
CALIFORNIA TASK FORCE

ON K-12 CIVIC LEARNING

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Civic Learning:

How It Benefits Local Control and Accountability Plan Priority Areas

The Local Control Funding Formula provides a unique opportunity for school districts to use the *Six Proven Practices of Civic Learning* to provide high-quality educational programs for all students. As schools and districts develop Local Control and Accountability Plans they are encouraged to consider research that demonstrates that civic learning is a powerful tool for meeting several of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) priority areas.

What Is Civic Learning?

Civic learning provides students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to be informed and engaged participants in our democracy. Research identifies six proven practices in civic learning:

1. Providing classroom instruction in Government, History, Law, Economics, and Democracy;
2. Combining community service and learning;
3. Discussing current events;
4. Giving students a voice in school governance;
5. Offering extracurricular clubs; and
6. Simulating democratic processes.¹

Benefits of Civic Learning to LCAP Priority Areas

- **Student Achievement**

The American public and business community are keenly interested in youth developing the competencies necessary to thrive in a changing global economy. Civic learning not only enhances knowledge of economic and political processes, but supports college and career readiness through opportunities for youth to apply academic concepts in real-world settings, work collaboratively in teams, and engage with professional role models.²

- **School Climate**

Civic learning builds a positive school climate, which in turn has a positive impact on a wide range of outputs for students, ranging from academic achievement to personal character. Research shows that providing opportunities to engage in civic learning teaches the importance of community (both within the school and more broadly). Respectful dialogue about controversial issues is foundational to a positive school climate. The benefits of civic learning in one classroom can help shape the norms of other classrooms and the school more broadly.

- **Student Engagement and Reducing the Dropout Rate**

Civic learning provides compelling, motivating, and challenging experiences that can keep kids in school. Civic learning, beginning in elementary and middle school with a focus on civic responsibility, is directly tied to a student’s propensity to drop out of high school.³ More than 80% of students who drop out indicate that they would have been more likely to stay in school if they had more opportunities to participate in experiential learning.⁴ In particular, taking courses that require community service and participating in student government have been found to predict high school graduation and college attendance and success.⁵

- **Implementation of Common Core State Standards**

Civic learning naturally supports the college and career readiness skills and abilities called for by Common Core State Standards (CCSS), especially in English Language Arts. For example, CCSS prioritizes comprehension and use of complex texts, and our Constitution and Bill of Rights are excellent content for such skill development. CCSS calls for the capacity to analyze a problem and to communicate purposefully both orally and in writing, which can be achieved through simulations of democratic processes such as classroom mock trials. Including History-Social Science teachers in CCSS professional development can facilitate integration of civic learning and common core.

Making Civic Learning Opportunities Available to All Students

Currently in California, low-income students and students of color are significantly less likely to have access to the proven practices in civic learning, and are therefore denied the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will enable them to access the power of our democracy. LCAP is an opportunity for local leaders to address this inequity and ensure that all students, including English Language Learners and Special Education students, are not just prepared for college and career, but to be informed and engaged citizens and residents of their communities.

Prepared by the California Task Force on K–12 Civic Learning, established by Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. For more information visit www.powerofdemocracy.org.

¹ Jonathan Gould, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Peter Levine, Ted McConnell, and David B. Smith, eds. *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*. Philadelphia: Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, 2011. Print.

² Judith Torney-Purta and Britt S. Wilkenfeld. “Paths to 21st Century Competencies Through Civic Education Classrooms: An Analysis of Survey Results from Ninth-Graders.” Washington, D.C.: Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and American Bar Association Division for Public Education, 2009. Accessed from CIRCLE via <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=360>

³ Charlane Fay Starks. “Connecting Civic Education to Civil Right and Responsibility: A Strategy for Reducing High School Dropout Among African American Students.” 2010. Accessed via www.csus-dspace.calstate.edu/xmlui/handle/10211.9/512

⁴ *The Silent Epidemic*. Accessed via <https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/Documents/TheSilentEpidemic3-06FINAL.pdf>

⁵ Alberto Dávila and Marie Mora. “CIRCLE Working Paper 52: Civic Engagement and High School Academic Progress: An Analysis Using NELS Data.” 2007. Accessed via

www.civicyouth.org/circleworking-paper-52-civic-engagementand-high-school-academic-progress-ananalysis-using-nels-data