



# Harvard Model Congress

## Boston 2024

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# THE STATE OF CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

*By June Park*

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## INTRODUCTION

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*Civic education is  
the foundation of  
educating the future  
citizen-leaders of  
the United States.*

*Wall Street Journal*

To understand the current state of **civic education** in America we must first examine the current state of *civics* in America. In their 2022 poll, the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that only 47% of American adults could name all three branches of the government, which was down from 56% of adults in 2021 (Maroni, 2022). Despite the recent increase in youth voter turnout, such as in 2020, voter turnout among young Americans is lower than for other age groups (US Census Bureau, 2021). Trust in the government continues to remain low with only two-in-ten Americans saying that “they trust the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” or “most of the time”” (Bell, 2022). Thus, the current state of civics looks grim: Americans are disengaged, disinterested, and at times even disillusioned about America.

Unfortunately, the state of civic education is just as disheartening. The results of the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress, which is often called the “Nation’s Report Card,” found that only “22 percent [of eighth graders] were proficient in civics.” The 2022 average civics score dropped by two points compared to 2018, marking the first-ever decline since the exam was administered (Institute of Education Sciences, 2022). In addition, the 2022 Spring Youth Poll recently found that only one in three young Americans have ever been taught how to register to vote or vote in high school (Harvard Public Opinion Project, 2023).

In short, the current civic education system is failing Americans, especially young Americans, in teaching them about civics. If the cycle of disengagement and disillusionment in America continues, the civic crisis will escalate, and our democracy might be at risk.

## EXPLANATION OF THE ISSUE

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### *Historical Development*

**Civic Education** –  
the provision of  
information and  
learning experiences  
to equip and empower  
citizens to participate  
in democratic  
processes means.

**No Child Left  
Behind Act** –  
This 2002 education  
law supported  
standards-based  
education reform  
based on the premise  
that setting high  
standards and  
establishing  
measurable goals  
could improve  
individual outcomes  
in education.

While federal  
investment for  
STEM has been  
about **\$50 per  
student per  
year**, the federal  
investment for  
civics has been only  
**5 cents per  
student per  
year**.

In the United States, “public schools had the mission of educating the youth for citizenship” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018). One of the earliest examples in American history is Horace Mann’s “common school” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These schools would educate all children together, “in common,” regardless of their background, religion, or social standing. This universal education included an emphasis on civic education, as Mann believed that all Americans “must, if citizens of a Republic, understand something of the true nature and functions of the government under which they live” (Carleton, 2009). In the “common schools,” the civic education consisted of “large amounts of rote memorization of information about political and military history and about the workings of governmental bodies” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018). Since then, **civic education** has been broadly defined as “the provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizens to participate in democratic processes” (YouthPower, 2018).

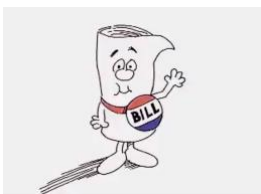
Although civic education continues to be a part of the public education system, the “increased focus on math and reading in K-12 education—while critical to prepare all students for success—has pushed out civics and other important subjects” (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). In particular, the **No Child Left Behind Act** further exacerbated the gap between civics and other subjects, like reading and math. The act required schools to conduct assessments in math, reading, and science, but not in civics or social studies (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). As a result, today, “13 states have no civics course requirement and only seven require a full year of government or civics instruction.” Furthermore, while federal investment for STEM has been about \$50 per student per year, the federal investment for civics has been only *5 cents per student per year* (Altschuler & Wippmann, 2023).

### *Scope of the Problem*

This worrisome lack of interest and funding for civic education comes especially at a time when robust civic education is greatly needed. Many Americans are disinterested at best, and disillusioned at worst, with the U.S. government and even democracy. However, “when civics education is taught effectively, it can equip students with the knowledge, skills, and disposition necessary to become informed and engaged citizens” (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). Thus, as “guardians of democracy,” schools have a crucial role to play in preparing Americans for civics. But for civic

**Civic Knowledge** –  
citizens’  
understanding of the  
workings of the  
political system and  
of their own political  
and civic rights and  
responsibilities.

