

The background of the entire page is a photograph of two students, a young woman and a young man, smiling. The young woman is in the foreground, wearing a dark patterned top and a name tag that says 'Student Judge'. The young man is standing behind her, wearing a light-colored shirt and a patterned tie. They are in front of a bulletin board with various papers and posters pinned to it. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

**ACTION CIVICS IN
SCHOOL DISTRICTS:
INSIGHTS & MATERIALS
FOR ADMINISTRATORS**



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SINCE GENERATION CITIZEN BEGAN WORK OVER EIGHT YEARS AGO, WE HAVE ALWAYS HAD BIG GOALS: THAT EVERY STUDENT IN THIS COUNTRY RECEIVES AN EFFECTIVE ACTION CIVICS EDUCATION. WE BELIEVE IN THE STRENGTH OF OUR CORE PROGRAM, WORKING WITH SCHOOLS TO EDUCATE YOUNG PEOPLE TO BECOME ENGAGED AND ACTIVE CITIZENS.

Every day, we see the powerful transformational potential of Action Civics. We have seen the results of young people advocating to their local elected officials to support legislation incentivizing affordable housing, pushing for expanding funding for summer teen jobs, or exploring innovative ways to tackle the emerging opioid crisis. Transformational things happen when our youngest generation engages with real public officials in their communities, pushing for change.

We also believe, though, in the power and necessity of systemic change. Our goal is not that Generation Citizen is in every classroom across the country— that is impossible. Our goal is that Action Civics is in every classroom. Ultimately, we hope that Action Civics becomes a staple of the educational curriculum, as important as math, science, or English.

In order for that to happen, we believe that school districts need to play a lead role in promoting Action Civics, and providing educators with the necessary resources to teach the discipline effectively. Our country's decentralized education system, necessarily emphasizing local control, can make scale and diffusion challenging. Districts, however, indisputably play a vital role in helping to set school and educator priorities, and ultimately, helping set the strategic priorities for the students they serve.

We have learned a lot in our eight years of operating at Generation Citizen. But we know that educators and administrators have crucial local knowledge to inform our work. To that end, this report is based on consolidating best practices from district leaders from across the country. There is no right or wrong way of promoting Action Civics within a district. We do believe, however, that there are best practices, which can be applicable across a variety of settings.

We are producing this report to be helpful to educators and district leaders who want to emphasize the practice. We also feel like this is a critically important time for such report. With an uncertain political climate, and educators recognizing the importance of pushing this type of learning, the time has never been more ripe to promote Action Civics.

We hope this report can be helpful. Most importantly, we hope that our learnings can ensure that more students receive an effective Action Civics education, providing them with the knowledge and skills necessary to become informed and engaged citizens. Our democracy depends on it.

Sincerely,



Scott Warren, CEO Generation Citizen



AT GENERATION CITIZEN, A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION FOUNDED IN 2008, WE PARTNER WITH SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS TO TEACH A SEMESTER-LONG ACTION CIVICS CURRICULUM.

Since our founding, Generation Citizen has worked with more than 30,000 young people throughout Massachusetts, New York City, Rhode Island, the San Francisco Bay Area, Central Texas, and Oklahoma. Our program, and others like it, have demonstrated the significant promise

of the growing practice of Action Civics in positively impacting both our youth, and the future of our democracy. As we work towards a goal of every student in the United States receiving an effective Action Civics education, we need the energy and support of educators, policymakers, funders, and civics education organizations alike. To build this energy around Action Civics, it is imperative to consider the roles that individuals across the education system can play, and how they can be supported. The following report is aimed at school district administrators, and how they can best implement Action Civics.



WE HEAR OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT CIVICS EDUCATION IS SEEN AS A “NICE TO HAVE” RATHER THAN A “NEED TO HAVE.” MANY PEOPLE – TEACHERS, SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERS, STATE POLITICIANS, AND THE GENERAL POPULATION ALIKE – AGREE THAT EVERYONE SHOULD RECEIVE AN EFFECTIVE CIVICS EDUCATION.

