



# CIVICS EDUCATION INITIATIVE

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*100 Facts Every High School Student Should Know*



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The Civics Proficiency Initiative will set as a requirement for High School graduation that students must pass the United States Citizenship Civics Test. Passage of this test – *in English* – is required for all new American Citizens. A score of 60% or greater is required for passage.

As of December 2013, 92% of immigrants applying for United States citizenship passed the test.

For native-born citizens the results are less than stellar. According to the 2014 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAPE), only 23 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders are proficient in civics, and only 14 percent of High School Seniors can identify Thomas Jefferson as the author of the Declaration of Independence.

Shouldn't our High School graduates know as much about basic American civics as we require immigrants applying for United States citizenship to know about America?

Can you pass the test?

## United States Citizenship Civics Test

### 100 Questions in Three Parts

#### **PART ONE: AMERICAN GOVERNMENT**

##### **A: Principles of American Democracy**

1. What is the supreme law of the land?
2. What does the Constitution do?
3. The idea of self-government is in the first three words of the Constitution. What are these words?
4. What is an amendment?
5. What do we call the first ten amendments to the Constitution?
6. What is one right or freedom from the First Amendment?
7. How many amendments does the Constitution have?
8. What did the Declaration of Independence do?
9. What are two rights in the Declaration of Independence?
10. What is freedom of religion?
11. What is the economic system in the United States?
12. What is the "rule of law"?

##### **B: System of Government**

13. Name one branch or part of the government.
14. What stops one branch of government from becoming too powerful?
15. Who is in charge of the executive branch?
16. Who makes federal laws?
17. What are the two parts of the U.S. Congress?

18. How many U.S. Senators are there?
19. We elect a U.S. Senator for how many years?
20. Who is one of your state's U.S. Senators now?
21. The House of Representatives has how many voting members?
22. We elect a U.S. Representative for how many years?
23. Name your U.S. Representative.
24. Who does a U.S. Senator represent?
25. Why do some states have more Representatives than other states?
26. We elect a President for how many years?
27. In what month do we vote for President?
28. What is the name of the President of the United States now?
29. What is the name of the Vice President of the United States now?
30. If the President can no longer serve, who becomes President?
31. If both the President and the Vice President can no longer serve, who becomes President?
32. Who is the Commander in Chief of the military?
33. Who signs bills to become laws?
34. Who vetoes bills?
35. What does the President's Cabinet do?
36. What are two Cabinet level positions?
37. What does the judicial branch do?
38. What is the highest court in the United States?
39. How many justices are on the Supreme Court?
40. Who is the Chief Justice of the United States now?
41. Under our Constitution, some powers belong to

the federal government. What is one power of the federal government?

42. Under our Constitution, some powers belong to the states. What is one power of the states?
43. Who is the Governor of your state now?
44. What is the capital of your state?
45. What are the two major political parties in the United States?
46. What is the political party of the President now?
47. What is the name of the Speaker of the House of Representatives now?

### **C: Rights and Responsibilities**

48. There are four amendments to the Constitution about who can vote. Describe one of them.
49. What is one responsibility that is only for United States citizens?
50. Name one right only for United States citizens.
51. What are two rights of everyone living in the United States?
52. What do we show loyalty to when we say the Pledge of Allegiance?
53. What is one promise you make when you become a United States citizen?
54. How old do citizens have to be to vote for President?
55. What are two ways that Americans can participate in their democracy?
56. When is the last day you can send in federal income tax forms?
57. When must all men register for the Selective Service?

### **PART TWO: AMERICAN HISTORY**

#### **A: Colonial Period and Independence**

58. What is one reason colonists came to America?
59. Who lived in America before the Europeans arrived?
60. What group of people was taken to America and sold as slaves?
61. Why did the colonists fight the British?
62. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
63. When was the Declaration of Independence adopted?
64. There were 13 original states. Name three.
65. What happened at the Constitutional Convention?
66. When was the Constitution written?
67. The Federalist Papers supported the passage of the U.S. Constitution. Name one of the writers.
68. What is one thing Benjamin Franklin is famous for?
69. Who is the "Father of Our Country?"
70. Who was the first President?

#### **B. The 1800's**

71. What territory did the United States buy from

France in 1803?

72. Name one war fought by the United States in the 1800s.
73. Name the U.S. war between the North and the South.
74. Name one problem that led to the Civil War.
75. What was one important thing that Abraham Lincoln did?
76. What did the Emancipation Proclamation do?
77. What did Susan B. Anthony do?

### **C: Recent American History and Other Important Historical Information**

78. Name one war fought by the United States in the 1900s.
79. Who was President during World War I?
80. Who was President during the Great Depression and World War II?
81. Who did the United States fight in World War II?
82. Before he was President, Eisenhower was a general. What war was he in?
83. During the Cold War, what was the main concern of the United States?
84. What movement tried to end racial discrimination?
85. What did Martin Luther King, Jr. do?
86. What major event happened on September 11, 2001, in the United States?
87. Name one American Indian tribe in the United States.

### **PART THREE: INTEGRATED CIVICS**

#### **A: Geography**

88. Name one of the two longest rivers in the United States.
89. What ocean is on the West Coast of the United States?
90. What ocean is on the East Coast of the United States?
91. Name one U.S. territory.
92. Name one state that borders Canada.
93. Name one state that borders Mexico.
94. What is the capital of the United States?
95. Where is the Statue of Liberty?