*The current civic  
education system is  
failing to empower  
Americans to feel  
like they can make  
a difference in their  
communities, let  
alone the  
government.*



*I'm just a bill...  
School House Rock Live  
Jr.*

education to become effective and robust, there are many problems it must overcome, and this briefing highlights a variety of problems surrounding the state of civic education in America.

## Decreasing Interest and Investment, But Increasing Civic Crisis

Since Horace Mann’s “common schools,” the goal of civic education has been to prepare Americans as democratic citizens by teaching them civics. However, civic education faces two troubling trends: the *decreasing interest and investment in civic education* at all levels (local, state, federal) and the *increasing civic crisis* among Americans. Like mentioned in the historical development section, the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act has disadvantaged civic education. For example, “while a majority of teachers have reported feeling well prepared to teach math and English, only 19% feel well prepared to teach civics” (Scribner, 2022). Meanwhile, Americans continue to face a cycle of civic disempowerment. While less than half of Americans can name all three branches of government, when asked if they approve or disapprove of Congress, only 3% of Americans say that they do not have an opinion. In other words, “97% of Americans do have an opinion, but somehow that doesn’t always translate into learning procedure. There’s a disconnect somewhere between caring about policy and understanding the government that decides it” (Hammer, 2022). The current civic education system is failing to empower Americans to feel like they can make a difference in their communities, let alone the government. As a result, many of these Americans then stay civically disengaged into adulthood.

## The Definition of Civic Education

In the United States, civic education often focuses on knowledge of U.S. government and history when teaching American students. Thus, when Americans hear “civic education,” they often recall their high school government or civics class where they were instructed on how a bill becomes a law or the U.S. Constitution. In simpler terms, “students are taught the many structures of government and the procedures within those structures” (Hammer, 2022).

However, there is a growing movement to expand this definition of civic engagement beyond sole memorization of facts. Shapiro and Brown (2018) argue that “civics is not synonymous with history” because understanding how the government works is only one part of civics. Similarly, the National Council for the Social Studies defines civic education as “[requiring] knowledge of the history, principles, and foundations of our American democracy, *and* the ability to participate in civic and democratic processes... Civics enables students not only to study how others participate, but also to *practice participating and taking informed action themselves*” (Baumann, 2015). Thus, some argue that civic education is

concerned with these three elements: **civic knowledge**, **civic skills**, and **civic disposition** (YouthPower, 2018).

## The Content of Civic Education

“85 percent of parents, across political parties, believe that it’s important for students to learn how the U.S. system of government works” (Smith, 2022). Unfortunately, there is less consensus on what the *content* of civic education should be. Heightened partisan polarization has seeped into civic education, because different ideological groups have been seeking to shape the civic education curriculum to align with their own ideological perspectives. In other words, *civic education itself has become polarized and politicized*. One area of civic education that has been getting much news coverage is **critical race theory** and other “divisive topics” being taught in schools. Many of these “divisive topics” often revolve around teaching social or historical issues like gender and sexuality, race/ethnicity, or America’s history with slavery (Ray & Gibbons, 2021).

This has led to activism at every level: parents, students, state legislatures, and the federal government. Parents have become vocal at school board meetings about having a say in their child’s education, while state legislatures have passed laws at addressing the content of civic education, such as setting strict parameters of what can be taught in the classroom or banning books. As of February 2022, “well over 100 bills before legislatures in more than 30 states would affect how, or if, teachers can introduce or talk about vital matters that relate to the rights and duties of citizens” (Smith, 2022). One such example is Texas’s HB 3979, which was introduced in March and signed by Governor Abbott in June 2022. While HB 3979 “includes a detailed list of documents and topics to be covered in civics education, including “the history of white supremacy,” it requires teachers to explore them from contending perspectives, “without giving preference to any one perspective.” It forbids credit for out-of-class advocacy or internships and limits discussion of current events” (Smith, 2022).