Yet in the hierarchy of education requirements, civics has yet to make it to the top. Often lacking in resources, mandates and assessment, allocated personnel, and more broadly, attention, the discipline of civics education needs the help of its advocates to claim its rightful place as a “need to have” in American education.

**“FOR A LONG TIME, CIVICS HAS BEEN THE STEPCHILD.”
– DISTRICT LEADER**

School district administrators can play a unique role in driving the curricular focuses and resource allocation of school leaders and teachers. As such, we sought to understand best practices for implementing Action Civics education throughout an entire district, as well as pain points and challenges that district leaders face in achieving scale and saturation. We spoke with fourteen individuals working in social studies, or a related department, at the district or county level in urban areas across the country.¹ Five of the fourteen individuals are located in districts where Generation Citizen has programming. Another three were existing contacts of a Generation Citizen staff member. The remaining six were reached through cold emails. An additional five individuals did not respond, and thus were not interviewed. The district leaders we spoke with have various amounts of experience with civics education, and specifically Action Civics, in their districts.

Analyzing interviews, we have identified themes, insights, and opportunities that can 1) serve as a guide for district leaders interested in implementing or improving Action Civics in their districts and 2) highlight opportunities for Action Civics and other educational providers to build resources that will be of use for these district leaders. Though components of Action Civics can be integrated into K-6 classes, this report is directed at middle and high school levels.

From our interviews, we learned there are opportunities at the state, district, and school levels to advocate for, introduce, and improve effective civics education, and specifically Action Civics. The insights we generated and opportunities that we identified, that are elaborated on throughout this report, are supplemented by tips and materials to support district leaders in bringing Action Civics to their districts. However, there is still much work to be done and we look forward to working with partners in the field to develop additional resources that will help leaders at the district level to work with their colleagues, schools, and teachers to effectively implement Action Civics.

**“IF WE INCREASE KNOWLEDGE AROUND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES, WE’RE GOING TO CHANGE BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES AROUND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, AND THUS LEAD TO GREATER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.”
– DISTRICT LEADER**

WHAT IS ACTION CIVICS?

