.

Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question “What are the high school course graduation requirements relative to civic education?” is multi-faceted in nature as civic education is a component of social studies and could be incorporated in various courses. As such, Table 1 (see Appendix) reports the findings from the broadest interpretation of the data available on the official websites for all

50 states and the District of Columbia. Minimum state requirements are reported; however, districts have flexibility beyond the minimum requirements. Additionally, three states, Idaho, Nebraska and New Jersey do not use traditional Carnegie credit units in reporting their requirements, and several states identified courses as a requirement, but did not identify the credit hours. Such requirements are identified with an x. Several states have requirements associated with future graduating classes and the year is identified with the state or requirement. Overall, 24 states have a requirement for a course in Government, 8 states have a requirement for a course in Civics, and 10 states require a course in Government/ Civics. Four states are identified as “Other” with Hawaii requiring a course in U.S. History/ Government, New Mexico coupling Government and Economics, and South Carolina requires a course in U.S. History and Constitution. The fourth state, North Carolina, requires a course titled Founding Principles. This course can either be American History: Founding principles, Civics and Economics or Founding Principles of the United States of America and North Carolina Civic Literacy. One state, New Jersey, indicated that civics was integrated in all social studies courses.

In addition to course requirements related to civics and or government, 30 states required specific assessments related to civics/ government. Many states provided key phrases to denote their civics/ government related assessment. These phrases were used to facilitate access to state testing requirements. Examples of key phrases included “end of course assessments,” passing tests on state and the Federal Constitution, immigration tests, etc. All but one state, Kentucky, that required an assessment related to civics and/ or government required a course in civics and/ or government at the high school level. Additionally, one state, Rhode Island, required students to complete a research project and the District of Columbia required students to complete a community service project.

Research Question 2

The second research question “What are states doing relative to the inclusion of learner outcomes related to civic education?” is also multifaceted. All states included information on their websites indicating standards relative to social studies and/ or civics. Mississippi’s civics strand denotes civic engagement with an additional comment “learning experiences should be expanded to include the community” (Mississippi Department of Education, 2018). Additionally, all states listed as part of their state expectations the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (NCSS, 2013), state academic standards, state social studies performance/ learning standards, or content standards/ frameworks.

Discussion and Implications of Findings

Based on the information available on state websites, the current prevalence of uncivil behaviors exhibited by Americans across the United States and statements provided by the judiciary (*Cook (A. C.) v. McKee*, 2022; *Cook (A. C.), et al. v. Raimondo, et al.*, 2020; and Roberts, 2019), as a society we may not be doing enough to prepare students for participation in civic life and the democratic process. The 18 student plaintiffs in the *Cook (A. C.) et al. v. Raimondo et al.*, 2020 case raised the point that too much emphasis was placed in the teaching of

reading and mathematics at the expense of not requiring coursework in civics. The point raised by the plaintiffs posits an issue related to priorities in the context of the challenges society is currently facing and was supported by Shapiro and Brown (2018). Findings from this study also raise questions regarding state policies. Both the Education Commission of the States (2016) and Wilson, et al. (2019) studies report many states require knowledge of the content without placing a value on the quality of instruction. Findings from the current study also indicate many states appear to have integrated civics in other courses including government. Knowledge of the content associated with participation in a democratic society is important; however, learning the skills critical to participation goes beyond content knowledge (Blevins, et al., 2016; Kahne, et al., 2016) and civics tests. Based on this study's findings, many states require a paper and pencil test which may not provide an appropriate assessment mode for marginalized learners. Furthermore, while knowledge is critical for the development of higher order critical skills, it does not guarantee the development of civic-related skills. This perspective is supported by Dabach et al. (2018), Fitzgerald, et al. (2021), and Tichnor-Wagner et al. (2022). Furthermore, Saye et al. (2018) posit learning environments must be based on authentic pedagogy in order for students to develop civic competency. Students must also be in an intellectually stimulating environment aligned with higher order thinking skills.