#### **B: Symbols**

96. Why does the flag have 13 stripes?
97. Why does the flag have 50 stars?
98. What is the name of the national anthem?

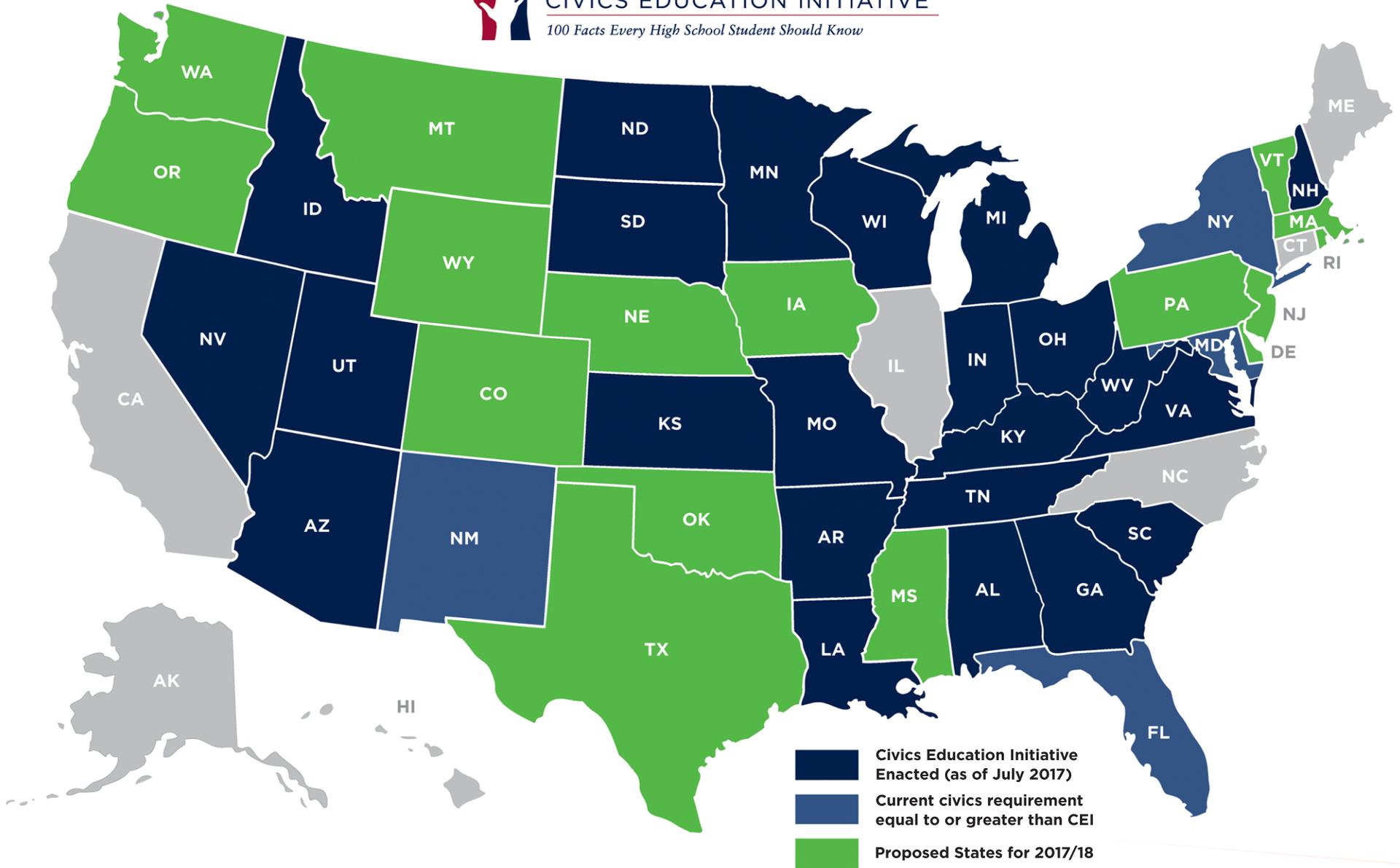
#### **C: Holidays**

99. When do we celebrate Independence Day?
100. Name two national U.S. holidays.



# CIVICS EDUCATION INITIATIVE

100 Facts Every High School Student Should Know





# LegisBrief

A QUICK LOOK INTO IMPORTANT ISSUES OF THE DAY

MAR 2017 | VOL. 25, NO. 9

## Tackling the American Civics Education Crisis

BY MEGAN MCCLURE

Millions of American students and adults are unfamiliar with how their government works, leading experts to sound the alarm about a crisis in civics education. Armed with evidence of the lack of knowledge, the Civics Education Initiative and other programs aim to reverse a trend they say leaves American democracy vulnerable.

Less than 30 percent of fourth-, eighth- and 12th-grade students were proficient in civics, and a significant gap persists among racial and ethnic groups, according to the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics report. NAEP also reports a decline in the overall civic knowledge of high school seniors between 2006 and 2010. In addition, a survey of 1,416 adults by the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) revealed that only one-third of those surveyed could name the three branches of government. One-fifth of respondents think that a 5-4 Supreme Court ruling is sent back to Congress for consideration. The results of this survey “demonstrate that many know surprisingly little about these branches of government ... [and] offer dramatic evidence of the need for more and better civics education,” said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the APPC.

What led to this decline in civics education and knowledge? Three major changes helped drive the crisis, according to Dr. Lucian Spataro of the Civics Education Initiative (CEI). First, the country’s education system began to focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). “Parallel to that, standardized testing became the way to measure success and performance. Then, simultaneously, school and teacher funding began to be tied to the results of these tests,” he said. “These consequences had never before been associated with assessment.” Teaching what is tested became the norm and civics (along with the other “soft sciences”) was de-emphasized in the curriculum.

Those looking to remedy the situation are not starved for organizations willing to help. There are myriad groups providing legislative guidance, talking points, teacher lesson plans, and resources and programs for students.

### The Civics Education Initiative

One such organization is the Joe Foss Institute, which realized that “students are not learning how to run our country, how government is meant to operate as outlined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights, and more importantly, the history behind how our country came to be—the philosophy behind America’s values.” This realization prompted the Institute to create the Civics Education Initiative.