## State Governments v. Federal Government Involvement

To complicate issues more, in the United States, the control and administration of public education are shared between the state and federal governments, with primary authority resting at the state level. Each state has its own department or agency of education that sets educational standards, establishes curriculum guidelines, and manages funding and resources for public schools within its jurisdiction. States have the authority to create laws and regulations regarding education, such as compulsory attendance, teacher qualifications, and graduation requirements (FindLaw, 2018).

**Civic Skills** – citizens’ ability to analyze, evaluate, take and defend positions on public issues, and to use their knowledge to participate in civic and political processes.

**Civic Disposition** – interpersonal and intrapersonal values, virtues, and behaviors of citizens that are necessary for a democracy.

**Critical Race Theory** – an academic and legal framework that denotes that systemic racism is part of American society – from education and housing to employment and healthcare. CRT recognizes that racism is more than the result of individual bias and prejudice.

*While state governments have primary control over public education, the federal government influences and supports education through funding, legislation, and policy initiatives.*

However, the federal government still plays a significant role in education through various laws and programs. The U.S. Department of Education, established in 1980, serves as the principal federal agency responsible for implementing and enforcing education policies. It provides financial assistance to states, collects and analyzes education data, and promotes equal access to education. While the federal government cannot directly control the day-to-day operations of schools or dictate specific curriculum content, it can influence education policy through funding incentives, grants, and the establishment of broad guidelines (Klein, 2015). In summary, while state governments have primary control over public education, the federal government influences and supports education through funding, legislation, and policy initiatives. Thus, when creating solutions for civic education, the roles of state and federal governments need to be balanced.

## *Congressional Action*

Congress has played a significant role in supporting public education, including civic education, over the years. In general, these federal laws about education set standards for accountability, student achievement, and the rights of students with disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) by imposing certain requirements and providing funding for specific educational initiatives. For example, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), originally passed in 1965, has been reauthorized several times, most recently as the **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** in 2015. The ESSA includes provisions that support civic education, such as the requirement for states to include civics as part of their academic standards and assessments (Klein, 2015). A 2022 bill that addresses civic education is the Civics Secures Democracy Act, which was introduced by Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Chris Coons (D-DE), and John Cornyn (R-TX), and co-sponsored by many more. The bill “would direct \$1 billion in federal investment across five years in school districts, nonprofits, and education centers to develop curricula and opportunities for improving civics and history comprehension throughout K-12 education” (Scribner, 2022). Additionally, Congress has allocated funds for civic education programs through the federal budget. This includes funding for the U.S. Department of Education's programs and initiatives related to civic education, such as the Teaching American History grants and other educational grants that support civics and social studies instruction (Federal Grants, 2004).

## *Other Policy Action*

Besides Congress, many other stakeholders care about civic education. While “13 states have no civics course requirement and



*States like Colorado are leading the way for civic education.*  
*The Chronicle of Higher Education*

***Every Student Succeeds Act*** –  
*This 2015 education law included provisions that support civic education, such as the requirement for states to include civics as part of their academic standards and assessments.*

*Conservatives generally believe that education, like other issues, are better left to state or local governments to handle than the federal government.*

**1619 Project** –  
*A long form journalism project focused on slavery and the founding of the United States that developed an educational curriculum.*

*In October 2022, a poll conducted by the nonprofit iCivics found “overwhelming bipartisan support for more civics education, with almost 7 in 10 saying that it is more important today than five years ago”*

only seven require a full year of government or civics instruction” (Smith, 2022), states like Colorado are leading the way for civic education. Colorado designed detailed curricula where throughout one year “teachers are expected to cover the origins of democracy, the structure of American government, methods of public participation, a comparison to foreign governments, and the responsibilities of citizenship” (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). Additionally, “Colorado teachers help civics come alive in the classroom through the Judicially Speaking program, which was started by three local judges to teach students how judges think through civics as they make decisions” (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). This combination of a rigorous, yearlong civics course and the Judicially Speaking program could contribute to Colorado’s youth voter participation and volunteerism rates, which are slightly higher than the national average’s rates. There are many nonprofits who are working in the civic education field from Generation Citizen, which teaches what it terms as “action civics” to more than 30,000 middle school and high school students to CivXNow, which is a cross-party coalition with more than 280 members that has developed a “state policy menu” that outlines goals for improving the quality of K-12 civic education (Smith, 2022).