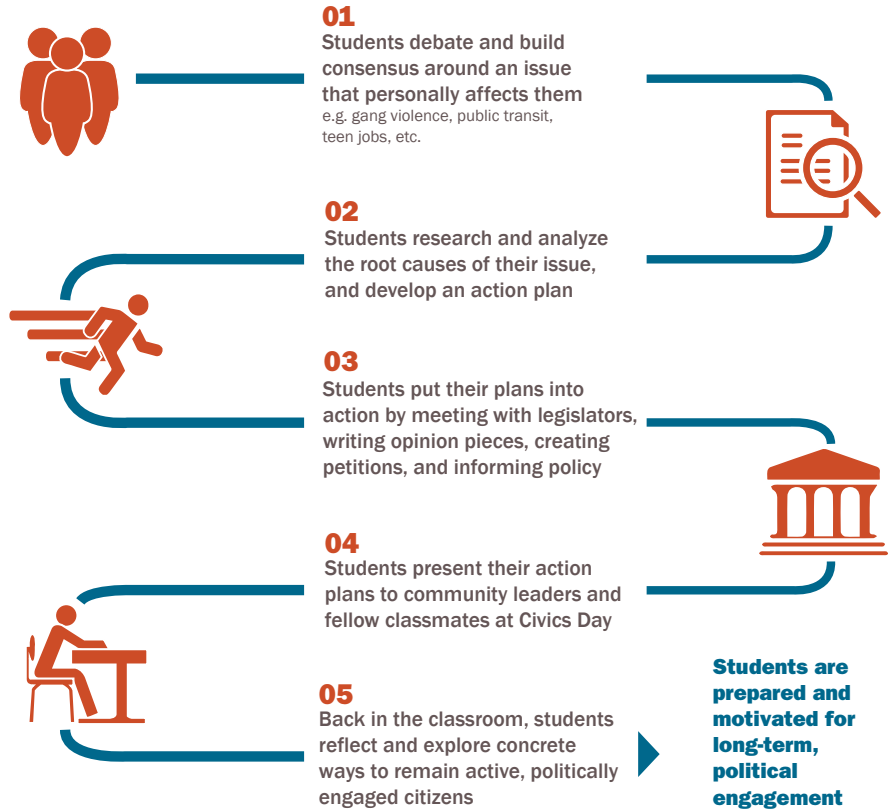


OVERVIEW

Action Civics is a student-centered, experiential practice in which young people learn about the political process by taking action on specific issues in their communities. Action Civics can be a powerful motivating experience, setting young people on a path towards lifelong civic and political engagement. Applied in classrooms during the school day, Action Civics is a civics education course typically comprised of community examination, issue identification, research, strategizing, taking action, and reflection. Adults provide guidance and support throughout the process. Any Action Civics course or program must include the following four elements:

- A student-led project
- A real-world, personal issue
- Political action toward lasting change

GENERATION CITIZEN'S ACTION CIVICS PROCESS



GENERATION CITIZEN'S CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK





“EVERY SCHOOL MUST BECOME AN EMBRYONIC COMMUNITY LIFE, ACTIVE WITH TYPES OF OCCUPATIONS THAT REFLECT THE LIFE OF THE LARGER SOCIETY [...] WHEN THE SCHOOL INTRODUCES AND TRAINS EACH CHILD OF SOCIETY INTO MEMBERSHIP WITHIN SUCH A LITTLE COMMUNITY, SATURATING HIM WITH THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE, AND PROVIDING HIM WITH THE INSTRUMENTS OF EFFECTIVE SELF-DIRECTION, WE SHALL HAVE THE DEEPEST AND BEST GUARANTEE OF A LARGER SOCIETY WHICH IS WORTHY, LOVELY, AND HARMONIOUS.”

– JOHN DEWEY, *THE SCHOOL AND SOCIETY*

It is a foundational responsibility of our public schools to prepare students for citizenship. Yet there has been a decline in the prevalence and quality of civics education over the past decades, and a correlating decline in civic participation. Where they do exist, textbook-based civics courses that focus on the structures and history of our government often fall short of fostering the skills and motivation young people need to become active and engaged citizens. Students who take Action Civics classes, on the other hand, can leave the classroom with important civic skills and motivation, in addition to a core base of knowledge. In fact, students who receive effective civic learning are more likely, than those who do not, to vote and discuss politics at home, four times more likely to volunteer and work on community issues, and more confident in their ability to speak publicly and communicate with their elected representatives.²

“WE ARE FIGHTING AN UPHILL APATHY BATTLE.”
– DISTRICT LEADER

The benefits of Action Civics extend beyond civic outcomes. By activating youth voice, and engaging students through project-based learning, Action Civics can produce a positive impact on school retention and college graduation. 81% of high school dropouts said they would have been less likely to do so if they received more experiential learning,³ and

civic activities undertaken during high school are related to significantly higher odds that individuals graduate from college in later years, when controlling for a host of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.⁴

Despite its proven benefits, many students do not receive an action-based civics education. For instance, more than half of students report they never participate in mock trials or simulations and less than twenty percent of fourth, or eighth grade teachers report organizing visits from members of the community or report that their students participate in community projects.⁵ Where action-based civics education does exist, stark disparities in its distribution result in what can be termed a “civic education gap.” Higher income students are more likely to experience the best practices for civic learning, compared to free or reduced lunch eligible students.⁶ Furthermore, many students in rural areas experience “civic deserts,” where there are few opportunities for civic learning and engagement.⁷ Supporting Action Civics in every classroom can begin to fill this gap and enable equitable opportunities for student success and civic engagement – a foundational need of our democracy.