Have we approached the point where we are just checking off expected learning outcomes, or are we committed to making civic education a priority in our secondary schools? Being a team player, resiliency, communication skills, listening, collaborative learning, problem solving, and creative thinking are important attributes in a democratic society. However, based on the findings of the analysis of state graduation requirements, only the District of Columbia required students to gain the necessary skills through active participation in the democratic process. Policy tends to drive the formal curriculum in schools; therefore, a focused effort to bring about change resides within state departments of education and the state legislative bodies. However, a change in policy does not always denote a change in student knowledge and application of skills related to civic education. Unfortunately, many Americans and policy makers view education to be in a period of crisis that goes back to the 1980s (Flower, 2009) and continues up to today. Educators are not always consulted or encouraged to provide input. Griffith and Finn (2021) stated “. . . far too many young (and not-so-young) Americans have only the haziest grasp of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are essential to informed citizenship, in part because for decades now we have systematically failed to impart them to our children” (p.3).

Concerns about preparation of our high school graduates for participation in a democratic society are supported by the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics. According to assessment results, less than one-quarter of the eighth graders scored at or above the NAEP *Proficient* (p. 3). Likewise, there was no significant change in civic scores from the 2014 assessment. Furthermore, only twenty-two percent of the students had 8th grade teachers who were “primarily responsible for teaching civics and/or U.S. government” (p. 3). To help address concerns related to knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to preparing students for

engagement in a democratic society, Stern et al. (2021) recommended “Maximize civics and U.S. History coverage in elementary and middle school and require at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics in high school” (36). The need for greater attention on civic education is evident in a recent study reported by the RAND Corporation (Diliberts & Kaufman, 2022). Findings from the study indicate elementary teachers are more likely to integrate civics in all subjects than secondary teachers who indicated the content was included in subject specific social studies and history courses. Elementary teachers were also more likely to focus on developing social and emotional skills than secondary teachers. Teachers also reported they were more likely to focus on critical thinking and skills in conflict resolution as important aims in the civics curriculum.

Expectations across the 50 states and the District of Columbia tend to be very uneven. While Wilson, et al. (2019) reported all states required students to pass a course in which civics was included, and the current study indicated all states included standards associated with civics and social studies. However, evidence that all students possess the knowledge and skills to function effectively in and contribute to a democratic society is weak at best, even where students have to pass a test. A concerted effort has been made by every state to ensure students have appropriate learning opportunities in mathematics and reading. The current social and political environment in our country indicates similar attention needs to be given to civics across the P-12 setting with stronger expectations for the high school level.

In addition to the above recommended changes in the P-12 system, higher education through the preparation of educators has a responsibility to ensure educators are prepared to provide high quality learning environments at the P-12 level. With the limited number of states requiring projects, performance assessments, and community engagement, institutions need to look beyond P-12 settings for field experiences. Developing the knowledge and skills to participate in a democratic society goes beyond the higher education learning environment. Field experience requirements need to be examined to ensure teacher candidates have opportunities to engage in the community to develop the knowledge and skills to facilitate P-12 learning necessary for effective contributions in a democratic society. Completing experiences in community agencies and participating in project-based activities will engage teacher candidates in various sectors of the community, i.e., community educational agencies, disaster relief efforts, food pantries, housing authorities, and refugee resettlement agencies. This expectation was supported by the Mississippi Department of Education (2018) and teacher candidates need experiences requiring direct involvement in communities.

The potential impact of not providing focused learning opportunities relative to civics education go beyond the point raised by the plaintiffs in the *Cook (A. C.), et al. v. Raimondo, et al., 2020* case. In a recently released study (EdWeek Research Center, 2022) the satisfaction of classroom teachers appears to have hit an all-time low with 44% of those surveyed indicating they were either very dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with their jobs. Reasons given for their dissatisfaction included the political and cultural wars associated with the pandemic and the reduced respect for the profession. Respect or lack thereof for others is connected to civic

education and is evident in the *C3 Framework* for participation and deliberation in a democratic society “D2.Civ.9.9-12. Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings” (NCSS, 2013, 33). Of those who expressed dissatisfaction with their job, 55% indicated a high likelihood they would leave the profession in the next two years. This could exacerbate the current teacher shortage in many areas and negatively impact district efforts to recruit teachers who are well qualified to prepare students to effectively engage in a democratic society.