The goal of the CEI is to make passing the U.S. citizenship test a requirement for high school graduation. The reasoning behind the Initiative is simple: Civics education is necessary to produce well-informed, understanding citizens, committed to participating in the American system. The initiative recommends teaching and testing students on American civics. The CEI is working with various stakeholders, including lawmakers, to make passing the 100-question test (answering at least 60 questions correctly) necessary for graduation. Fifteen states have passed bills requiring high school students to pass the U.S. citizenship test in order to graduate or that civics be included in existing courses or tests. Twenty states are considering similar legislation in 2017. The ultimate goal of the CEI is the enactment of legislation in all 50 states by Sept. 17, 2017, the 230th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution.

The initiative has met with pushback from teachers’ unions, the American Civil Liberties Union and advocates for students with disabilities, who claim it is an unfunded mandate that places even more pressure on classroom teachers who are already stretched to their limit. State lawmakers, however,

### Resources

[NCSL Legislators Back to School program](#)

[Civics Education Initiative](#)

[iCivics](#)

[Civics Renewal Network](#)

[Center for Civic Education](#)

### Sample questions from the U.S. citizenship test

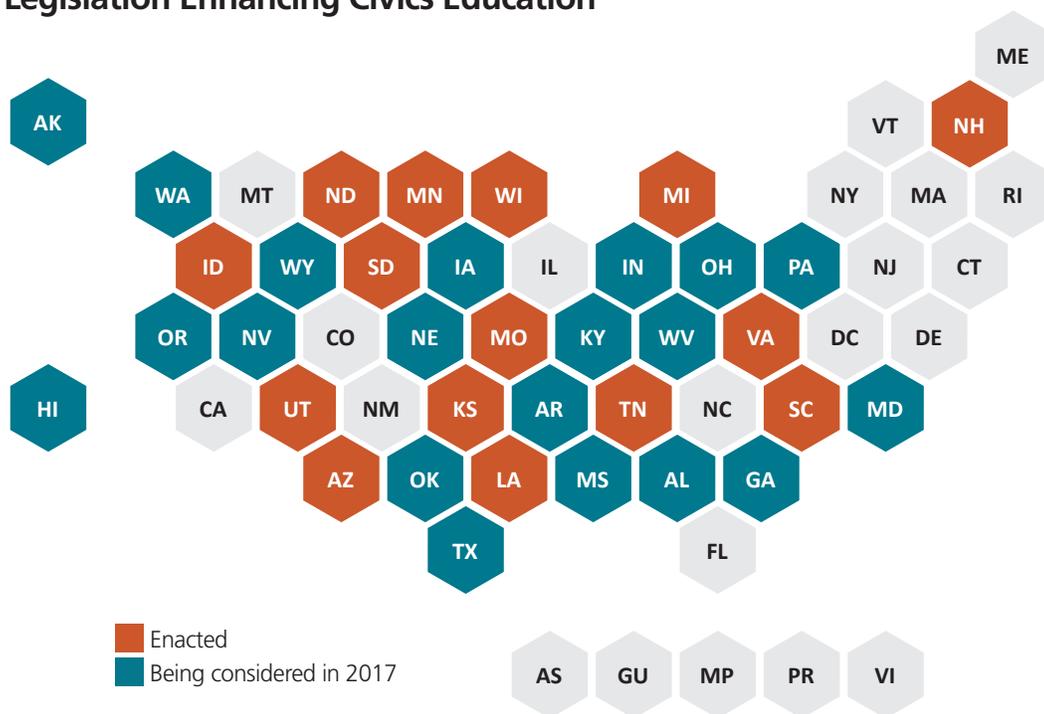
How many amendments does the Constitution have?

Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?

What do we call the first 10 amendments to the Constitution?

Who was president during World War I?

## Legislation Enhancing Civics Education



Source: Civics Education Initiative, 2017

have been able to pass legislation by discussing the issue with key stakeholders and pointing out that there is no additional cost. The test is already provided and administered online, in multiple languages, by the [United States Citizenship and Immigration Service \(USCIS\)](#).

### Other Civics Education Programs

There are also groups promoting civics education in ways other than legislation. Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor founded [iCivics.org](#) in 2010. iCivics uses web-based games and online tools to help teach students important civics lessons. iCivics, along with the [Annenberg Center](#), the American Bar Association, the Library of Congress and others have banded together to create the [Civics Renewal Network](#), which provides high-quality, no-cost learning materials to teachers.

Almost every state legislature provides hands-on learning about the legislative process and representative democracy. Through various programs such as mock sessions, page and internship programs, youth legislatures, citizen education forums and support for teachers, state legislatures are able

to educate students and the public about the role of the legislative branch of government.

The [We the People Program](#) from the [Center for Civic Education](#) also promotes “civic competence and responsibility among upper elementary and secondary students” using simulated congressional hearings, textbooks and other interactive strategies.

The [NCSL Legislators Back to School Program](#), in partnership with the Center for Civic Education, is also a source of free materials for state legislators interested in visiting classrooms to engage students in conversations and learning about representative democracy. It is designed to increase understanding about the legislative process and the job of a state legislator.

CEI and other allies of American civics education are seeking to bring attention to the “quiet crisis” of the decline of civics education. However, Spataro stresses that the CEI and other civics education organizations are “not the end-all be-all” for remedying the civics education crisis in America. They are starting points, meant to “shine a spotlight on civics education in America” once again.

### Did You Know?

- Less than 30 percent of fourth-, eighth- and 12th-grade students are proficient in civics.
- In a [2016 Pew Research Center report](#), U.S. voter participation came in 31st among 35 developed countries
- More than 5 million naturalization tests were administered nationwide between 2009 and 2016. For applicants taking both the English and civics tests, the overall [national pass rate](#) was 91 percent.

### Sample question answers

How many amendments does the Constitution have?

**27**

Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?

**Thomas Jefferson**

What do we call the first 10 amendments to the Constitution?

**The Bill of Rights**

Who was president during World War I?

**Woodrow Wilson**

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# Our Country 'Tis of Thee...

