



GAUGING CIVIC READINESS

THE STATE OF CIVIC ASSESSMENT IN THE UNITED STATES
AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITS IMPROVEMENT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Readying young people for their civic responsibilities in a democracy is an essential role of schools in the United States. Yet, over the past half-century, for a variety of reasons, civic learning has been reduced to a small part of the curriculum. As the civics scores on the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show, less than a quarter of 8th graders in the U.S. are proficient in civic knowledge and civic skills. There is also a wide gap in access to civic learning opportunities that disadvantages students of color and students living in poverty.

In the past few years, policymakers in an increasing number of states have begun to recognize that to maintain our democratic culture, it is critical that schools effectively prepare students to function productively as civic participants. One of the obstacles to meaningful progress in improving civic education, however, has been the anemic state of civic assessment. As a recent overview of the field concluded, “there is currently no ongoing effort to gather civic learning outcome and opportunity data across all age groups, to track learning and opportunities over time, or to assess learning in ways that could inform instruction...”¹

In this report, we aim to stimulate discussion and action on overcoming these problems. We provide an overview of the current state of civic assessment in K-12 education, showing that, of the states that assess civic readiness, the majority only require students to pass tests based on the short-answer, multiple-choice exam given to individuals seeking to become naturalized U.S. citizens. These tests touch on basic civic facts but do not purport to examine the range of civic knowledge, civic skills, civic experiences, and civic dispositions students need to be prepared for their civic responsibilities, and many educators have concluded that requiring students to take these very limited exams is counterproductive. Four states require students to take written exams that test civic knowledge more substantively than does the naturalization exam, but these tests largely cover civic knowledge and not civic skills, civic experiences, or civic dispositions, the other important aspects of civic readiness. Most other states include limited domains of civic knowledge as part of a larger required social studies exam.

Some innovative initiatives involving civic projects, performance measures, and reality-based authentic assessment are being undertaken in a few states. Although these new approaches have not been fully perfected, they do suggest that valid methods for accurately assessing progress in the meaningful civic preparation of students in the 21st century can be developed, and they provide promising directions for further research and implementation.

In the concluding section of the report, we present a set of recommendations for building on these positive possibilities that states should consider. Ultimately, all states should adopt comprehensive civic assessment systems that can fully and fairly measure the extent to which students in the United States are ready to sustain our democratic culture.

1. Laura S. Hamilton and Ace Parsi, “Monitoring Civic Learning Opportunities and Outcomes: Lessons from a Symposium Sponsored by ETS and Educating for American Democracy,” ETS Research Notes (ETS, 2022), 4.

I. INTRODUCTION

Readying young people for their civic responsibilities in a democracy has historically been an essential role of schools in the United States. In most states, it is the cornerstone of students' right to education under state constitutions.² The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed that preparing students to be capable civic participants is a primary purpose of public education.³

Preparing all students to be capable civic participants in the 21st century is a more complicated and challenging undertaking than it was in the 19th or 20th centuries. Meaningful civic preparation today must go far beyond teaching historical or structural knowledge of governmental institutions; it requires ensuring that a large and diverse body of students also acquires a range of important civic skills, civic experiences, and civic dispositions.⁴ This poses many new challenges for both teaching and assessment.

Although historically, education for citizenship⁵ permeated the school curriculum, civic education is no longer part of most schools' core program. Over the past half-century, for a variety of reasons, including increased distrust of government, reduced agreement about, or acceptance of, cultural and civic values, and contemporary emphasis on preparing students for college and career, civic learning has been reduced to a small part of social studies curricula.⁶ It is telling that proficiency scores in history and civics on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which have been embarrassingly low for decades, further declined in the latest testing round in 2022. Only 13% of the nation's eighth graders were considered proficient in history and only 22% were proficient in civics.⁷ The gaps in civic knowledge and civic preparation are particularly acute for students of color and students living in poverty. This disparity, which Harvard professor Meira Levinson calls "a civic empowerment gap," stems from a variety of factors, including extensive and longstanding disparities in resources available in schools attended predominantly by students of color and students living in poverty; distrust of civic institutions, stemming from legacies of historical discrimination; and continuing racism and/or unconscious bias among many administrators and teachers.⁸

In the past few years, policymakers in an increasing number of states have begun to recognize that the decline in civic education correlates with widespread ignorance and confusion about governmental processes and constitutional values. They have agreed that to maintain our democratic culture, it is critical that the schools effectively prepare students to function productively as civic

2. For example, New York's highest court ruled in *Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) v. State* (2003) that the state government has a constitutional obligation to provide all students "a meaningful opportunity for a sound basic education" that prepares them to "function productively as civic participants capable of voting and serving on a jury." The Wyoming Supreme Court held that its constitution requires the state to provide students with "a uniform opportunity to become equipped for their future roles as citizens, participants in the political system, and competitors both economically and intellectually." *Campbell Cty. Sch. Dist. v. State* (2003).

3. See e.g., *Tinker v. Des Moines Ind't. Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503, 507 (1969) (The schools "are educating the young for citizenship"); *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 221 (1982) (Schools are where the "fundamental values necessary for the maintenance of a democratic political system" are conveyed.)

4. For example, the New York State Board of Regents has defined civic readiness as "the ability to make a positive difference in the public life of our communities through the combination of civic knowledge, skills and actions, mindsets, and experiences." New York State Education Department, Civic Readiness Initiative, available at <https://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/civic-readiness-initiative>. See also Laura S. Hamilton and Ace Parsi, "Monitoring Civic Learning Opportunities and Outcomes: Lessons from a Symposium Sponsored by ETS and Educating for American Democracy," ETS Research Notes, (2022) (Defining "civic knowledge," "civic skills," "civic dispositions and civic engagement.")

5. The National Academy of Education (NAEd) Committee on Civic Reasoning and Discourse defined citizenship to refer not only to the activities and responsibilities related to legal status of citizenship but also "to active, responsive, and critical participation in any community in which people find themselves." Citizenship is defined in this more inclusive fashion throughout this report.

6. For a detailed discussion of the reasons for the decline in the teaching of civics over the past 60 years, see Michael A. Rebell, *Flunking Democracy: Schools, Courts, and Civic Participation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

7. See "NAEP Report Card: 2022 NAEP Civics Assessment," <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/civics-2022>; Sarah Mervosh, "It's Not Just Math and Reading: U.S. History Scores for 8th Graders Plunge," *The New York Times*, May 3, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/03/us/us-history-test-scores.html>.

8. Meira Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

participants.⁹ One of the obstacles to improving civic education, however, has been the state of civic assessment.¹⁰

Currently, U.S. education policy lacks valid and reliable methods for assessing students' development of the civic knowledge, skills, dispositions, and experiences necessary to ensure students are prepared for responsible civic participation. As a recent overview of the field at a conference on assessment for civic readiness convened by the Educational Testing Service concluded, "there is currently no ongoing effort to gather civic learning outcome and opportunity data across all age groups, to track learning and opportunities over time, or to assess learning in ways that could inform instruction..."¹¹

"Currently, U.S. education policy lacks valid and reliable methods for assessing students' development of the civic knowledge, skills, dispositions, and experiences that are necessary to ensure students are prepared for responsible civic participation."

Tracking civic learning opportunities and civic readiness outcomes is important for emphasizing the importance of civic preparation, guiding effective instruction, and informing policy, especially policies needed to promote equity of opportunity and civic empowerment. However, the challenges for developing reliable, validated methods for assessing the full range of civic knowledge, skills, experiences, and dispositions are substantial.

The need to develop methodologies that accurately assess the range of civic knowledge, skills, experiences, and dispositions that educators agree are necessary for appropriate civic preparation in the 21st century has received little attention to date.¹² There have been a number of studies that raise interesting hypotheses about the effectiveness of particular aspects of civic teaching and learning. For example, Campbell and Niemi¹³ found that high-stakes exams in civics incentivize civic learning and lead to increases in political knowledge, especially for Latinx and immigrant students, and other research has also found that some well-designed civics exams have a positive effect on student civic knowledge. These results align with the compensation hypothesis, which holds that students who belong to populations that are most disenfranchised by the political system will experience the greatest gains from a civics curriculum and assessment.¹⁴ However, the design of fair and accurate assessments must also take into account the reality that many schools, especially schools attended by students of color and those that are under-resourced, do not provide meaningful opportunities for students to develop civic knowledge, skills, experiences and dispositions.¹⁵

Such individual studies do not, however, track civic learning opportunities and outcomes data across

9. See e.g., Shawn Healy, "Momentum Grows for Stronger Civic Education Across States" (American Bar Association, January 4, 2022), https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/the-state-of-civic-education-in-america/momentum-grows-for-stronger-civic-education-across-states/.