## IDEOLOGICAL VIEWPOINTS

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### *Conservative View*

In October 2022, a poll conducted by the nonprofit iCivics found “overwhelming bipartisan support for more civics education, with almost 7 in 10 saying that it is more important today than five years ago” (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). However, as mentioned above in the “Content of Civic Education” section, bipartisanship ends at this common ideal and many aspects of civic education have become very polarized. Conservatives believe that a strong civic education should provide a thorough understanding of the founding principles of a nation, such as the Constitution, the rule of law, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. They also tend to market civic education as way to learn about “patriotism” and are wary of educational initiatives that feature critical examinations of American history. For example, the **1619 project**, which explores the history of slavery and racism in the U.S, has come under heavy fire for fear that it, along with similar programs, will “supplant—rather than supplement—current curriculum” (Hess, 2020). Many conservative governors, like Governor Abbott of Texas or Governor DeSantis of Florida, and state legislatures have passed bills banning books or topics to be taught in classroom that have to do with critical race theory or other “divisive topics.” Conservatives

**Media Literacy** –  
an expanded  
conceptualization of  
literacy that includes  
the ability to access  
and analyze media  
messages as well as  
create, reflect and  
take action, using the  
power of information  
and communication  
to make a difference  
in the world

*Liberals often  
advocate for civic  
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nature of American  
society.*

generally believe that education, like other issues, is better left to state or local governments to handle than the federal government.

## *Liberal View*

Liberals often advocate for civic education that recognizes and celebrates the multicultural nature of American society. They believe that civic education should embrace diverse perspectives, cultures, and histories. This may involve teaching about the contributions and experiences of marginalized communities, promoting cultural awareness, or fostering empathy and understanding across different groups. As a result, liberals are against banning books or restricting topics, especially those related to social issues, in schools and classrooms. Liberals emphasize a more adaptive, critical look at American history and politics. They believe that students should be taught how to analyze and evaluate information, engage in respectful and evidence-based debates, and develop their own informed opinions. Thus, they are more open to educational initiatives like the 1619 project (Hess, 2020).

## AREAS OF DEBATE

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Below are four highly debated potential solutions to the problems raised earlier: updating and enhancing the civic curriculum, active civics/service-learning, restricting divisive topics, and civic assessments/evaluations. Obviously, these are only four areas of debate and there are many other policy ideas and initiatives that improve civic education. Thus, they are only the beginning points of debate.

### *Updating and Enhancing the Civic Curriculum*

One major problem of current civic education is that it does not cover the essential civic knowledge and skills necessary for Americans to understand civics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, updating and enhancing the current civic curriculum to meet the needs of students of today will help civic education move away from the stereotype of simple memorization of facts and dates. This section will only mention a few of the many ways to update and enhance curricula.

One way to update the civic curriculum is to revolve around the three Cs mentioned earlier: civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic disposition. For example, supporters of this enhancement argue that developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills is not only important for young Americans in better understanding the political process and their role as citizens, but also for any workplace or society in general. As a result, Rebecca Winthrop

**Active Civics or Service-learning** – an approach to civic education that goes beyond traditional classroom instruction by actively engaging students in real-world experiences and community service.