How much do we  
know about our sweet  
land of liberty?  
Shockingly little.

BY MEGAN MCCLURE

**Y**ou know how a bill becomes a law. But do your constituents? Do they know how the responsibilities of state legislators differ from those of our lawmakers in Congress? Or how a case gets to the Supreme Court? And, as far as state budgets go, do they understand what their taxes pay for?

Civics—the study of how government works and the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen—seems to be disappearing. **Fewer than 30 percent of fourth-, eighth- and 12th-grade students were proficient in civics, and a significant gap persists between white students and students of racial and ethnic minority groups, according to the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress civics assessment.** The assessment found a decline in the overall civics knowledge of high school seniors between 2006 and 2010. This ignorance of the responsibilities of citizenship results in young people being inadequately prepared to participate in the democratic process. With only about half our citizens bothering to vote, it's clear that “we the people” are not as engaged in government as we should be.

To achieve proficiency in civics is not particularly complex; it doesn't take years to learn the basics. And yet, **less than half of eighth-graders tested in the most recent national civics exam knew the purpose of the Bill of Rights, and only one in 10 eighth-graders demonstrated acceptable knowledge of the checks and balances our country relies on through the three branches of government.**

### **An Ongoing Concern**

The problem is not just with today's students. Barely one-third of more than 1,400

adults could name the three branches of government in a survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. One-fifth of respondents thought that a 5-4 Supreme Court vote would be sent back to Congress for consideration. These results “demonstrate that many know surprisingly little” about our government, says Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Center, and offer “dramatic evidence of the need for more and better civics education.”

Why is this alarming? **“A democratic government cannot function without citizens' participation, and civics education provides the bedrock for that participation.** The less the population knows and understands about how the American system of government works and the values and history behind it, the more vulnerable the system becomes,” says Charles N. Quigley, executive director of the Center for Civic Education.

“Today's students are tomorrow's leaders, and giving them a strong foundation in civic values is critical to the vitality of America's democracy and economy in the 21st century,” said former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in 2012 with the release of the report “Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy: A Road Map and Call to Action.” Duncan stressed the need “to develop and improve civic learning as part of a well-rounded education so every student has a sense of citizenship.” The report, along with other dismal news, prompted the Joe Foss Institute to create the Civics Education Initiative. The nonprofit institute is dedicated to educating youth about the nation's unique freedoms.

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## Test Your Civics Chops

Here are 20 of 100 possible questions on the U.S. citizenship test. To become naturalized citizens, immigrants must get at least 60 percent correct. On this mini-test that would be 12 correct answers. If you ace it, you're not only a citizen, you are a statesman. Answers are below.



1. What is the supreme law of the land?
2. What do we call the first ten amendments to the Constitution?
3. What is one right or freedom from the First Amendment?
4. How many amendments does the Constitution have?
5. What are two rights in the Declaration of Independence?
6. What is the economic system in the United States?
7. What stops one branch of government from becoming too powerful?
8. We elect a U.S. senator for how many years?
9. The House of Representatives has how many voting members?
10. If both the president and the vice president can no longer serve, who becomes president?
11. Under the U.S. Constitution, what is one power given to the states?
12. There are four amendments to the Constitution about who can vote. Describe one of them.
13. Name one of the two responsibilities of U.S. citizens.
14. Name two rights of everyone living in the U.S.
15. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
16. When was the Declaration of Independence adopted?
17. When was the Constitution written?
18. The Federalist Papers supported the passage of the U.S. Constitution. Name one of the writers.
19. What did the Emancipation Proclamation do?
20. What did Susan B. Anthony do?

### Answers to Quiz

1. the Constitution 2. the Bill of Rights 3. speech, religion, assembly, press, petition the government 4. 27 5. life, liberty, pursuit of happiness 6. capitalists or market economy 7. checks and balances, separation of powers 8. six 9. 45 10. the Speaker of the House 11. provide schooling and education, provide protection (police), provide safety (fire departments), issue a driver's license, approve zoning and land use 12. Citizens 18 and older can vote; you don't have to pay a poll tax to vote; any citizen can vote; women and men can vote; a male citizen of any race can vote. 13. serve on a jury, vote in a federal election 14. freedom of expression, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom to petition the government, freedom of worship, the right to bear arms 15. Thomas Jefferson 16. July 4, 1776 17. 1787 18. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay 19. Freed the slaves 20. Fought for women's rights

There is little time in the school day for civics education anymore, the institute says, partly due to the increased emphasis on testing subjects other than social studies.

“Civics is being boxed out of the classroom today by an all-consuming focus on ... tests that are being used in many cases to determine funding and a host of outcomes for schools, students and teachers,” says Lucian Spataro, the institute’s chief academic officer and vice president of legislative affairs.

The institute’s solution? Make the U.S. citizenship test for immigrants a graduation requirement for high-schoolers.

### Test of Citizenship

The Civics Education Initiative wants state legislators to require high school students, as a condition for graduation, to answer at least 60 of the 100 questions on the U.S. citizenship civics test correctly—the same level of knowledge asked of immigrants seeking to become naturalized U.S. citizens.

State by state, the initiative is working with lawmakers, students, teachers and other concerned citizens. Twenty states and the U.S. Virgin Islands have passed legislation inspired by the initiative, and another three states have enacted versions of a civics-test bill through action by their education boards.

Teachers’ unions, the ACLU and advocates for students with disabilities claim the requirement is an unfunded mandate that places even more pressure on classroom teachers who are already stretched to their limits. Several states have passed legislation by getting input from all those involved and tweaking the measures to address their concerns and fit their state’s unique needs. The initiative’s goal is to get legislation supporting civics education enacted in all 50 states.

Every state has passed legislation addressing civics education over the years, often within social studies requirements, according to the Education Commission of the States. Most states either require specific civics courses or describe what students must learn. Some require students to pass civics tests to receive credit for the courses, but not to graduate. Arizona, Missouri, North Dakota, Utah, Tennessee and Wisconsin are just starting to require the test for graduation.