10. "The lack of inclusion in priority assessment is a contributing cause to a narrowing of the curriculum that deemphasizes the vital importance of civic learning." "Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools" (The Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011).

11. Hamilton and Parsi, "Monitoring Civic Learning Opportunities and Outcomes," 4.

12. See, e.g., Raj Vinnakota, "From Civic Education to a Civic Learning Ecosystem: A Landscape Analysis and Case for Collaboration" (Red & Blue Works, December 2019) (discussing the need for detailed research into the outcomes of specific methods that are necessary to determine the most effective means to implement civic learning); Paul Baumann and Jan Brennan, "State Civic Education Policy: Framework and Gap Analysis Tool" (Education Commission of the States, December 2017) (recommending the development of assessments that include traditional tests alongside authentic assessments and project-based learning, as well as accountability indicators for schools and districts to ensure feedback that supports civic education outcomes).

13. David E. Campbell and Richard G. Niemi, "Testing Civics: State-Level Civic Education Requirements and Political Knowledge," *The American Political Science Review* 110, no. 3 (August 2016): 495–511. Campbell and Niemi emphasize that the high-stakes civics exams in their study were paired with a course in civics and indicate that an exam alone may not achieve the same result.

14. Campbell and Niemi, "Testing Civics: State-Level Civic Education Requirements and Political Knowledge."

15. Sarah McGrew, "Civic Learning Impact and Measurement Convening Report" (CivXNow A Project of iCivics, 2019).

all age groups or over time, nor do they systematically assess learning in ways that could inform instruction.

Recently, the Institute for Citizens and Scholars catalogued 136 civic assessment tools being used in a wide variety of contexts, including, but not limited to, education, and mapped them along the areas of civic learning they test. The report features a collection of measurement tools, rubrics, and more than 200 resources in use by practitioners across education, business, philanthropy, community institutions, media, government, and civil society. It found that the civic readiness of individuals—such as analytical skills or an understanding of how government works—is measured far more frequently than civic opportunities—such as collaboration activities or media literacy training and that the paucity of longitudinal studies makes it difficult to determine how much students’ civic learning influences real-life contexts. It also noted that researchers working in related fields rarely collaborate and there are “civic measurement islands and civic measurement deserts.”¹⁶

Some pioneering work has also been done in assessing civic preparation activities in higher education. For example, in 2015, Judith Torney-Purta led a study that catalogued the existing studies of civic assessment in higher education and broke them down by frameworks, assessment type, and the skills that were assessed. This analysis classified the common civic skills into two categories, “civic competency and civic engagement,” and developed a format for a computerized assessment detailing the exact type of question that might assess each civic skill, activity, and disposition.¹⁷

“In higher education, as in K-12 education, development of validated methods for correlating specific civic preparation instructional methods with desired outcomes is still in a fledgling stage.”

Although these studies have drawn attention to the importance of developing accurate methods for assessing the full range of knowledge, skills, experiences, and dispositions needed to assess civic learning, they highlight that most types of assessments they catalogue are of limited breadth and are not valid or reliable: many rely heavily on interviews, surveys, and self-reporting, methods that each only assess parts of the relevant knowledge, skills, experiences and dispositions necessary for civic readiness, but are often undertaken in isolation and not as part of a comprehensive evaluation.¹⁸ Most of these tests are also not responsive to, or affirming of, students’ social

and cultural contexts. In higher education, as in K-12 education, development of validated methods for correlating specific civic preparation instructional methods with desired outcomes is still in a fledgling stage.

The insufficiency of civic readiness assessment has had a direct negative impact on instructional emphasis: what gets tested is often what gets taught, especially in under-resourced schools. As Peter Levine has put it, “If we don’t test civic knowledge and skills, they become afterthoughts in

16. Institute for Citizens & Scholars (C&S), “Mapping Civic Measurement: How Are We Assessing Readiness and Opportunities for an Engaged Citizenry?” February 16, 2023, citizensandscholars.org.

17. Judith Torney-Purta et al., “Assessing Civic Competency and Engagement in Higher Education: Research Background, Frameworks, and Directions for next-Generation Assessment,” ETS Research Report Series, 2015. Amy Driscoll et al., “An Assessment Model for Service-Learning: Comprehensive Case Studies of Impact on Faculty, Students, Community and Institution,” *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 3 (1996): 66–71 (pilot study of service-learning experiences that were built into its curriculum that focused on determining the impact on students, faculty, the community, and the institution); Sherril B. Gelmon, *Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques*, 2018 (textbook providing analysis and practical guidance on how to use interviews, focus groups, observations, and surveys to assess service learning and civic engagement).

18. The challenges to testing the outcomes of civic learning, according to Torney-Purta et al., include that respondents tend to self-report socially desirable traits at higher rates than are accurate; the settings and context in which students are tested can affect civic approaches; and subgroup differences due to gender, race, and national origin are often overlooked. The polarized political environment and agendas that have affected civic curricula also pose a challenge to civic education, and the rapidly changing world of technology and media render new civic skills necessary for students to navigate the current political space.

education, especially in schools where lots of kids are at risk of failing the subjects that are tested.”¹⁹ After the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which emphasized high-stakes testing in reading and math but included no testing in social studies, there was a nationwide reduction in the amount of time devoted to social studies (and therefore to civic education) in 44% of school districts.²⁰

Many states have required students to take an end-of-term exam or pass an exit exam that deals with some aspects of civic knowledge or civic skills to graduate from high school, but the issues and the domains that are assessed have generally been of limited scope and quality. Similarly, when states have included civics questions in required social studies assessment, the number and quality of questions that relate to civic readiness has been limited.

In section 2 of this report, we will provide an overview of the current state of civic assessment in K-12 education. Some innovative initiatives are being undertaken in a few states. Although none of these new approaches have been fully perfected, they do suggest that valid methods for accurately assessing progress in providing meaningful civic preparation of students in the 21st century can be developed, and they provide promising directions for further research and implementation. We will discuss these advances and their implications in section 3. In the concluding section, we will present a set of recommendations states should consider for building on these positive possibilities and creating comprehensive assessment systems that can fully and fairly measure the extent to which U.S. students are ready to sustain our democratic culture.

II. CURRENT CIVIC ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Aware of the increased importance of civic education and the role that assessment can play in motivating both teachers and students, policymakers in many states have adopted new requirements for testing civic readiness in recent years. Close to half of the states require students to pass tests based on the short answer, multiple-choice exam given to individuals seeking to become naturalized U.S. citizens. These tests touch on basic civic facts but do not purport to examine the range of skills, experiences, and dispositions students need to be prepared for their civic responsibilities. Four states require students to take written exams that test civic knowledge more substantively than does the naturalization exam. Most other states test limited domains of civic knowledge as part of a larger required social studies exam. Most of these exams contain a limited number of questions that relate solely to basic civic knowledge. Several states are attempting to assess deeper civic knowledge and civic skills through open-ended exam questions.

A. The U.S. Naturalization Civics Test

Currently, 21 states have adopted tests of civic readiness that consist of questions from the civics section of the U.S. naturalization test as an end of term or graduation requirement. The states that have adopted this measure as a required form of civic assessment are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana,²¹ Nebraska, Nevada, New

19. Peter Levine, “Tennessee Becomes the First State to Use Projects to Assess Civics,” May 3, 2012, <http://peterlevine.ws/?p=8817>. A 2010 survey of high school social studies teachers reported that 93% of respondents wanted regular social studies testing to emphasize the subject’s importance in the curriculum, David E. Campbell, “Putting Civics to the Test: The Impact of State-Level Civics Assessments on Civic Knowledge,” AEI Program on American Citizenship (AEI Research, September 17, 2014).