Gen Z and Millennials consume news from about six different traditional sources or social media platforms at least weekly

*The Fulcrum*



Voter registration drives are one activity under active civics or service-learning

*Henry Ford College*

(2020) argues that “civic learning [is] an essential 21<sup>st</sup>-century skill.” Examples of how to incorporate critical thinking and problem-solving into the classroom includes conversations about current news or civil discourse and debates for students to research and think critically by learning about different opinions.

Another way to enhance the civic curriculum is to incorporate technology and media literacy. With the rise of digital media, there are concerns that the current curriculum does not sufficiently address media literacy skills necessary to navigate and critically evaluate information sources. In 2022, it was found that Gen Z and Millennials “consume news from about six different traditional sources or social media platforms at least weekly,” which included the traditional outlets like newspapers and TV news stations, but also platforms like Twitter or Youtube (The Media Insight Project, 2022). Students may lack the ability to discern bias, misinformation, or propaganda, impairing their ability to make well-informed decisions.

One concern with this solution is the *execution* of any updated curriculum, especially one that is extremely ambitious in its undertaking. Currently, civics is one of the most underfunded subjects in school and since the No Child Left Behind Act, it has been pushed away in importance by subjects like reading and math. Thus, “teachers have reported feeling unprepared to support students’ civic development, experiencing pressure to prioritize other subjects, and lacking the resources and training needed to equip their students” (Scribner, 2022). As a result, any update to the curriculum needs to be also considered through the lens of the teachers who at the end of the day are the ones teaching the curriculum to the students, not Congress.

## Political Perspectives on this Solution

Both conservatives and liberals agree that the current civic education is not enough. However, how it should be updated is much more contentious. Thus, any updates to the curriculum need to be negotiated with both ideologies in mind. For the conservatives, they favor less drastic changes with the curriculum because they are more in favor of civic education being the traditional study of the foundational values and political institutions of the United States. They are wary of current news and debates being an integral part of civic education because they believe that many of these conversations will have left-leaning connotations. Meanwhile, for the liberals, they may favor more drastic changes to expand the definition of civic education. Liberals view conversations about social issues as a mechanism for students to develop critical-thinking skills.



## *Active Civics/Service-learning*

**Active civics** or **service-learning** refers to an approach to civic education that goes beyond traditional classroom instruction by actively engaging students in real-world experiences and community service. It combines academic learning with hands-on practical application, allowing students to develop a deeper understanding of civic concepts, gain practical skills, and make positive contributions to their communities. Supporters argue that “many students learn better by *doing*: in math, students don’t simply learn about the concept of multiplication, they do multiplication. In science, students put their knowledge to practice in the lab. Similarly, if the goal of civics education is to cultivate productively engaged citizens, teachers should encourage students to “*do civics*” rather than simply reading about it” (Hess, 2020). In active civics or service-learning, students actively participate in activities that address community needs, promote social justice, and foster civic responsibility. These activities include community service, voter registration drives, mock elections, letter writing to policymakers, social justice hackathons, and more. The commonality shared by these activities is that students get involved in their communities beyond just reading about them.

The argument against active civics or service-learning is that it requires significant time and resources, potentially diverting attention from already existing limitations in instructional time and resources for civics classes. Additionally, some argue that the focus on experiences and community engagement could overshadow the development of essential knowledge and critical skills. Finally, others contend that when active civics or service-learning is not executed correctly, such as in the form of short-term volunteer projects, this may not lead to sustained civic action or meaningful behavior change beyond the duration of the project.

### Political Perspectives on this Solution

Many liberals are supporters of active civics or service-learning. They argue that “activities like participating in marches or writing to members of Congress are part and parcel of learning how civics works and preparing to be a responsible citizen” (Hess, 2020). Within active civics or service-learning, liberals believe that civic engagement is more than just voting, so they support teaching non-electoral ways, including protesting and advocacy. Meanwhile, conservatives support the goal of helping students become active citizens, but they are more hesitant on the method. For example, “conservatives argued that ‘action civics’ seems to lean decidedly left, with activities and emphases that consistently favor progressive causes rather than conservative ones. They suggested that this makes it more akin to indoctrination than instruction” (Hess,

2020). In addition, they are concerned that focusing too much on active civics or service-learning will “come at the expense of teaching civic knowledge—a serious issue in a nation where too few understand the basics of how our government works” (Hess, 2020).