We cannot ask teachers to work harder; however, as a society we must work smarter. Taking an insight from educational reform in Kentucky, Pankratz and Petrosko (2000) stated: “...reform works best when it blends the strengths of past practice with the potential of new initiatives” (p. 278). The self-interests of groups can negatively impact efforts to bring about change. However, when society works to bring groups together, it can solve issues resulting in incivility and provide curriculum opportunities for students what will prepare them to be active and informed participants in a society that builds on a foundation of informed discussions in a civil and respectful environment. Students at the high school level have a level of cognitive maturity to understand issues facing society and some will be eligible to vote prior to graduation. Therefore, providing focused opportunities for students to acquire the knowledge and skills associated with effective engagement in our democratic society would be a prudent option for helping society address the current social, political, and economic conflicts. Findings from this study and Stern et al. (2021) along with the NAEP scores in civics indicate society needs to reconsider the current priority given to civics education as part of our high school graduation requirements.

Sam Evans is a retired dean and professor in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at Western Kentucky University. His research interests relate to student success, leadership, licensure of social studies teachers, academic freedom issues as they related to classroom teaching and the preparation of teachers, affective characteristics of effective teachers, and documenting teacher candidate impact on P-12 student performance.

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Appendix

Table 1

High School Graduation and Assessment Requirements in Government and Civics by State

State	Govt.	Civics	Civics/ Govt.	Other	Tests/Assessments
Alabama	.5	-	-	-	Civics
Alaska	-	-	r	-	-
Arizona	.5	-	-	-	US Naturalization-Civics
Arkansas	-	.5	-	-	Civics
California	.5	-	-	-	-
Colorado*	1	-	-	-	-
Connecticut	-	-	.5	-	-
Delaware	-	-	-	-	-
Florida	.5	-	-	-	Civic Literacy
Georgia	-	-	.5	-	-
Hawaii	-	-	-	1	-
Idaho	-	2	-	-	Civics
Indiana	1	-	-	-	U.S. Naturalization
Iowa	.5	-	-	-	-
Kansas	1	-	-	-	-
Kentucky	-	-	-	-	Civics
Louisiana	-	-	1	-	Graduate Exit Exam
Maine	-	-	x	-	-
Maryland	1	-	-	-	Government
Massachusetts	-	x	-	-	-
Michigan	-	-	.5	-	-
Minnesota	-	-	x	-	-
Mississippi	.5	-	-	-	-
Missouri	.5	-	-	-	Civics & U.S. & MO Constitution
Montana	-	-	-	-	-
Nebraska	-	x	-	-	U.S. Citizenship & Immigration
Nevada	.5	-	-	-	Civics
New Hampshire	-	-	.5	-	-
New Jersey	-	-	-	-	-
New Mexico	-	-	-	1	End of Course (EOC)
New York	.5	-	-	-	Regents Examination
North Carolina	-	-	-	1	-
North Dakota	.5	-	-	-	Civics
Ohio	.5	-	-	-	EOC
Oklahoma	.5	-	-	-	U.S. Naturalization (2025)
Oregon (2026)	-	.5	-	-	If Funding Available
Pennsylvania	1	-	-	-	Government & Civics
Rhode Island (2025)	-	x	-	-	Research Project

South Carolina	.5	-	-	1	EOC U.S. History & Constitution
South Dakota	.5	-	-	-	-
Tennessee	-	-	x	-	US Constitution & Naturalization
Texas	.5	-	-	-	USCIS Civics Test**
Utah	-	-	.5	-	USCIS Civics Test
Vermont	-	1	-	-	Proficiency-Based
Virginia	1	-	-	-	Standards of Learning (SOL) Test
Washington	-	.5	-	-	-
West Virginia***	-	-	1	-	Mastery of Content Standards
Wisconsin	x	-	-	-	USCIS Civics Test
Wyoming	x	-	-	-	U.S. and State Constitution
District of Columbia	x	-	-	-	Community Service Project

Notes. A dash is used to indicate the state does not require this course. A r denotes the course is recommended.

* Colorado Graduation Requirements are set by the school districts.

** USCIS – United States Customs and Immigration Services

*** West Virginia graduates can take Civics or AP Government or Poli