20. Council of Chief State School Officers, “The Marginalization of Social Studies,” November 16, 2018, <https://ccsso.org/resource-library/marginalization-social-studies>. This problem is particularly pronounced in the elementary grades, where only 10 percent of class time is devoted to social studies compared with 53 percent for English and 25 percent for math. A recent Brown Center report noted that students in states with history assessments received more hours of history education per week than students in states without assessments, Michael Hansen et al., “The 2018 Brown Center Report on American Education: How Well Are American Students Learning?” (Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings, June 2018).

21. Although the Montana statute does not use the term “required,” it very strongly encourages all schools to give the test and to “provide each student with the opportunity to take the test as many times as necessary for the student to pass the test” (“Montana Code Annotated 2023,” 20-7-119 § (2023), https://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0200/chapter_0070/part_0010/section_0190/0200-0070-0010-0190.html). For these reasons we have included Montana in the category of states that have adopted the naturalization exam as its basic civic assessment approach.

Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.²² This test was developed to be administered to those who have immigrated to the United States and wish to become U.S. citizens. It was repurposed as a measure of civic readiness for students by the Joe Foss Institute's civic education initiative, which, starting in 2015, has encouraged all states to require the exam.²³

When testing applicants for U.S. citizenship, the naturalization test consists of 100 questions from which prospective citizens must successfully answer six out of 10 questions selected by immigration officials.²⁴ States using the naturalization test as an assessment of civic readiness vary in the number of questions students are required to answer, with some requiring correct answers to only 10 questions, while others call for students to answer 50 or more. In some states students are given the questions that will be used in advance, on the theory that, if they learn the answers, they will improve their civic knowledge. Some of the states do not require that students pass the exam, only that it is administered.²⁵

Examples of questions from the naturalization exam are

- What do we call the first ten amendments to the Constitution?
- Name one war fought by the United States in the 1800s.
- Name one of the two longest rivers in the United States.²⁶

Most educators do not consider this exam an effective way to assess civic readiness or provide accountability for civic learning. Although some of these questions could have a place as part of a broad social studies knowledge assessment, they do not test civic readiness because they do not comprehensively test civic knowledge, and they don't assess civic skills, civic experiences, or civic dispositions. In 2018, the National Council for the Social Studies stated:

[The Naturalization Test], as constructed, was not designed to measure civic literacy and learning but rather memorization of information. ... It does not get to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions so necessary for civic life; instead, it assesses memorized answers, freely available online. ... There is also no evidence that implementing a version of this test would result in greater civic engagement. ... Instruction should align with assessment; if the USCIS [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services] Naturalization Test becomes the cornerstone of civic literacy...the negative impact on instruction is likely to be significant.²⁷

The Ohio Council for the Social Studies opposed a legislative bill that would have given students the option to replace Ohio's American Government State Exam with the civics section of the U.S. Naturalization Test, stating:

22. New Hampshire requires students to pass both the naturalization exam and a locally developed civic competency exam; Tennessee requires a passing score on the naturalization exam to graduate high school, and also requires a project-based civic assessment once in middle school and once in high school. In Nebraska, students must either take the exam or attend a public meeting and complete a project; in Pennsylvania, schools must provide a locally developed civics test that can consist of questions from the naturalization exam.

23. The Joe Foss Institute, now housed at Arizona State University, is an organization that sends military veterans into schools to discuss patriotism and American government. See "Civic Literacy Curriculum Guides," Center for American Civics at Arizona State University, n.d., <https://cptl.asu.edu/Civic-Literacy-Curriculum-Section-2>; Sarah D. Sparks, "How Many High School Students Can Pass the U.S. Citizenship Test? States Begin to Find Out," *Education Week*, September 14, 2017.

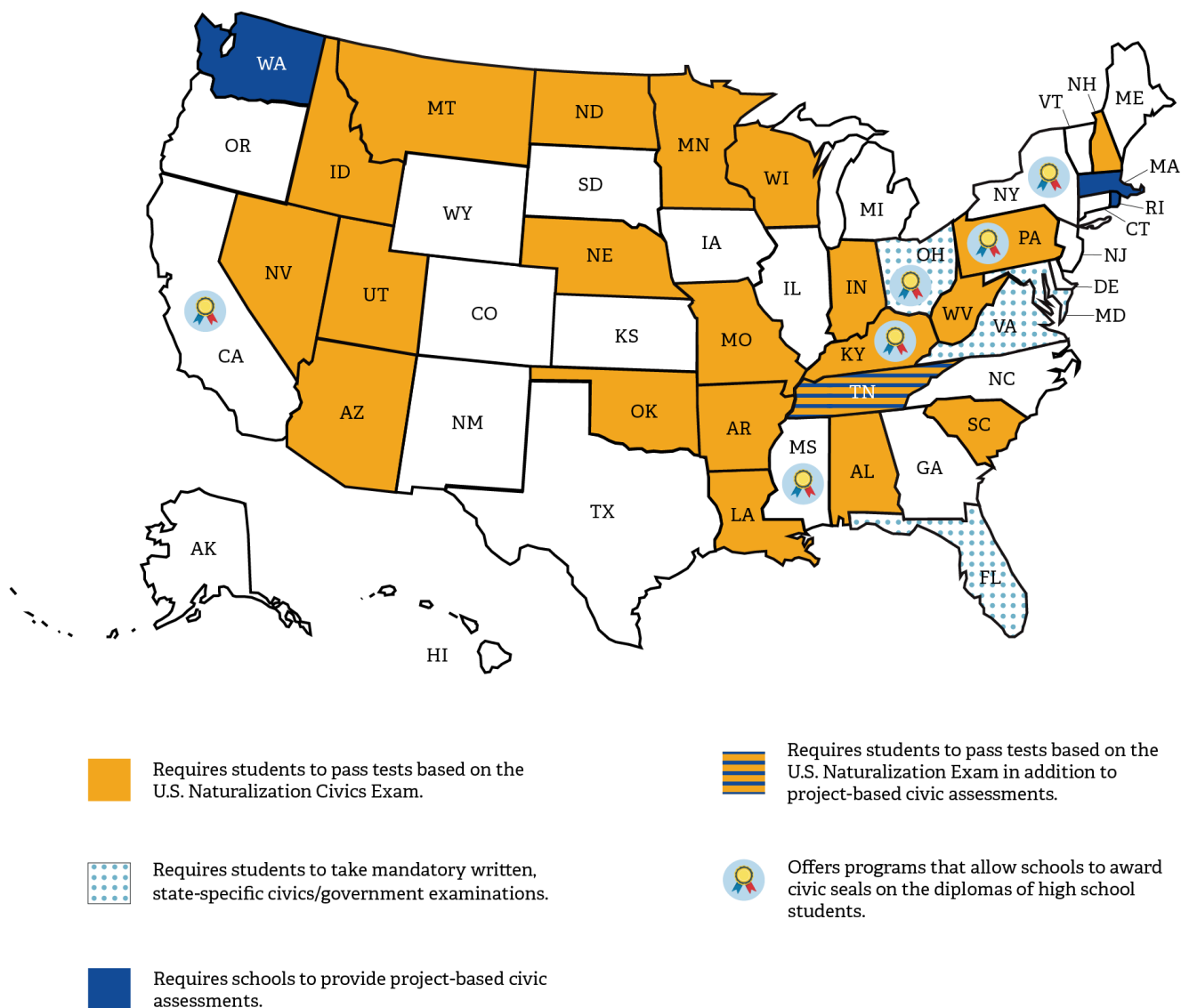
24. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Civics (History and Government) Questions for the Naturalization Test," January 2019.

25. For example, in Indiana, students do not need to pass the test to pass the Government course, but schools need to report the pass rate.

26. In addition to the many states that now require students to take a test based on the naturalization exam, the content of the naturalization exam has affected the curriculum and existing assessments in several other states: Texas has added 10 questions from the naturalization exam to its end-of-course history exam (Texas Education Agency, September 30, 2022, "HB 1244 Implementation."), and both Virginia (Standard 1. Instructional programs supporting the Standards of Learning and other educational objectives, 2023 updated section), and Michigan ("The Revised School Code: Act 451 of 1976," Michigan State Legislature, as of 2023) have passed legislation explicitly adding the content from the naturalization exam to the curriculum.