## *Restricting Divisive Topics*

Many state legislatures and local school districts have taken the route of restricting divisive topics when it comes to improving the civic education experience for students. The restrictions have especially manifested in laws banning critical race theory from being taught in classrooms or banning certain books because of their topics. Supporters of restricting divisive topics argue that critical race theory and other similar topics, especially surrounding gender and sexuality or race and ethnicity, focus too much on group identity and emphasize differences rather than promoting unity and commonality, which is not very “American.” For example, they contend that CRT oversimplifies complex historical events and reduces them to the lens of race, neglecting other significant factors (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). Furthermore, they argue that these divisive topics are not appropriate or too complex for students to learn at such a young age, so banning these topics protects students from exposure to potentially harmful or offensive material. Often, supporters of these restrictions suggest that it should be up to the parents to decide what is appropriate or not for their children.



*Books are being banned in many schools across the country.*

*Reader's Digest*

Opponents of restricting divisive topics argue that banning books or divisive topics, like critical race theory, infringes upon academic freedom and limits the ability of educators to explore and teach a comprehensive understanding of history, social issues, and systemic racism. They believe that open dialogue and critical examination of race and racism are crucial for addressing inequities and fostering a more inclusive society. As a result, they contend that it is a disservice to students to ban or restrict educational material from them just because some adults felt uncomfortable by it. Students should be challenged to critically analyze with different perspectives and ideas, instead of being sheltered by these topics.

## Political Perspectives on this Solution

As of November 2021, nine states (Idaho, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Arizona, and North Dakota) have passed legislation banning critical race theory from being taught in classrooms (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). Many of these state legislatures are held by a conservative majority. Similarly, conservatives are concerned about the prevalence of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity being taught in classrooms and are more in favor of restricting these topics. They are in favor of letting parents decide what their children should learn. Meanwhile, liberals are, overall, against restricting these divisive topics. They

see banning books and banning critical race theory as politicizing civic education, not improving civic education. They are not in favor of restrictions, but rather prefer incorporations of social justice into civic education.

## *Civic Assessments and Evaluations*

*Supporters argue that a national civics assessment provides a standardized measurement tool to evaluate students' knowledge and understanding of civic concepts and skills across the country.*

One solution to fix the crumbling civic education system is to establish a national civics assessment or national standards for civic education, like those that were created for reading and math. Supporters argue that a national civics assessment provides a standardized measurement tool to evaluate students' knowledge and understanding of civic concepts and skills across the country. It allows for consistent and comparable data that can help identify strengths and weaknesses in civic education. By collecting data on students' civic knowledge and skills, a national assessment can inform policymakers about the effectiveness of existing civic education policies and initiatives. It can help identify areas that require improvement or provide insights into successful approaches that can be replicated (Hess, 2020). It can also encourage schools to prioritize and allocate resources for civic education, knowing that their performance will be assessed and publicly reported. Furthermore, supporters argue that it is ineffective, and perhaps even a waste of money, to make updates or create grants for civic education without first understanding the precise problems; in other words, one should diagnose the problem first before finding a solution.

*Opponents of a standardized civics assessment argue that the test may not fully capture the broad spectrum of civic education goals and outcomes and instead continue to emphasize rote memorization of facts and dates.*

However, opponents of a standardized civics assessment argue that the test may not fully capture the broad spectrum of civic education goals and outcomes and instead continue to emphasize the learning of facts and dates. For example, some states use the U.S. Citizenship test as a proxy for a civics test and many of these questions are arguably very niche and even unrelated to civics. In their view, civic education should be multidimensional and encompass not only knowledge but also skills, attitudes, and behaviors that may be challenging to assess through a single test. Like reading and math assessments, results of the standardized civics exam could be tied to school funding, so it may create undue pressure and incentivize teaching to the test rather than promoting authentic and comprehensive civic education (Meier, 1989).