# How Polarized Are We?

We keep hearing how polarized we are these days. But how is that measured? Political scientists Boris Shor, of the University of Houston, and Nolan McCarty, of Princeton University, measure polarization by using roll call voting data and state legislators' responses to the National Political Awareness Test to calculate the ideological distance between the median Democrat and Republican in each state legislature. The larger the distance, the higher the score, and the greater the level of polarization. This is an update from the chart in the July/August 2017 issue.

**State Legislatures' Level of Polarization in 2016**



## Plenty of Effort

There are many other groups focusing on civics education.

Former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, spurred by what she saw as the inadequacy of American civics education, founded iCivics in 2010. The nonprofit provides web-based games and tools to help students learn about and participate in civic life. ICivics has joined with the Annenberg Center, the American Bar Association, the Library of Congress and other organizations to create the Civics Renewal Network, which is "committed to strengthening civic life in the U.S. by increasing the quality of civics education in our nation's schools and by improving accessibility to high-quality, no-cost learning materials."

On the Civics Renewal Network website, teachers can find civics education resources, searchable by subject, grade, resource type, standards and teaching strategy. The "We the People Program," from the Center for Civic Education, also promotes "civic competence and responsibility among upper elementary and secondary students" using simulated congressional hearings, textbooks and other interactive strategies.

State legislators are doing their part to promote civics education as well. Almost every legislature offers civics education materials or learning experiences to students and the public. Mock legislative sessions give students a chance to see how the lawmaking process works. Legislatures also offer internships and page positions to young people interested in lawmaking and civics in general.

The Wisconsin Legislature received NCSL's 2016 Kevin B. Harrington Award for Excellence in Democracy Education, an annual recognition of an individual or organization for advancing public understanding of state and local representative democracy. A cornerstone of Wisconsin's civics education opportunities is the Senate Scholars Program, in which high school students spend a week at the Capitol learning about the legislative process and meeting with legislators, legislative staff professionals and the press.

NCSL's Legislators Back to School Program is a great source of materials and support for legislators interested in visiting classrooms and talking with students about civics and state legislatures. Unique to the program's materials is "The American Democracy Game," designed to put middle-school students in the shoes of a lawmaker to experience dealing with public policy issues, negotiating with stakeholders and finding ways to reach agreement.

When the Foss Institute's Civics Education Initiative began, it laid out these goals: "First, to bring attention to this 'quiet crisis' to ensure students graduate with the tools they need to become informed and engaged citizens; second, to get civics education back in classrooms across this country; lastly, that the Civics Education Initiative should be only the first step in expanding civic awareness and learning for our students ... to serve as a foundation for a re-blossoming of civic learning and engagement."

The initiative and other groups, including NCSL, provide support and educational materials to concerned teachers, civil servants and citizens. We can recover from the current civics crisis by valuing and supporting comprehensive, high-quality civics education. After all, who's going to run the country if no one knows how it works?

# Ignorance Does Not Lead to Election Bliss

Perhaps the country's political state owes itself to the failures of its education system.



Jim Urquhart / Reuters

JONATHAN R. COLE | NOV 8, 2016 | EDUCATION

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While there surely are many varied causes for the current American political situation, one among those is the relative ignorance of basic American history, scientific, technological knowledge, and what some refer to as “civics” among a large sector of our population. It is testimony to the failure of the country’s education system that a high percentage of the voting-age population is simply

ignorant of basic facts—knowledge that is necessary to act reasonably and rationally in the political process.

This void isn't limited to those with little education or those without significant professional achievements. It is telling, for example, that in 2009, 89 percent of those who [took](#) a test on civic knowledge expressed confidence they could pass it; in fact, 83 percent would have failed.

In short, as I've [written](#) in the past, the public's limited knowledge—or even what the psychologist William James called “acquaintance with knowledge”—is neither monopolized by the poorly educated nor found only among certain social classes. **This illiteracy has created a void that is easily filled by those with anti-science, anti-intellectual, and demagogic leanings.**

To immediately cite the absurd, one 2016 presidential candidate and former two-time governor of New Mexico, Gary Johnson, had no idea what was going on in Aleppo, Syria, where a great human tragedy involving the United States is unfolding before the world's eyes. Moreover, asked by the commentator, Chris Matthews, to name his favorite leader of any nation in the world, Johnson could not name one, and after a pregnant pause said he was having an “Aleppo moment.” Along the same lines, Tony Schwartz, who was Donald Trump's ghostwriter for *The Art of the Deal*, [suggests](#) that Trump apparently rarely, if ever, reads books of any kind, much less historical works. No wonder he turns out to be woefully ignorant of history and science, or of the near-scientific consensus about global climate change and our seeming determination to destroy our planet.

When this kind of ignorance reaches the level of presidential aspirants, it must give Americans pause. Where does the ignorance originate? Why has it become so pervasive in the United States today? Can the U.S. have meaningful elections if its citizens have a paucity of civic knowledge and history that might allow them to make informed decisions? A significant part of the answer lies, I believe, in the failures of the American education system.

Without addressing how to remedy this situation, consider some of its manifestation and possible causes—a few illustrations of the problem [as reported](#) in *The Atlantic* in 2010:

- Americans were more able to identify Michael Jackson as the composer of a number of songs than to know that the Bill of Rights was the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
- When asked in what century the American Revolution took place and whether the Civil War, the War of 1812, and the Emancipation Proclamation preceded or followed the Revolution, more than 30 percent of respondents answered that question incorrectly.
- And more than a third of Americans did not know that the Bill of Rights guarantees a right to a trial by jury. Meanwhile, 40 percent mistakenly thought that it secures the right to vote.