27. National Council for the Social Studies, "Affirming Support for Alternatives to the USCIS Naturalization Test as a Measure of the

Figure 1. U.S. Map of Current Civic Assessment Practices & Initiatives



The majority of states have some form of mandatory social studies assessment, which often includes some questions about civics, given at some level of schooling as a stand-alone exam or part of a required course. However, this map only catalogues civic-focused assessments and does not include broader social studies assessments.

Updated December 2023.

Tests like the U.S. Citizenship and Naturalization test that promote low-level/superficial knowledge steal quality instructional time away from implementation of Ohio's strong civic standards, which promote real-world civic engagement and community service. . . . Assessments should be aligned with teaching, such that they include attention to the higher-order learning outcomes described in the research as well as in Ohio's standards.²⁸

In addition to Ohio, 17 other states have considered proposals for adopting the naturalization exam and have decided to reject those proposals.²⁹

Adopting the naturalization test as a sole or major assessment of civic competence seems to be a hasty political response to the perceived need for more emphasis on civic preparation that regularly has bipartisan support. However, doing so often stops the conversation on how to prepare students for civic participation and how to develop adequate approaches to civic assessment. Civic education is more than memorization of facts; it must afford students opportunities to practice civic responsibilities, so students become empowered and civic-minded members of society.

B. Mandatory Written Civics/Government Examinations

Several states require students to take a state-developed civic examination. These tests are more substantial than the tests based on the naturalization exam questions, but they largely cover civic knowledge and not the other important aspects of civic readiness. For example, Virginia has developed a test on civics and economics as part of its series of Standards of Learning (SOL) tests that establish minimum expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade or course. It is a multiple-choice exam that focuses on civic knowledge.³⁰ Florida requires all students enrolled in a U.S. Government course in high school to take the Florida Civic Literacy Exam (FCLE), a computer-based multiple-choice assessment that tests students' "knowledge of United States governmental structures, ability to interpret primary documents, and interpretations of hypothetical scenarios."³¹

Some of these state exams require students to demonstrate analytic skills as well as subject-area knowledge. For example, Maryland requires students to pass a state-developed assessment on government that includes open-ended questions and requires students to consider a number of

Civic Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions of Students," March 2018.

28. Ohio Council for the Social Studies, "Position Statement: The Use of the Naturalization Test for Measuring Student Civic Learning," 2018, 2.

29. Sparks, "How Many High School Students Can Pass the U.S. Citizenship Test? States Begin to Find Out."

A recent study of national, cross-sectional data on self-reported voting behaviors of 18- to 24-year-old U.S. citizens who had taken the naturalization exam from the 1996 to 2020 found no significant impact of taking state-mandated naturalization tests on youth voter turnout. The authors also found a marginal, negative impact of taking the test on Black youth voter turnout, although they recommended caution in interpreting this because of its low marginal significance level. Jilli Jung and Maithreyi Gopalan, "The Stubborn Unresponsiveness of Youth Voter Turnout to Civic Education: Quasi-Experimental Evidence from State-Mandated Civics Tests," September 12, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737231195887>.

30. Virginia Department of Education, "SOL Practice Items (All Subjects)," n.d., <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/student-assessment/sol-practice-items-all-subjects>.

31. Florida Department of Education, "Florida Civic Literacy Exam (FCLE)," January 3, 2023, <https://www.fl DOE.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/fcle.html>.

The U.S. Congress fulfilled which of the following purposes of government when it declared war on Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor?

- A. ensuring domestic tranquility
- B. promoting the general welfare
- C. providing for the common defense
- D. establishing a system of justice

In the United States, which of the following is permitted to citizens by the right of freedom of assembly?

- A. the right to demonstrate
- B. the right to riot
- C. the right to immigrate

evidentiary sources and respond to a series of questions based on those sources.³² Ohio has a multiple-choice American Government test that includes civic-oriented questions that ask what someone should do in a given situation (e.g., how to get a state policy changed), as well as questions regarding the meaning of constitutional rights, the purposes that various constitutional provisions serve, and the like.³³ These exams require students to demonstrate deeper knowledge of civic issues and some level of civic skills, although they do not effectively assess the full range of competencies needed for civic readiness.

C. Mandatory Written Social Studies Exams

Most states assess civic competence as one component of a larger required social studies exam.³⁴ These social studies exams generally focus on knowledge of history, and many of them also include questions on economics, geography and/or civics. However, the social studies exams that include civics usually test civic knowledge (often related to history), and not civic skills, experience, or dispositions. They also do not purport to cover the full range of civic knowledge that students should have learned; for example, although most states require instruction regarding the workings of both federal and state and local governments, questions regarding state and local government rarely appear on these exams.

The New York Regents U.S. History and Government Exam is a robust assessment of historical content and analysis. Beginning in 2023, it introduced a “civic literacy essay” section. However, most of the questions for this section from recent administrations were along the lines of traditional document-based analyses and did not prompt students to demonstrate broad knowledge of current civic issues or institutions or civic skills. For example, the sample question in the July 2023 educator framework is as follows:

Historical Context: Imperialism in the 1890s

Throughout United States history, many constitutional and civic issues have been debated by Americans. These debates have resulted in efforts by individuals, groups, and governments to address these issues. These efforts have achieved varying degrees of success. One of these constitutional and civic issues is imperialism in the 1890s.

Using information from the documents and your knowledge of United States history, write an essay in which you

- Describe the historical circumstances surrounding this constitutional or civic issue
- Explain efforts by individuals, groups, and/or governments to address this constitutional or civic issue
- Discuss the extent to which these efforts were successful³⁵

Though this question addresses the topic of imperialism, it is more akin to a historical paper than a civics exam question.

32. “Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program, Government 2021 Sample Evidence-Based Argument Set (EBAS).” Maryland State Department of Education. Accessed January 3, 2023, <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DAAIT/Assessment/HSA/index.aspx>. A sample question is “Should Maryland become an open primary state?” Students are then provided information from five credible sources that deal with various aspects of this issue and are asked a series of five questions that require them to demonstrate an understanding of how these sources relate to the core issue.

33. “Social Studies Paper Practice Tests.” Ohio Department of Education, n.d, <https://oh-ost.portal.cambiumast.com/resources/student-practice-resources/social-studies-paper-practice-tests>.

34. As of 2017, the Education Commission of the States reported that 36 states have a required social studies assessment and 15 states require a social studies assessment for high school graduation, “Guidebook: Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning,” Education Commission of the States (ECS), 2016.

35. “Part III: Civic Literacy Essay Question Sample Student Papers” (University of the State of New York State Education Department, n.d.), <https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/state-assessment/part-3-civic-literacy-essay.pdf>.

Delaware requires statewide social studies assessments in grades 4, 7, and 11. Most of the questions focus on history and some relate to the civic skills involved in media literacy,³⁶ but they do not touch on other aspects of civic readiness. In Georgia, the mandatory 8th grade end of year “Milestone” social studies exam explicitly states that 20% of the questions will relate to civics, but the study guide from the Department of Education indicates that the content is focused largely on historical information that requires only limited civic knowledge.³⁷

III. BROADER ASSESSMENT INITIATIVES

Some governmental entities are developing more holistic approaches to civic assessment. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), administered to a sample of schools nationwide by the federal government, attempts to capture a broader range of civic learning outcomes in a standardized test format. Several states and school districts are going further and using a range of project-based activities and assessments, surveys, portfolios, written reflections, performances, and other types of “authentic assessment” to capture a more complete picture of civic readiness.

