

League of Women Voters of Alaska: Government/Civics Education Position

Position Adopted: June 17, 2024

STATEMENT OF POSITION

This position addresses the need for a comprehensive curriculum which teaches the skills needed for active and productive civic engagement, in age-appropriate ways, for grades K-12.

AMPLIFICATION

The study and practice of citizenship and government is vital to the continuation of American democracy. Producing informed citizens has been at the heart of the American education system since its founding. The effective citizen of the 21st century must be able to analyze, compute, create, act, participate, and communicate in an informed manner about the social, political, and economic issues of the day.

The study of civics is the study of government and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. In its broadest sense, civics is the lifelong process that makes people into active, responsible, and knowledgeable members of their communities. Such training does not start at the beginning of the junior year nor is it only concentrated in one course throughout all the years of learning. We vote, whether it is for president, or the class member who will lead the line to the lunchroom. We debate at the dinner table and in public forums. We participate on city councils and student councils. All of us are practitioners and teachers of civics for the good of the whole.

Good citizens cannot be lectured into being; they can only emerge through study and practice. Therefore, beginning in grade K, teachers must provide classrooms that model democratic practices and procedures while the community invites student activism and involvement. The study of government and citizenship is vital in a society as diverse as Alaska's. It teaches students that differences can be contained and discussed within the decision-making frameworks established by tribal, local, state, and national governments.

The Alaska State Content Standards for Government and Citizenship ask educators to explore with their students how these systems operate and to examine ways informed citizens can participate. A required civics/government course should include the seven goals of the Alaska State Content Standards for Government and Citizenship, which can be found here: <https://education.alaska.gov/akstandards/Government-and-Citizenship.pdf> Additionally, students should practice media literacy and gain an understanding of the intersection of media and civic life.

Course evaluation for the purpose of successful course completion should include a variety of measures that are determined by the social studies instructors. These measures reflect the various activities and topics addressed in the classroom and would give all students a chance to demonstrate their learning and provide for a successful experience. Measurements should reflect the student's understanding of citizen responsibility in a democracy. State funding should be made available for schools for the purpose of either establishing a civics program if none is currently in place or to support those schools who have ongoing civics education programs.

A curriculum focused on civics education should culminate in either grade 11 or 12 to allow smaller school scheduling flexibility with, at minimum, a stand-alone course of one semester, earning the student ½ credit in government/civics. Successful completion of this course should be required for high school graduation.

The above position addresses the current lack of a requirement in Alaska at the state level to have all students graduate with knowledge of democratic practices. Currently Alaska is one of eleven states that does not require a civics/government course for graduation. This position hopes to support such an addition to high school graduation requirements as well as K-12 emphasis on civic engagement.

Sources Used During the Civics Education Position Creation

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4. What is Civics Education?, CivXNow Coalition, 2024: <https://civxnow.org/our-vision/what-is-civics/>
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<https://www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org/the-roadmap/>
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12. Center for Civics Education. K-4 Content Standards. 2023. <https://www.civiced.org/standards>.
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14. Center for Educational Equity. Columbia University. Joe Rogers. 26Feb2019. "An Equitable Approach to Strengthening Civic Education. https://civxnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/J.-Rogers-Essay-on-Equity-in-Civic-Education_v.-2.26.19.pdf

15. Elizabeth Newlin Carney. The Fulcrum. "A Turning Point for Civic Education?" 21Feb2023: <https://thefulcrum.us/a-turning-point-for-civic-education>.
16. Kevin Frazier. The Fulcrum. "The Future of Civic Education." 23May2023. <https://thefulcrum.us/future-of-civic-education>.
17. Steven Sawchuck. \$1 Billion For Civics Education? Bipartisan Bill Eyes Dramatic Federal Investment. 17Sept2020. <https://www.edweek.org/education/1-billion-for-civics-education-bipartisan-bill-eyes-dramatic-federal-investment/2020/09>.
18. Civics Secures Democracy Act. A proposed piece of federal legislation to strengthen the teaching of civics in public school. 2021. Sponsors: Reps. Rosa Delauro, Tom Cole, Earl Blumenauer and Senators Chris Coons, John Cornyn. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1814>