See *Generation Citizen’s program outcomes* in Appendix 1.



ACTION CIVICS CAN SUPPORT STATE MANDATES (AND STATE MANDATES CAN SUPPORT ACTION CIVICS)

State education mandates and control vary by state. Most of the district leaders with whom we spoke work in states where education is under local control. Frameworks and standards put forth by the state must be met, but it is at the discretion of districts to determine how, and to ensure that, these standards are met. In most states, state law and standards prescribe a quantity of social studies courses, a specific government or civics course, or both (e.g. two credits of social studies including one half credit of civics education). Such state mandates tend to do little to ensure effective civics education is taught, and it thus falls upon district leaders to make the case for, and facilitate, civics in their schools.

A handful of states have stronger mandates and frameworks for civics education and the district leaders we spoke to in these states have seen an impact on the attention civics education receives and how it is implemented. In Florida, for instance, where there is a required middle school civics assessment that students must pass for promotion to high school, teachers write large are spending more classroom time than they used to on civics content. In Illinois, where a legislated civics course with mandated pedagogical practices⁸ was implemented for the first time in the 2016-2017 school year, teachers are open to, and embracing new educational models for civics more than they were before. These mandates, while making it easier to ensure teachers teach civics, require heavy lifting on behalf of district level staff to offer curricular resources and professional development that help teachers become comfortable with the materials and effectively meet the requirements.

“HAVING MANDATES MAKES THE DIFFERENCE. WE HAVE NEW STANDARDS THAT ARE ARTICULATED, PEOPLE MUST DO IT.”
– DISTRICT LEADER

Advocating for state policy and improved standards that require Action Civics, and offer resources and assessment to support it, is an opportunity that will have positive effects on districts’ prioritization and implementation of Action Civics.

District leaders in states that have adopted the College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework⁹ noted that it had effectively positioned civics – and particularly, civics as a means for fostering civically engaged students, as a priority. The C3 Framework, which has been recently been adopted by states across the country and continues to be adopted by others, highlights education as a means of preparing students for career, college, and citizenship. The role that select district leaders have seen the C3 Framework play as a means to effective civics education in the classroom underscores an opportunity to advocate for, and introduce, the framework in states and districts.

“THE C3 FRAMEWORK HAS BEEN HELPFUL. IT HAS PROVIDED SOME CLEAR STANDARDS ON WHAT WE’RE ACTUALLY AIMING FOR. IT GIVES US A FRAMEWORK TO INCORPORATE CIVICS – A FRAMEWORK COMPARABLE TO MATH AND SCIENCE. AN INTEGRATED APPROACH HAS HELPED – C3 LANGUAGE IS IN OUR PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, ASSESSMENTS, CURRICULUM.”
–DISTRICT LEADER

SPOTLIGHT

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS’ IMPLEMENTATION OF ILLINOIS’ NEW LEGISLATIVELY MANDATED CIVICS COURSE:

In 2015, the Illinois legislature passed a law “requiring that future Illinois high school students complete a stand-alone, semester-long civics course. Course content must include instruction on government institutions, current and controversial issues discussions, service learning, and simulations of democratic processes.”

The law makes it the responsibility of districts’ central offices to set parameters and offer resources to ensure that the requirement, which went into effect on July 1, 2016, is met. Though they could create their own, most principals and teachers prefer to use resources prepared by the central district to teach the new required civics course. District-prepared resources in Chicago include a full curriculum, five days of summer professional development, three days of school-year professional development, and information about partnerships with outside organizations. These resources are built with the support of external funding, both stipulated as part of the mandate, and raised with the help of the district.

The Illinois legislation built on an existing movement for effective civics education in Chicago. At the time it was passed, an initiative called Democracy Schools was already in effect, part of a program designed to “recognize and support high schools that are dedicated to expanding and improving civic learning experiences across the curriculum.” These schools helped make the case for the statewide requirement, and now act as models for Chicago schools ramping up their civic learning efforts as a result of the new law.