A. NAEP Civics Assessment

Sometimes referred to as the “Nation’s Report Card,” NAEP is a congressionally mandated assessment of student proficiency in various subjects. NAEP tests students from a sample of schools across the country to provide representative data on student achievement. (In other words, results of the test are not reported back to the students or their schools and the test is not used for formative instructional purposes.) The NAEP Civics Assessment was established in 1998 and is intended to be given to a representative sample of 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students, though the 2018 and 2022 tests were only administered to 8th graders due to funding restrictions.³⁸ The NAEP Civics Assessment focuses on four areas of civic learning:

- Civic Knowledge: fact and information based
- Civic Skills: the ability to participate in civic life
- Civic Dispositions: the rights and responsibilities of an individual in a democracy
- Contexts of Civic Education: the ability to apply civic education in relevant and varied contexts

Sixty percent of the test consists of multiple-choice questions, while 40% consists of open-ended writing questions for which there is a clear scoring rubric.³⁹ Since a standardized test cannot assess a student’s actual civic participation, the test attempts to assess civic engagement by providing fictional scenarios in which characters can exercise civic skills and asks students to choose the best actions for the characters. According to the 2018 NAEP framework, 20% of questions focus on the role of citizens in American democracy, 10-15% of the questions attempt to test participatory skills, 10-15% intend to test civic dispositions, and the exam also includes questions relating to media literacy that require students to interpret political materials and author motivations.

36. The sample questions ask students to analyze documents and sources and identify support for certain arguments in provided texts. For example, one question provides 5 sources and asks: “How do the sources best help explain a historical trend in U.S. immigration?” Delaware Department of Education, “Delaware Social Studies Assessment,” June 17, 2022, <https://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/3824>.

37. “Georgia Milestone Assessment Guide Grade 8,” May 3, 2023, https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Documents/Milestones/Study-Resource%20Guides/EGA125_GR08_EMSC_SG_0001_20210513.pdf.

38. “Results from the 2018 Civics, Geography, and U.S. History Assessments.” The Nation’s Report Card, March 31, 2020, https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/geography/supporting_files/2018_SS_infographic.pdf; Results from the 2022 Civics Assessment, <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/civics/2022/>. The next administration of the NAEP history and civics exam, scheduled for 2026, will also only be given to 8th graders. Not until 2030 will the exam be given to students in grades 4, 8, and 12. “The Nation’s Report Card (NAEP): Assessment Schedule,” National Assessment Governing Board, n.d., <https://www.nagb.gov/naep/assessment-schedule.html>.

39. National Assessment Governing Board, “Civics Framework for the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress,” January 2018.

The NAEP exam assesses more than memorized facts and does enable students to role-play as civic actors, but its standardized written testing format does not allow for assessment of important civic readiness attributes such as actual civic engagement, collaboration, and civic agency or consideration of civic dispositions in realistic contexts. The Institute for Citizens & Scholars' map of civic measurement assessments indicates that the NAEP civics exam touches on civic understanding (content knowledge), but does not fulfill the necessary civic learning areas within civic readiness which they have termed "believing" (civic dispositions related to civic values), "participating" (civic experiences), and "connecting" (applying civic skills in interpersonal and community contexts).

B. Project-Based Civic Assessments

In 2018, Massachusetts enacted a law that requires school districts to provide an opportunity for each student to complete in the 8th grade and in high school "a non-partisan civics project," and established the Civics Project Trust Fund to support efforts to improve civic education.⁴⁰ These projects are intended to provide students thorough-going opportunities to develop substantial civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions, and students are encouraged to develop projects that will include involvement with local community organizations and activities.⁴¹ Though there are currently no requirements for how schools should assess these civics projects, the state department of education provides a guide to the project's intended goals and offers sample rubrics for various types of project assessments, including self-assessments, process indicators, group assessments, and written reflections.⁴² In June 2023, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education partnered with Generation Citizen to host two statewide civics project showcases.⁴³

Alongside this form of project-based civic education and assessment, Massachusetts is in the process of developing a statewide standardized civic assessment instrument that will include a state-level performance task and an end-of-course test. The state-level task focuses on one of seven topics outlined by the 2018 History and Social Science Framework, and the end-of-course test covers all 8th grade civic standards. To help to prepare students for the state-level performance tasks, optional local-level classroom performance tasks have also been developed.⁴⁴ The state will begin field tests in spring 2024, and has assigned practice civics topics to all schools enrolling 8th graders, such as the "Rights and responsibilities of citizens" and "The structure of Massachusetts state and local government."⁴⁵ The performance tasks will be tailored to these civics topics.

Washington State requires schools to offer classroom-based civics projects in elementary, middle, and high school. These projects build on and assess students' ability to work with primary

40. "An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement" (2018), <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2018/Chapter296>. "Civics projects may be individual, small group or class wide, and designed to promote a student's ability to: (i) analyze complex issues; (ii) consider differing points of view; (iii) reason, make logical arguments and support claims using valid evidence; (iv) engage in civil discourse with those who hold opposing positions; and (v) demonstrate an understanding of the connections between federal, state and local policies, including issues that may impact the student's school or community."

41. Massachusetts Department of Education of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Assessing the Projects," Civics Project Guidebook, https://www.doe.mass.edu/rlo/instruction/civics-project-guidebook/index.html#/lessons/ru-AKEPKiGglZtu1CVK_R8jV1dHOo-Qw. The law also provides an opportunity, supported by a public/private grant program, for students to showcase their civics projects. State grants are also available to schools to improve their civics curricula.

42. Massachusetts Department of Education of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Assessing the Projects."

43. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. "Statewide Civics Project Showcases," July 26, 2023. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/civics/showcase.html>.

44. Rob Curtin, "News from DESE Student Assessment Services," September 1, 2023, <https://mailchi.mp/495fdbbaa8c5/student-assessment-update-special-edition-103474>.

45. The performance component currently being developed will be a 50-minute written test that will allow students to use their civic content knowledge and skills to explain or describe civic concepts, support claims with evidence, and analyze sources and graphics. The tasks will consist of constructed response questions, and multiple-choice, multiple-select, and technology-enhanced items. The end of course test will consist of approximately 36-38 test questions including multiple-choice, multiple-select, and technology-enhanced questions. Many questions will be based on a text source or graphic. Curtin, "Student Assessment Update," September 1, 2023.

sources, analyze and evaluate policy, support a policy argument, consider a range of stakeholder positions and collaborate with colleagues in undertaking the projects. The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's website provides comprehensive guidelines and grading rubrics for each project.⁴⁶ Districts are required to confirm that projects have been provided, but they do not have to report student grades or how projects were assessed,⁴⁷ and the extent to which schools are implementing these projects is unknown.

In Tennessee, in addition to passing a test based on the naturalization exam in order to graduate high school,⁴⁸ students must complete a project-based civic assessment once in grades 4-8 and once in high school. The state does not require districts to report on student results from these assessments, and a 2014 study found that some local education agencies were having difficulties in creating their own assessments and that the lack of state-wide uniformity in assessment techniques was a problem.⁴⁹

Rhode Island also requires each public school district to provide at least one student-led civics project for students during either their middle or high school years.⁵⁰ A task force appointed by the commissioner of education has proposed specific methods for implementing and showcasing student-led civics projects.⁵¹

C. Civic Seal Programs

Six states have programs that allow schools to award civic seals on the diplomas of high-school students who have achieved distinction in civic readiness by satisfying specific state-designated achievement criteria. Virtually all of these programs require some degree of community engagement and performance, portfolio and/ or self-reflection activities. The criteria are established by the state, but the assessment of student qualifications and performance in regard to these criteria is generally left to the local school district or school. Two of the most extensive programs are being implemented in New York and California.

New York instituted the Seal of Civic Readiness Program in 2021 and piloted the program in approximately 120 schools throughout the state during the 2021-2022 school year; the next year, all schools were eligible to apply to participate in the program and about 350 were accepted as participants, and approximately 500 schools are participating during the current 2023-2024 school year. The state has established a set of basic eligibility criteria that award points for specific activities including passing state social studies examinations, extracurricular activities, service-learning, civic projects, self-reflection, and undertaking a major capstone project.⁵² (By far, the largest number of points is awarded for completion of a capstone project.⁵³) Students must exhibit proficiency in both

46. "OSPI-Developed Social Studies Assessments," Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, January 3, 2023.

47. Washington is also in the process of revising the civics project assessments so that they are less cumbersome for educators to incorporate into their classrooms, with the hope that this will lead to increased implementation. Jerry Price, OSPI Social Studies Program Supervisor, interview by Carrie Mannino, November 2022.