Things have not gotten better more recently. In a study of historical knowledge carried out in 2015 for the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), more than 80 percent of college seniors at 55 top-ranked institutions [would have received](#) a grade of either a D or F. Here's an overview of some of the 2015 results, which were based on standard high-school civics curricula:

- Only about 20 percent knew that James Madison was the father of the Constitution, while over 60 percent gave the title to Thomas Jefferson.
- More than 40 percent of college graduates did not know that the Constitution grants the power to declare war to Congress.
- Roughly half of college students could not correctly state the length of the terms of members of the Senate or the House of Representatives.

Finally, consider the eye-opening findings of a July 2016 ACTA study on the inclusion of American history in the curricula of the leading colleges and universities in the United States. The survey [found](#) that [only about half of the](#)

students at the top 50 colleges and universities could identify the purpose of *The Federalist Papers*, and only 22 percent knew that the phrase, “government of the people, by the people, for the people” could be found in the Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. That these are questions many *Atlantic* readers probably wouldn’t be able to answer confidently attests to the fact that the dearth of historical knowledge is a matter of education and not intelligence.

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## Only seven of the nation’s top 25 liberal-arts colleges require history majors to take a course on U.S. history.

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Why does this ignorance exist among even “elite” college students today? I’ll start by pointing out that, according to the ACTA study, only seven of the nation’s top 25 liberal-arts colleges require history majors to take a course on U.S. history (the report does not note the proportion of history majors that elect to take a course in American history); the same is true of only four of the 25 top national universities (such as the Ivies, Stanford, and the University of Chicago) and just 14 of the top 25 public ones. If few of those who actually major in history are required to take such courses, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that the results of surveys of the general student population seem remarkable. While colleges often reason that these statistics are indicative of efforts to maximize the choices available to students, these efforts apparently happen at the expense of knowledge about the history of the United States.

Turning to scientific and technological literacy among Americans yields perhaps even more startling ignorance. The public must weigh in on critical ethical and moral issues—human cloning, genetically modified crops, the production of

greenhouse gases, to name a few—that require at least a modicum of literacy in science and technology, knowledge that is infrequently found among the country’s citizens. Consider just two illustrative findings:

- More than half of the adults questioned in a 2009 survey from the California Academy of Science **did not know** that it took a year for the Earth to orbit the sun.
- In 2012, the National Science Foundation **found** that slightly more than half of surveyed Americans said astrology was “not at all scientific.”

Of course, when it comes to civic affairs in the country, it’s possible that the evident lack of knowledge is overwhelmed by other social and economic interests within the public. If individuals feel that they are being excluded from the benefits of American prosperity—if they feel that there is little chance for them or their children to rise in the world, that the government refuses to take action on matters that are of great importance to them—they may vote on the basis of these interests. If so, then perhaps knowledge of history, science, technology, and other matters that provide the population with critical-reasoning skills and a basis for choice would be one of only many other factors influencing their decisions.

But it’s undeniable that the state of America’s education system, from the small classrooms in rural areas teaching high-school students to the Ivy League universities educating the world’s future leaders, is contributing to the country’s political state.

Take the way the U.S. treats its public-school teachers. Surveys and statements by public officials speak to the critical need for a highly educated workforce—for the national economy as well as for individual participation in American democracy. A 2013 Gallup poll **showed**, for example, that 70 percent of Americans believed that a college education was very important—up from 36 percent when the survey was first taken in the late 1970s. Yet the U.S. **doesn’t pay** teachers well compared with most other professions, and it does little to

sustain their motivation to continue as educators.

Consequently, many teaching positions are filled by people with limited classroom training or educators who aren't experts in the field they're being hired to teach. In 1993, as I have [previously written](#), the science historian and former physics professor Gerald Holton noted that “we are losing 13 mathematics and science teachers for each one entering the profession.” According to National Center for Education Statistics [data](#) from the 2007-08 school year, roughly 70 percent of math teachers in high schools majored in math, but only about 60 percent were certified in the subject; almost 30 percent hadn't majored in math, and only 16 percent of these were certified.

Which leads me to another phenomenon contributing to the widespread dearth of knowledge in the country: the education system's obsession, as I've found in my own research, with labeling youngsters as scientifically “able” or “talented” at an early age. Most often this labeling is based upon how rapidly students can obtain correct answers to questions when the answers are already known—not on how they respond to the kinds of intriguing questions for which the answer isn't known, the kinds that are often key to gauging scientific talent.

Therefore, many of America's very talented students come to believe that they have little aptitude for science and engineering—eventually moving into professions far removed from the sciences. Many never take a science course after they have completed the final requirement in high school—even though the 20th century was distinguished by the extraordinary contributions of science and technology to contemporary culture and the economic well-being of Americans. What they know about science and technology must, then, come from various news and social-media sources and from whatever teaching they may have received in American history during high school or in college.

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## History textbooks say very little

# about the thousands of discoveries that have been central to American economic growth and well-being.

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If someone today is ignorant of science and technology—and of its implications for the average citizen—it is likely to come from what he read or was taught through American-history courses. In the late 1990s, I [examined](#) the content of a number of the leading American history textbooks used in high schools and colleges. These books, which were authored by world-class historians, were almost totally devoid of discussions of science. I contrasted space devoted to science and technology with that to contemporary culture and the arts and [found](#), as just one example, that much more discussion was devoted to, say, the singer Madonna than to James Watson and Francis Crick, who discovered the structure of the DNA molecule. The same was true when it came to scores of other scientific discoveries.

In fact, in these massive textbooks a few pages at most were dedicated to science—and when that was the case, it was mostly to a brief discussion of the discovery of atomic power and the atom bomb. In this great century of American science, a stranger would likely never know from these texts that science and technology had played a central role in the growth of American society.

Have things in the textbook world changed since the 1990s? To answer this question, I've recently reviewed, in a cursory fashion to be sure, the content of some of today's leading high-school texts for AP American-history courses as well as some widely used in American colleges (although the leading schools rarely rely on textbooks). One of the most widely used and highly praised is *The American Pageant*, by the renowned historians David M. Kennedy, Lizabeth Cohen, and Thomas Bailey. This turns out to be one of the most popular texts used to prepare high-school students for AP examinations; I looked at the 13th

edition of a couple of years ago.