CPS’s Social Science and Civic Engagement Department launched a three-year implementation plan for “preparing the next generation to participate in civic and community life,” which includes additional information about civic learning, tactics for teaching civic participation, and the current context, and opportunities, for civic learning in Chicago.

[You can read the implementation plan, “Ready to Engage” here.](#)

[See this site for more details about the Illinois legislation, resources, and related efforts.](#)

TIPS FOR ADVOCATING FOR STATE CIVICS STANDARDS AND LEGISLATION:

[To learn about your state’s laws, standards, and frameworks around civics education, see Education Commission of the States’ 2016 50-State Comparison.](#)

[See Generation Citizen’s Toolkit, “Taking Action on Action Civics” which outlines 6 tactics for advocating for Action Civics education.](#)

[Read testimony written by a district leader in Lowell, MA in support of a bill that would support Action Civics.](#)

TIPS TO BRING THE C3 FRAMEWORK TO YOUR DISTRICT AND STATE:

[Tips and tools to Introduce, plan, and implement the C3 Framework at your district.](#)

[Using the C3 Framework to Inform state policies and practices.](#)

ACTION CIVICS CAN OPERATIONALIZE DISTRICT PRIORITIES – EVEN IF THEY DON'T SPECIFY CIVICS

School districts set forth goals and visions that direct their priorities. This can include which courses get taught, what teachers focus their attention on, where resources get allocated, how student outcomes are evaluated, and what defines success. Across districts, these goals vary but two are nearly universal: literacy and equity in academic success. To meet these goals, emphasis is often placed on English Language Arts (ELA) and Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM). Few districts consider civics as a way to meet these goals.

A number of the districts we studied have goals and visions that include a commitment to community engagement, student voice, or something of the like that lends itself to robust civics education. Yet, even in these districts, such goals are not addressed with the same urgency as the goals that are perceived to directly contribute to career and college success.

Knowing a district's vision, goals, and priorities creates an opportunity for advocates of Action Civics to point out areas that are not met and demonstrate ways that districts can use Action Civics to effectively execute the goals laid out. Particularly, where goals that more directly lend themselves to civics education, such as community engagement, are absent from plans, it is imperative that advocates demonstrate how Action Civics education meets existing priorities.

Furthermore, proof of practice can help make the case to decision-makers that goals around community engagement, student voice, and civic learning, that support Action Civics, should be included in future plans.

TIPS FOR DEMONSTRATING HOW ACTION CIVICS CAN MEET DISTRICT PRIORITIES:

Read how Action Civics fosters improved literacy in Appendix 3.

Read how Action Civics fosters equity in academic success in Appendix 4.

Read how Action Civics fosters social and emotional learning in Appendix 5.

SPOTLIGHT

THE EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE DIGITAL AGE (EDDA) INITIATIVE IN OAKLAND:

EDDA is an initiative that was launched in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), based on the idea that to become effective civic actors, students must be taught using best practices in civic education and digital literacy. The initiative is a partnership with Mills College and the National Writing Project and is supported by the S. D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

The project works to ensure that students have civic learning opportunities that include academic skill development, exposure to different models of civic engagement, and opportunities for students to address issues that are relevant to their lives and communities. The initiative works directly with, and to support, teachers and its demonstrated success helped to shape OUSD's strategic goals. As of 2013, OUSD is responsible for graduating students who are Community Ready, in addition to College and Career Ready.