48. Tennessee Department of Education, "Civics Assessments," March 20, 2023, [https://www.tn.gov/education/districts/governor-s-civics-seal/civics-assessments.html#:~:text=%C2%A7%2049%2D6%2D408\),%2C%20grades%209%2D12.](https://www.tn.gov/education/districts/governor-s-civics-seal/civics-assessments.html#:~:text=%C2%A7%2049%2D6%2D408),%2C%20grades%209%2D12.)

49. CIRCLE Staff, "Civic Education Policy Change: Case Studies of Florida, Tennessee and Hawaii" (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, March 2014).

50. "Rhode Island Civic Literacy Act of 2021" (2021). The Act also specifies that each student "shall demonstrate proficiency, as defined by the local school district, in civics education."

51. "Rhode Island Civic Readiness Task Force Recommendation Report" (2023).

52. New York State Education Department, "Seal of Civic Readiness," January 3, 2023, <https://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/seal-civic-readiness>.

53. Four points are awarded for a capstone project versus a maximum of 1.5 points for any other civics accomplishment. New York's capstone projects call for "the applied combination of civic knowledge, skills and actions, mindset, and experiences" and emphasize the importance of students demonstrating "their readiness to make a positive difference in the public life of their communities." In this regard, students are encouraged to "[a]nalyze a civic issue (problem), evaluate alternative solutions, design and/or execute a solu-

civic knowledge and *civic participation* categories.

Schools and districts that apply for the program must outline a plan to establish a seal of civic readiness committee, which handles the communications with students and families, tracks activities pertaining to civic readiness, develops a tracking process for students who are eligible for the award, approves all potentially qualifying projects and learning experiences, and reviews each student's coursework and civic learning activities. The state has issued a manual that includes procedural requirements and assessment rubrics to support the local districts with these activities, but districts are not required to follow these suggestions, nor does the state monitor how or the extent to which these projects are assessed.⁵⁴

California instituted a State Seal of Civic Engagement program in 2020. School districts must pass a resolution to opt into the program, and then students must meet five criteria to earn the seal:

1. "Be engaged in academic work in a productive way
2. Demonstrate a competent understanding of United States and California constitutions; functions and governance of local governments; tribal government structures and organizations; the role of the citizen in a constitutional democracy; and democratic principles, concepts, and processes
3. Participate in one or more informed civic engagement project(s) that address real-world problems and require students to identify and inquire into civic needs or problems, consider varied responses, take action, and reflect on efforts;
4. Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection; and
5. Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community and/or society."⁵⁵

The precise requirements to fulfill these criteria are determined on a local basis. In 2020-2021, 103 schools piloted the seal project, and in 2021-2022, 181 schools did so.⁵⁶

Arizona allows school districts to award diploma seals to students who achieve high grades in social studies courses, complete two civic engagement activities (like attending a public meeting or a protest march or demonstration), engage in 75 hours of service learning, provide a written reflection, and pass a required exam based on the naturalization test.⁵⁷ As of summer 2022, the state education department estimated that 75 students from four school districts would be receiving the seal that year. Though three districts completed the participation form the previous year, no seals had actually been awarded. Schools that administer the seals will also be able to count the awarding of seals toward school ratings that call for, among other things, accountability for providing civic opportunity.⁵⁸

tion for this problem [and] [t]ake informed action to address the civic issue." "The New York State Seal of Civic Readiness Handbook" (New York State Education Department, December 2022), <https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/curriculum-instruction/civic-readiness-manual.pdf>.

54. "The New York State Seal of Civic Readiness Handbook" (New York State Education Department,) <https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/curriculum-instruction/civic-readiness-manual.pdf>

55. California Department of Education, "State Seal of Civic Engagement: Criteria and Guidance," 2022, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/hs/hssstatesseal.asp>

56. California Department of Education, "State Seal of Civic Engagement"

57. Arizona Department of Education. "Seal of Civics Literacy," January 3, 2023, <https://www.azed.gov/diplomaseals/sealofcivicslit#:~:text=The%20Arizona%20Seal%20of%20Civics,and%20noted%20on%20their%20transcript.>

58. Hannah Rude, "Arizona Seal of Civic Literacy Research Question," July 5, 2023.

Georgia's seal program requires students to complete the state social studies curriculum, pass the state exam based on the naturalization test, undertake 35 hours of community service and 15 hours of civic engagement (for example, attending a school-board meeting), and present a portfolio on their civics and government activities.⁵⁹ Virginia offers a Diploma Seal for Excellence in Civics Education to high school seniors who have earned at least a "B" in Virginia and United States History and Government courses, have good attendance and no disciplinary issues, and have completed 50 hours of community service.⁶⁰ Nevada recently passed a state bill instituting a Civic Seal program, which will award the seal to students based on academic achievement in social studies, a score of at least 90% on the state exam based on the naturalization test, a satisfactory citizenship score,⁶¹ and a service-learning project. The statute states that the state department of education will develop a rubric to assess students for this seal.⁶²

Civic seal programs provide an environment potentially conducive for developing valid and reliable assessments of civic readiness, since they aim to promote and assess not just civic knowledge but also civic engagement, skills, and dispositions. However, the states that have adopted seal programs have not to date developed consistent, validated methods for assessing the extent to which students develop civic readiness through their seal programs. While some states, like New York, have issued detailed assessment rubrics, use of these rubrics is not mandated, and the state does not monitor the extent to which they are actually used. Furthermore, participation in seal programs is optional for school districts, which means that many students, and especially many of those in under-resourced districts, do not have access to the civic learning experiences the seal programs offer, and these students are not included in any assessment of civic readiness that may result from these programs.

D. Authentic Assessment

Many scholars and educators have expressed dissatisfaction with typical written standardized exams because these tests do not readily lend themselves to assessing complex content, and they do not reflect the nature of performance in the real world, which rarely presents people with structured choices.⁶³ Various forms of assessment attempt to evaluate learning more authentically and to more accurately assess its practical applications. "Authentic assessment" involves, among other

59. Georgia Department of Education, "Social Studies Civic Engagement Diploma Seal," January 3, 2023, <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/Social-Studies.aspx>.

60. Lisa Kissinger and Members of the NCSS Seal of Civic Readiness Task Force, "Civics Diploma Seals: Energizing Civic Education for Students," *Social Education* 86, no. 3 (2022).

61. The "Citizenship Score" is determined by a Citizenship Rubric developed by the state which includes "Mindset," "Active Learning," "Personal Responsibility" and "Social Responsibility." Nevada Department of Education, "Providing High-Quality Civic Instruction & Engagement to Nevada Students," https://webapp-strap1-paas-prod-nde-001.azurewebsites.net/uploads/NV_Seal_In_Civics_e6a6947164.pptx.

62. An Act Relating to Education, Pub. L. No. 194 (2021), https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/81st2021/Bills/SB/SB194_R2.pdf. A few other states have pilot civics seal programs or civic award programs that do not require students to demonstrate comprehensive civic achievement. The Kentucky Civic Education Coalition and Kentucky's Secretary of State Office are piloting a civic seal program in 10 schools that includes a civic engagement project and whose guidelines will be created following the pilot, Kentucky Council for the Social Studies. "Kentucky Civic Seal," n.d. <https://www.kysscouncil.org/kcec.html>. Ohio has a Citizenship Seal that is rewarded based on achievement in American History and American Government, Ohio Department of Education. "Citizenship Seal." Accessed July 24, 2023. <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Ohio-s-Graduation-Requirements/Ohio%E2%80%99s-Graduation-Requirements/Graduation-Seals/Citizenship-Seal>. In Pennsylvania a Governor's Civic Engagement Award is presented to schools based on the percentage of their student population that is registered to vote, DOS Voting & Election Information. "Governor's Civic Engagement Award," n.d. <https://www.vote.pa.gov/Resources/Pages/Governor-s-Civic-Engagement-Award.aspx>. Similarly, Tennessee has a Governor's Civics Seal for schools and districts, and the Tennessee Excellence in Civics Education School Seal, which is presented to districts in which 80% of its schools received the Governor's Civics Seal, Tennessee Department of Education. "Governor's Civics Seal," n.d. <https://www.tn.gov/education/districts/governor-s-civics-seal.html>.