It is a big, well-written book, covering all of American history. Because its range is so great, though, its depth is limited. And it provides only scanty references to the Constitution's Bill of Rights and to science and technology in the 20th century. A review of the nearly 400 pages devoted to the 20th century reveals two pages devoted to scientists and engineers as "makers of America." The information it provides is good stuff: It notes that American scientists "have repeatedly made significant contributions to the life of the nation"; it discusses, very briefly, the move to Big Science in America after World War II and the role that research universities have made in those discoveries; it mentions the Human Genome project and how industry along with universities spurred developments in communications and information technology.

But it says very little about the thousands of discoveries that have been central to American economic growth and well-being. In comparison to the space devoted to political events, social movements, wars, crises of one kind or another, there is almost no attention to science and technology. This is a first-rate textbook, but a student studying from it would gain little knowledge about American science and technology and more specifically the thousands of discoveries made at America's universities that have had a critical role in shaping the nation—nor would they get a sense of the important aforementioned ethical and moral questions that remain unaddressed.

To cite one more history-textbook example: Howard Zinn's enormously popular, if controversial, *A People's History of the United States*, which [has sold](#) over 2 million copies, has an even greater paucity of discussion of scientific and technological discoveries and breakthroughs in the 20th century. If this is where America's students are largely obtaining their knowledge of science, they are obtaining very little of it.

James Madison put the current dilemma clearly in focus almost 200 years ago, when he [wrote](#) in an 1822 letter to W. T. Barry: "A popular Government without

popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy, or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.” The American people are not doing this today, and the results are evident in the cracks appearing in the country’s democracy.

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## Related Video

How Will Education Be Different in 100 Years?



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Is Trump's Victory the Jump-Start Civics Education Needed?

America's classrooms are responsible for preparing students to be good citizens. This election indicates that they may be failing to do so.



Evan Semon / Reuters

RICHARD D. KAHLBERG AND CLIFFORD JANEY | NOV 10, 2016 | EDUCATION

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The 2016 campaign produced the unthinkable: the election of a presidential candidate whom members of his own party [described](#) as a classic authoritarian. How is it possible that tens of millions of Americans supported a presidential

candidate who consistently rejected basic constitutional principles that previously had been accepted across the political spectrum? Donald Trump won despite trampling on cherished American ideals, including freedom of religion (proposing a ban on Muslim immigrants), freedom of the press (calling for opening up libel laws to go after critics), the rule of law (endorsing the murder of the families of terrorists), and the independence of the judiciary (questioning the bias of a judge based on ethnicity).

What set Donald Trump apart, wrote the University of Texas historian Jeffrey Tulis to *The New York Times*, is that “no other previous major party presidential candidate has felt so unconstrained by ... constitutional norms.” A former top aide to President George W. Bush wrote that in the Republican nominee, “we have reached the culmination of the founders’ fears: Democracy is producing a genuine threat to the American form of self-government.”

In the coming months and years, analysts will seek to discern all the contributing factors to the rise of an authoritarian American president—including legitimate concerns about the effects of economic globalization and the culture in Washington, and illiberal concerns about the country’s changing demographics and the role of women in society. But among the most important culprits is the American education system.

Public schools are failing at what the nation’s founders saw as education’s most basic purpose: preparing young people to be reflective citizens who would value liberty and democracy and resist the appeals of demagogues. In that sense, the Trump phenomenon should be a Sputnik moment for civics education. Just as Soviet technological advances triggered investment in science education in the 1950s, the 2016 election should spur renewed emphasis on the need for schools to instill in children an appreciation for civic values and not just a skill set for private employment.

As we outline in a new report for The Century Foundation, entitled “Putting Democracy Back into Public Education,” the Founders were deeply concerned

with finding ways to ensure that their new democracy, which through the franchise provided ultimate sovereignty to the collective views of average citizens, not fall prey to demagogues. The problem of the demagogue, the Founders believed, was endemic to democracy, and they saw education as the safeguard of America's system of self-governance.

The Founders wanted voters to be educated so they could discern serious leaders of high character from con men who do not have the nation's interests at heart. Beyond that, public education in the United States was also meant to instill a love of liberal democracy: a respect for the separation of powers, for a free press and free religious exercise, and for the rights of political minorities. Educating common people was the answer to the oligarchs who said the average citizen could not be trusted to choose leaders wisely.

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## **“You cannot teach what you do not model.”**

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The founder of American public schooling, the 19th-century Massachusetts educator Horace Mann, [saw](#) public education as the bedrock of the country's democracy. He wrote: “A republican form of government, without intelligence in the people, must be, on a vast scale, what a mad-house, without superintendent or keepers, would be on a small one.” Teachers, the Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter [wrote](#), should be regarded “as the priests of our democracy.”

Yet in recent years, democracy has been given short shrift in American public schooling in two important respects: the curriculum that is explicitly taught to students does not place democratic values at the center, and the “hidden” curriculum of what students observe on a daily basis no longer reinforces the importance of democracy. The failure of schools to model democracy for

students is critical, as the Rochester teachers' union leader Adam Urbanski has noted, because "You cannot teach what you do not model."

The explicit civics curriculum has been downplayed in recent years. With the rise of economic globalization, educators have emphasized the importance of serving the needs of the private marketplace rather than of preparing citizens for American democracy. On one level, this approach made some sense: As the country celebrated two centuries of continuous democratic rule, the paramount threat seemed to be economic competition from abroad, not threats to democracy at home. So the bipartisan education manta has been that education should prepare students to be "college-and-career ready," with no mention of becoming thoughtful democratic citizens. In a telling sign, in 2013, the governing board of the National Assessment for Educational Progress [dropped](#) fourth- and 12th-grade civics and American history as a tested subject in order to save money.