### Political Perspectives on this Solution

In general, conservatives have historically been more supportive of standardized testing, while liberals have expressed more criticism and concerns about its limitations. This pattern is replicated in the debate of civics assessments and evaluations. Conservatives tend to emphasize accountability, meritocracy, and the role of assessments in measuring student achievement and

teacher effectiveness. They often view standardized testing as a way to ensure quality education, hold schools accountable, and maintain high standards. Liberals, on the other hand, have raised concerns about the potential negative consequences and limitations of standardized testing. They often emphasize the importance of holistic and comprehensive assessments, including multiple measures of student performance, rather than relying solely on standardized tests. Liberals may argue that high-stakes testing narrows the curriculum and places undue stress on students. They also highlight issues of equity, as standardized tests may disproportionately disadvantage marginalized students and perpetuate existing achievement gaps.

## BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS

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Most of the solutions presented above come with a price tag. Thus, it is important to consider not only how feasible a solution is in terms of logistics, but also financially. Secondly, it is necessary to consider where the funding is coming from. For example, the Department of Education currently gives out grants to schools for civic education missions.

## CONCLUSION

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During the conference, you will be debating in your representative's voice when it comes to the main problems and solutions of civic education. Although party politics and polarization have seeped into civic education, there is plenty of room for negotiation and bipartisanship. Thus, it is crucial for you to critically analyze the various elements of civic education, because no problem or solution has a black and white answer.

At the same time, as you research about the state of civic education in the United States, I hope you take some time to reflect on your own experiences with civics, even if it is the opposite of your representative's opinions. Ask yourself these questions and let them frame your research: What are the most important aspects of civic education in preparing you to become a citizen? Do you feel satisfied with your civic education? Your creativity as both a high school student and as your representative is crucial for saving America's civic crisis!

*Ask yourself these questions and let them frame your research: **What are the most important aspects of civic education in preparing you to become a citizen? Do you feel satisfied with your civic education?***

## GUIDE TO FURTHER RESEARCH

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Hopefully, this briefing has given you a solid foundation to begin your own research into civic education. It should be emphasized that this briefing is only a snapshot into an extremely broad and complex topic, meaning that there are many other problems and solutions out there to be researched! It is highly suggested that you stay within the four broad problems with the state of civic education. Nonetheless, it is encouraged that you research and come up with your own innovative solutions beyond those presented in this briefing. There are many policy ideas, so think outside of the box! If you need some inspiration, I suggest turning to one of the many civic education organizations out there and reading some of their success stories of incorporating civic education into the classroom.

## GLOSSARY

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**Active Civics or Service-learning** – an approach to civic education that goes beyond traditional classroom instruction by actively engaging students in real-world experiences and community service.

**Civic Disposition** – interpersonal and intrapersonal values, virtues, and behaviors of citizens that are necessary for a democracy.

**Civic Education** – the provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizens to participate in democratic processes means.

**Civic Knowledge** – citizens’ understanding of the workings of the political system and of their own political and civic rights and responsibilities.

**Civic Skills** – citizens’ ability to analyze, evaluate, take and defend positions on public issues, and to use their knowledge to participate in civic and political processes.

**Critical Race Theory** – an academic and legal framework that denotes that systemic racism is part of American society – from education and housing to employment and healthcare. CRT recognizes that racism is more than the result of individual bias and prejudice.

**Every Student Succeeds Act** – This 2015 education law included provisions that support civic education, such as the requirement for states to include civics as part of their academic standards and assessments.

**Media Literacy** – an expanded conceptualization of literacy that includes the ability to access and analyze media messages as

well as create, reflect and take action, using the power of information and communication to make a difference in the world.

**No Child Left Behind Act** – This 2002 education law supported standards-based education reform based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals could improve individual outcomes in education.

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