The following are the aims of the initiative:

- Identify areas of the core curriculum from 9th – 12th grade where civic learning opportunities will expand and enhance students' knowledge, skills, and capacities
- Develop comprehensive plans at each high school that articulate the civic learning opportunities that will be provided to youth in a sequenced way culminating in a civic capstone project in senior year
- Create models of high quality civic capstone projects that teachers co-create, pilot, and refine for spread throughout the district.
- Build a common understanding of what it means to prepare students to be community ready through the district graduate profile

The website also includes resources for teachers, and schools. [You can read more about the EDDA initiative, and access the resources here.](#)

SPOTLIGHT

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND VOICE IN OKLAHOMA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS' DISTRICT-WIDE STRATEGIC PLAN:

In 2015, Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS) launched a five-year strategic plan called "The Great Commitment" that was developed in conversation with the community to define success for OKCPS. One of the seven defined goals is "student engagement and voice," where "every student will play a personal and meaningful role in their own learning and in the educational decision making of their school, district, and/or community." One measure for evaluating the achievement of this goal is "[percentage] of students engaged in community service, civic action or schoolwide projects."

Despite including student engagement in its strategic plan, the school district did not prioritize this goal in the plan's initial roll-out. When Generation Citizen was subsequently introduced to the OKCPS superintendent, it was evident that Generation Citizen, and Action Civics, would help to effectively operationalize the district's commitment to youth engagement and voice, filling an existing gap. Generation Citizen began programming in 12 classes in Spring 2017 and will be in 35 in the 2017-2018 school year.

[See OKCPS' "The Great Commitment" here.](#)

ACTION CIVICS CAN BE INTEGRATED INTO TEACHERS' EXISTING PRACTICES, BUT TEACHERS NEED SUPPORT

Few district leaders have direct control over what happens in the classroom. Even when a curriculum is used universally in a district, it proves challenging for district leaders to know how it is being used by teachers. As such, it is a particular challenge for district leaders to convince a critical mass of teachers to agree to teach innovative, and complex curricula such as Action Civics that require new content and pedagogy. In select districts, pacing guides and benchmarks help to direct what happens in the classroom.

SPOTLIGHT

CORNERSTONE PROJECTS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.:

Across disciplines and grades in District of Columbia Public Schools, students are required to complete cornerstone projects that require detailed inquiry. Each cornerstone lays out a question that students must aim to answer, offers tools to help students build inquiry and requires students to complete an assignment and take informed action. In a civics classroom, for example, a section on what makes a law just might involve students creating a bill, debating whether it is just, and sending it to a congressional subcommittee for review. Another focused on civic responsibility, might culminate in a PSA focused on the importance of civic participation.

[This site is a resource for social studies inquiry design models.](#)

[Read here to learn more about Washington DC's cornerstone model.](#)

Resistance to teaching Action Civics can come from teachers who feel overwhelmed by existing mandates and responsibilities, experience the pressure of requirements confining their flexibility and freedom in the classroom, or aren't prepared to teach Action Civics due to its required content and pedagogy.

Teachers who are early adopters of Action Civics, or similar courses, are those who opt-in. In some districts, administrators offer to connect their teachers with civics program partners such as Generation Citizen or Mikva Challenge. Some teachers choose to participate while others do not. A similar pattern of selective opt-in exists with regard to using resources and systems offered by district leaders such as professional development, curricular material, and tools for teaching outside of the textbook.

"THE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES OF ANYONE WHO LIVES IN A CIVIC INITIATIVE MUST BE REFLECTIVE AND ENGAGE AND EMPOWER FOLKS INSTEAD OF SAYING THIS IS WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW."

– DISTRICT LEADER

A note on assessment: By and large, mandated assessment has been an asset in helping district leaders to get teachers to think about, and actively teach civics. However, because assessments in the districts we spoke to, whether legislatively mandated or part of state standards, focus on the

knowledge component of civics education and not on skill development, they simultaneously become a liability. When students are required to take an exam, especially one focused on content, it has implications on their measured success and that of their teacher. As such, teachers often become so bogged down by preparing their students for exam success that they are reluctant to focus on any additional materials or creative ways to teach the material. While certain teachers realize that engaging their students in Action Civics bolsters their civic knowledge and competency on exams, for many, this connection is not apparent.