Likewise, in recent years, promoting democratic values in the school environment itself by respecting the voices of parents and teachers alike—a sort of "implicit curriculum"—has not been a priority. Indeed, many education reformers took their cue from the scholars John Chubb and Terry Moe, whose 1990 book, *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, argued that "direct democratic control" over public education appears to be "incompatible with effective schooling." Reformers didn't like the influence teachers' unions exercised in democratic elections, so they advocated for market-driven reforms that would reduce the influence of elected officials such as non-unionized charter schools, as well as for state takeovers of urban districts.

But the costs of neglecting democratic values in education are now glaringly apparent on several levels.

Civics literacy levels are dismal. In a recent [survey](#), more than two-thirds of Americans could not name all three branches of the federal government.

Education Secretary John King said only a third of Americans could identify Joe

Biden as the vice president or name a single Supreme Court justice. Far worse, declining proportions say that free elections are important in a democratic society.

When asked in the World Values Survey in 2011 whether democracy is a good or bad way to run a country, about 17 percent said bad or very bad, up from about 9 percent in the mid-1990s. Among those ages 16 to 24, about a quarter said democracy was bad or very bad, an increase from about 16 percent from a decade and a half earlier. Some 26 percent of millennials said it is “unimportant” that in a democracy people should “choose their leaders in free elections.” Among U.S. citizens of all ages, the proportion who said it would be “fairly good” or “very good” for the “army to rule,” has risen from one in 16 in 1995, to one in six today. Likewise, a June 2016 survey by the Public Religion Research Institute and the Brookings Institution found that a majority of Americans showed authoritarian (as opposed to autonomous) leanings.

Moreover, fully 49 percent of Americans agreed that “because things have gotten so far off track in this country, we need a leader who is willing to break some rules if that’s what it takes to set things right.”

And in 2016, the United States elected as president an individual whom the Brookings Institution Scholar Robert Kagan called “the most dangerous threat to U.S. democracy since the Civil War.”

Moving forward, schools need to put democracy back into education. Rigorous courses in history, literature, and civics would cultivate knowledge of democratic practices and a belief in democratic values. As a 2003 report out of the Albert Shanker Institute noted, the classes should tell America’s stories—warts and all—and include the ways in which groups have used democratic means to improve the country. The Institute suggests the curriculum should include an honest historical account of the brutal suppression of African Americans and other minorities, women, workers, and gays, but also the movements to abolish slavery, gain women’s suffrage, establish labor laws, and civil-rights legislation. “From these ... accounts,” the Shanker Institute noted, “students will recognize

the genius of democracy: When people are free to dissent, to criticize, to protest and publish, to join together in common cause, to hold their elected officials accountable, democracy's magnificent capacity for self-correction is manifest." In addition, children should be taught what it is like to live in nondemocratic countries in order to appreciate what they might otherwise take for granted.

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## **Integrated learning environments underline the democratic message that in America, everyone is equal.**

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But that is not enough. In addition to teaching democratic values directly, what if educators and policymakers thought more carefully about addressing what is taught to students implicitly through how they choose to run schools? Are parents and community members a part of decision-making or are they shut out by state takeovers and billionaire philanthropists call the shots? Are teachers involved in determining how schools are run, or are they bossed around by autocratic principals? Do students have access to economically and racially integrated schools where they are treated equally or are they segregated into separate and unequal schools or tracks within schools?

As the superintendent of schools in Rochester, New York; Washington, D.C.; and Newark, New Jersey, one of us (Janey), showed how local districts can include parents, teachers, and community members in decision-making in a way that is very visible to students. Rochester, for example, [developed](#) a peer-assistance and -review program, providing teachers a role in helping colleagues improve their craft and, in some cases, a voice in terminating the employment of those not cut out for the profession. Washington [created](#) a "D.C. Compact," which provided community members with input on a variety of matters, including standards and curriculum. Newark [created](#) a high-performing teacher-

led school that modeled workplace democracy for students and produced great achievement gains.

At the local level, a growing number of school districts (including Rochester) are also promoting democratic values through socioeconomic and racial school integration of student bodies at the school and classroom levels. Integrated learning environments underline the democratic message that in America, everyone is equal. By contrast, when American schoolchildren are educated in what are effectively apartheid schools—divided by race and class—the democratic message of equal political rights and heritage is severely undermined.

Likewise, demagogues can more effectively inflame passions against “others”—Muslims, Mexican immigrants, or African Americans—when, growing up, white Christian schoolchildren do not personally know many members of these groups. A large [body of research](#) finds that integrated schools can reduce prejudice and racism that stems from ignorance and lack of personal contact. As Thurgood Marshall noted in [one case](#), “Unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together.”

Providing an excellent, integrated education also promotes democracy by improving educational attainment, which increases political participation. Controlling for family socioeconomic status and academic achievement, a 2013 longitudinal [study](#) found that students attending socioeconomically integrated schools are as much as 70 percent more likely to graduate high school and enroll in a four-year college than those attending high-poverty schools. In turn, 2012 [Census data](#) show that about 72 percent of adults with a bachelor’s degree or more voted, compared with around 32 percent of those with less than a high-school education. Indeed, failing to provide a strong education to low-income and minority students can be seen, as the Harvard political philosopher Danielle Allen notes, as a form of voter suppression.

In 2016, democracy succumbed to the dilemma of the demagogue in what the

*Washington Post*'s Fred Hiatt [called](#) “the most frightening election of my lifetime.” To ensure that authoritarianism has no further purchase on our society, shouldn't America invest more heavily in civics education, improving both the curriculum we teach students, and the democratic practices within schooling that young people observe? Democratic values are not inborn; they have to be taught anew each generation. All nations, the late historian Paul Gagnon [noted](#), provide an excellent education to “those who are expected to run the country” and the quality of that education “cannot be far [from] what everyone in a democracy needs to know.”

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