Rhode Island recently committed to establishing a state civic seal program, but no details are yet available about that program. "Here's What Rhode Island Will Do to Improve Civic Education" (Teachers College, June 23, 2022), <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/articles/2022/june/heres-what-rhode-island-will-do-to-improve-civic-education/>.

63. Linda Darling-Hammond, ed., *Next Generation Assessment: Moving beyond the Bubble Test to Support 21st Century Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2015). A 2012 study by the Rand Corporation found that fewer than 2 % of math items and only about 20% of English language arts items on current state tests measure higher order skills (p. 4).

things, using “[e]ngaging and worthy problems or questions of importance, in which students must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively. The tasks are either replicas of or analogous to the kinds of problems faced by adult citizens and consumers or professionals in the field.”⁶⁴ Authentic assessment can be implemented in a variety of ways:

1. Performance-Based Assessments

“Performance assessments” are a type of authentic assessment that “allow students to construct or perform an original response, rather than just recognizing a potentially right answer out of a list provided, [and that] can measure students’ cognitive thinking and reasoning skills and their ability to apply knowledge to solve realistic, meaningful problems.”⁶⁵ Proponents of authentic assessment often use combinations of portfolios, performances, self-reflection, simulations and project-based activities to assess student competence in particular subjects or areas.

The New York Performance Standards Consortium, which consists of 38 public schools, has developed a series of performance-based assessments that the state has, for several decades, permitted them to use in lieu of some of the state-required Regents exams. The Consortium aims to build assessment as a natural outgrowth of curriculum, instead of structuring teaching around a test. These assessments are intended to be co-developed by teachers and students to provide students with a sense of agency and ownership over their learning.⁶⁶ The Consortium schools require students to complete performance-based assessment tasks, known as PBATs, that involve, for example,

- Analytic essays on literature
- Social studies research papers
- Lab reports of original science experiments or engineering designs
- Narratives of the process and solution of mathematical problem solving.⁶⁷

These performances are rated by external evaluators.⁶⁸

2. Assessing Responses to Real-World Problems

Some approaches to “authentic assessment” go a step further than most performance assessments. They evaluate students’ ability to use their knowledge and skills effectively to respond to a real-world situation, scenario, or problem, like a clinical, service learning or major capstone project.⁶⁹

64. Grant P. Wiggins, *Assessing Student Performance: Exploring the Purpose and Limits of Testing*, The Jossey-Bass Education Series (Jossey-Bass, 1993), 229.

65. Darling-Hammond, *Next Generation Assessment*.

66. NY Performance Standards Consortium, “The Consortium Assessment System,” Performance Standards Consortium, May 1, 2023, <http://www.performanceassessment.org/howitworks>.

67. “The Consortium Assessment System.” A three-year study of schools that had recently joined the Consortium in 2014 found that most educators (81%) felt they were more able to understand their students’ needs through the PBAT system than the traditional Regents program, Maria Hantzopoulos, Rosa L. Rivera-McCutchen, and Alia R. Tyner-Mullings, “Reframing School Culture through Project-Based Assessment Tasks: Cultivating Transformative Agency and Humanizing Practices in NYC Public Schools,” *Teachers College Record* 123 (April 2021). The study also found that transitioning to PBATs affected school culture, with students indicating that the process made them feel valued and respected and allowed them to pursue their interests. Another study from 2020 on students who attended Consortium schools and then enrolled at a four-year city university indicated that PBATs promoted long-term student success. Early data found that Black male students in particular who attended Consortium schools were more likely to persist in college and attain higher grades compared with students with similar backgrounds who attended traditional high schools, Michelle Fine and Karyna Pryiomka, “Assessing College Readiness through Authentic Student Work: How the City University of New York and New York Performance Standards Consortium Are Collaborating toward Equity” (Learning Policy Institute, July 2020).

68. Social Studies in Consortium Schools,” Performance Standards Consortium, n.d., <http://www.performanceassessment.org/social-studies-resources-22>. The New York State Board of Regents, as part of its comprehensive reconsideration of its current requirements that students pass a battery of “Regents Examinations” in order to graduate from high school, have established a Performance-Based Learning and Assessment Networks (PLAN) Program that, among other things, involves a number of schools working together in networks to learn and support each other in successfully implementing performance-based learning and assessment practices.

69. Zahra Sokhanvar, Keyvan Salehi, and Fatemeh Sokhanvar, “Advantages of Authentic Assessment for Improving the Learning Experience and Employability Skills of Higher Education Students: A Systematic Literature Review,” *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 70

Such reality-based authentic assessments are especially relevant for measuring the wide range of knowledge, skills, experiences, and dispositions that constitute civic readiness. However, creating valid and reliable authentic assessment measures of civic readiness is particularly challenging. As indicated above, some of these approaches to authentic assessment are being utilized in connection with civic projects and civic seal activities in several states, but in many of those contexts, they are not being systematically assessed or measured.

In recent years, civic education and youth development researchers and practitioners who support the use of authentic assessments came together to form the National Action Civics Collaborative. These organizations promote student activities that seek to bring about change in actual civic arenas. Through these activities, they seek to develop eight civic competencies: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, agency, civic values, professionalism, civic knowledge, and academic improvement. These organizations have attempted to measure these competencies largely through survey-based, self-reported assessments of students' attitudes and skills. Four tools for measuring the impact of these projects on the community are also employed.⁷⁰ So far, however, none of these approaches can reliably assess the competencies the students have developed. As one administrator put it: "Our evaluation measures don't NAIL it—they do not report what we know in our gut."⁷¹

The Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP) at Harvard University has developed, in collaboration with educators across Massachusetts, a year-long 8th grade civic curriculum in line with the Massachusetts civics project requirement and the state's updated state social studies framework.⁷² Along with this curriculum, the collaboration has produced a strategy and principles for assessing not just civic knowledge, but also civic skills, attitudes, and dispositions through multiple methods. For the civic knowledge section, DKP undertakes a rigorous item-writing process to ensure all the domains covered by the state standards are assessed; for civic dispositions, attitudes, and efficacy, as well as for media literacy, it employs self-report questionnaires that have been psychometrically validated in empirical studies.⁷³ It has also developed a culminating self-reflection writing activity and associated assessment checklist that evaluates student skills and focuses on the processes and thinking rather than the final outcome of the project.⁷⁴ The developers of this project recognize that professional development for teachers is key to shifting the mode of assessing student progress from fact-based quizzes and tests to process-based assessments and self-reflective writing.⁷⁵ The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recommends the DKP curriculum, and also recommends materials from iCivics, which includes online games related to civic knowledge, and curricular resources from History Alive!, NYC Civics for All, and Generation Citizen.⁷⁶

(2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2021.101030>.

70. Jessica Gingold, "Building an Evidence-Based Practice of Action Civics: The Current State of Assessments and Recommendations for the Future" (Bedford, MA: CIRCLE, Tufts University, August 2013).

71. Gingold, "Building an Evidence-Based Practice of Action Civics: The Current State of Assessments and Recommendations for the Future," 18. Some of the problems that were cited were the inaccuracy of pre and post surveys, precisely identifying the desired outcomes, and how to determine the weight to be given to various competencies.

72. DKP has worked in close collaboration with educators across Massachusetts to pilot and hone this curriculum, which is publicly available at <https://www.democraticknowledgeproject.org/8th-grade-curriculum/>. They also developed a validated measurement tool kit to provide teachers with tools to assess civic dispositions and skills, available here: <https://curriculum.democraticknowledgeproject.org/portal>. Adrienne Billingham Bock, "DKP Civics Curriculum," November 1, 2023.

73. Despite limitations of self-report questionnaires, the DKP developers state that the data they yield can be reliably interpreted by examining average scores and changes over time at the classroom and school levels. The reports will not affect individual grades and are for the purpose of allowing teachers to determine whether their class is developing civic attitudes and dispositions. "Assessment Specifications: Civic Engagement in Our Democracy (Grade 8)" (Democratic Knowledge Project, n.d.), https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/DKP_Assessment_Specifications_Feb252020_0.pdf.

74. Adrienne Bock, "DKP Civics Curriculum," November 1, 2023.

75. Jenny Chung, Curriculum and Training Specialist at the Office of Equity, Inclusion & Belonging for the Cambridge Public Schools, interview by Carrie Mannino, April 2023.

76. "Curricular Materials at a Glance: Grade 8 United States and Massachusetts Government and Civic Life" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.), <https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/grade-8-at-a-glance.docx>.

DKP is also developing a system of “competency-based badging” that would provide an infrastructure for assessing complex projects involving portfolio and performance dimensions in areas like civics by establishing a validation methodology that would be developed by expert stakeholders and reviewed and approved by a national Badging Board.⁷⁷ Digital badges can potentially make visible a comprehensive set of accomplishments obtained in a number of environments. For instance, a compilation of digital badges in civics could recognize the “public speaking” done as part of the extracurricular high school debate club, “community organizing” that was part of a summer internship during college, “group facilitation” skills developed in a current paid position, and a “good citizen” badge for long-term community service work.⁷⁸ These badges would build on one another by creating cumulative “mesobadges” based on smaller, related skills that could ultimately be combined to reflect a full range of relevant and related skills that would be recognized through a “macrobadge.” Some believe that badges present a possibility for civic assessment that would create a validated system of accountability without introducing another high-stakes, burdensome test, create opportunities to recognize civic skills and dispositions beyond civic knowledge, and recognize civic learning across disciplines.⁷⁹

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

As discussed above, over 80% of all states have largely ignored the need to thoroughly assess the full extent to which students are being prepared for capable civic participation. Many states have adopted the simplistic naturalization exam as a sole measure of civic preparation. However, a small number of states have begun to take seriously the need to develop methods for assessing the extent to which schools are providing students the full range of knowledge, skills, experiences, and dispositions they need to function productively as civic participants today. These fledgling efforts need to be expanded through further research, experimentation, and implementation in order to demonstrate that effective civic education and civic engagement can indeed prepare students to be committed and capable citizens.

“Over 80% of all states have largely ignored the need to thoroughly assess the full extent to which students are being prepared for capable civic participation.”

Expanded initiatives to improve assessment systems must also be accompanied by substantial efforts to ensure that all students, and especially those from historically marginalized communities and low-income families, have meaningful opportunities to learn the knowledge, skills and dispositions and to engage in the activities that are being evaluated by these assessments. In addition, greater efforts need to be made to develop validated assessments at the elementary school level, an important stage for developing civic dispositions and introducing students to civic engagement activities that is generally neglected by most existing assessment systems.⁸⁰

Specifically, we believe that policymakers and researchers in each state need to immediately consider the steps they can take to develop and implement civic assessment systems that combine 1) written examinations that effectively assess deep civic knowledge; 2) performance methods that allow students to demonstrate civic skills and civic dispositions; and 3) broader authentic

77. Danielle Allen, David Kidd, and Ariana Zetlin, “A Call to More Equitable Learning: How Next-Generation Badging Improves Education for All [White Paper],” August 2022, <https://www.nextgenbadging.org/whitepaper>.

78. Felicia M. Sullivan, “New and Alternative Assessments, Digital Badges, and Civics: An Overview of Emerging Themes and Promising Directions,” *CIRCLE Working Paper 77*, 2013, 3.

79. Sullivan, “New and Alternative Assessments.”

80. See e.g., Bernadette Chi, JoAnn Jastrzab, and Alan Melchior, “Developing Indicators and Measures of Civic Outcomes for Elementary School Students,” *CIRCLE Working Paper 47*, June 2006.

assessments of civic engagement, civic knowledge, civic skills and civic dispositions that involve students in addressing real-world problems.

1. Written Examinations

Civic knowledge and some civic skills can be fairly and effectively assessed through well-conceived written examinations. These examinations must, however, go beyond simple multiple-choice questions and include probing questions that require students to consider a range of evidentiary sources, interpret hypothetical scenarios, and analyze primary documents. Written tests should assess students' abilities to ask critical questions and to reflect on their own thinking. All states can and should develop and adopt such tests; existing written exams administered by NAEP and states like Maryland exemplify how this can be done. These written examinations should be psychometrically validated and cover the full range of knowledge domains encompassed by high quality state civic standards, as DKP has done in its Massachusetts project.

To assess civic knowledge effectively and to emphasize the importance of civic learning, these tests should be mandatory end of term or graduation requirements that are stand-alone examinations rather than small components of larger social studies examinations. They should be statewide examinations and aggregate results should be publicly reported. States currently utilizing the naturalization exam as a sole or primary assessment tool should phase out their use as soon as possible.

2. Performance Measures

Complex civic skills and civic dispositions cannot adequately be assessed solely through written examinations. Since these skills are developed in the context of “doing” or “experiencing,” they call for performance-based approaches that allow students to demonstrate specific skills, like how to distinguish accurate from inaccurate information on the internet or important civic dispositions like the ability to engage in meaningful conversations with people with different views. The qualities can be assessed through portfolios, presentations, interviews, simulations or self-reflection essays and can be incorporated into performance-based assessment tasks like the system currently used in some New York State schools as an alternative to the Regents Exams. Performance measures and other types of authentic assessments are likely to take on even greater significance in the future as the expanded use of artificial intelligence may compromise the integrity of assessments based solely or largely on written examinations that could utilize AI instead of representing original student work. It is important that greater efforts be made to ensure that performance measures are psychometrically validated and rated by external assessors to the extent feasible and/or guided by rubrics that undergo reliability assessments.

Badges can also effectively be used to track the attainment of civic skills and dispositions. Badges can be awarded to students for participating proficiently in specific activities like a debate that requires closely examining both sides of a controversial issue, completing a complex media literacy analysis on the internet, taking part in extracurricular activities and community activities that build civic skills, or exhibiting character traits that reflect civic-mindedness. The measuring proficiency for these badges should be based on rubrics that have undergone reliability assessments.

3. Reality-Based Authentic Assessments

All states should encourage or require school districts to provide their students the opportunity to undertake a civic project that addresses real-world problems. Such subjects require students to undertake substantive research, identify and inquire into civic needs or problems, consider varied responses, take action, and reflect on efforts. They engage students in authentic civic activities that call upon them to develop and utilize a full range of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The Massachusetts statute that requires all school districts to provide an opportunity for each student to complete “a non-partisan civics project” in the 8th grade and in high school that includes local community involvement is a prime example of how this can be done. Authentic assessments of civic

learning can also be incorporated into service learning opportunities for students at all levels. These projects should be assessed through performance measures like presentations, portfolios and self-reflections that are psychometrically validated to the extent feasible and/or guided by rubrics that undergo reliability assessments.

More comprehensive civic capstone projects can also be encouraged or required as part of civic seal projects administered by schools and school districts. States should provide state-wide rubrics and instructions on how local school districts can develop validated methods for assessing these projects. The state should monitor the implementation of these methods to ensure that schools are consistently and effectively assessing these capstone projects and that the civic seals they award truly reflect civic competence.

Establishing a fair and accurate assessment regime that conforms to these recommended criteria will be a challenge. Although adoption of meaningful written examinations can be done relatively promptly and relatively inexpensively, development and validation of effective performance measures and reality-based authentic assessments will take time, resources, and consistent policy and administrative guidance. These reforms will also require extensive professional development of teachers and other professional staff and cultural sensitivity to ensure that the assessments (including the written examinations) reflect the lived realities of students from minoritized communities who have often felt alienated from civic institutions and civics curricula that have often ignored their experiences and their needs.⁸¹

This investment is necessary to ensure that civic education, and schooling more broadly, is achieving what it is intended to do, namely provide meaningful civic preparation to all students. Prioritizing civic readiness, and the effective assessment methods that are necessary for its realization for all students, will pay rich dividends for each state in creating an educated citizenry that can effectively sustain our democratic culture.

81. See Meira Levinson, "Taking Action: What We Can Do to Address the Civic Achievement Gap," *Social Studies Review* 48, no. 1 (n.d.): 33–36; Meira Levinson, "The Civic Empowerment Gap: Defining the Problem and Locating Solutions," in *Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement*, ed. Lonnie Sherrod, Judith Torney-Purta, and Constance A. Flanagan (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 331–61. Michael Hansen et al., "The 2018 Brown Center Report on American Education: How Well Are American Students Learning?" (Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings, June 2018).