An alternative to a test-based assessment, which a number of district leaders expressed interest in, is the required completion of an action project for high school graduation. Tennessee's law requiring project-based civics assessment can serve as a model for this. District leaders can advocate for such requirements districtwide, and ultimately statewide.

DISTRICT LEADERS WHO HAVE HAD SUCCESS WORKING WITH TEACHERS TO INFUSE ACTION CIVICS INTO THEIR CLASSROOMS IN A DEEP AND MEANINGFUL WAY SUGGEST TO:

Build and nurture relationships

- Conduct personal outreach to teachers. If you can't speak with all of them, reach out to those who might be on the fence and need an extra nudge to commit.
- Make yourself available to teachers who seek further guidance and development.
- Speak teachers' language as you make the case for Action Civics.

Make Action Civics right for teachers and their classrooms

- Encourage teachers to shift their mindsets about classroom pedagogy and practice and help them to see that Action Civics fits in with what they are already doing in the classroom.
- Offer parameters for what Actions Civics should look like, but don't dictate what it has to be. (Action Civics is about empowerment and decision making; practice what you preach!)
- Give teachers flexibility in implementing any curriculum, lesson plans, or pacing guides you might offer.

TYPES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT WILL SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR PREPARATION FOR TEACHING ACTION CIVICS INCLUDE:

- Project based learning
- Local history and government
- Student centered pedagogy
- Socratic seminars / deliberative discussion
- Community engagement

Tips for finding professional development that supports Action Civics can be found in Appendix 6

A list of civics education resources and lesson plans can be found in Appendix 7.

ACTION CIVICS DEMANDS RESOURCES, BUT BEGINNING TO INTRODUCE AND SUPPORT CIVICS EDUCATION IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS IS NOT NECESSARILY RESOURCE DEPENDENT

Many district leaders expressed that they do not have the funding, staff, or time to commit to bringing Action Civics to their classrooms. Those who have successfully begun to help bring Action Civics to their classrooms suggested tools and practices that can be used with limited funding.

Empower Teachers

- Create a community of teachers teaching Action Civics to ensure that they recognize their work is bigger than themselves and their classrooms. Helping teachers to see they are part of a larger movement gives more weight to their work and allows them to share resources and experiences with like-minded teachers. This helps to build a movement and bring in additional educators.
- Recruit teachers who are teaching Action Civics well to serve as mentors and guide other teachers to adopt similar practices.

Be Strategic

- Start small and build momentum – both in terms of how you work with teachers and the number of teachers you work with.
- Tap organizations and individuals who are experts in Action Civics to be thought partners on best practices and tactics for implementation, particularly if you work alone at the district level.

“I REACH OUT TO PARTNERS WHO ARE EXPERTS IN THE AREA. NOT TO HAVE THEM DO ALL THE WORK BUT TO BE THOUGHT PARTNERS. THAT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE, ESPECIALLY AS CENTRAL OFFICE ROLES GET DIMINISHED.”

– DISTRICT LEADER

Advocate for Civics

- Ensure there is a champion at the decision-making table. The more advocates there are for Action Civics, the more likely it is that one will be at the table when decisions are made about district priorities, strategies, and programming. Whether it is the social studies leader advocating for a capstone project to take a community and civics focus, or a superintendent ensuring that community and civics are listed in district strategic plans, champions at all levels can make a huge push for the inclusion of Action Civics in education and identify opportunities to insert it.
- Build relationships with the Board of Education, superintendent and others in the district. This will both encourage them to be champions of Action Civics, and help to bring you to the table when possible.

Offer Materials

- Partner with local organizations who might have low-cost or free Action Civics programming or professional development.
- Offer to be a thought partner to teachers interested in bringing Action Civics to their classrooms in their own ways.
- Develop a scope and sequence that incorporates Action Civics into existing standards and curricula instead of simply giving teachers lesson plans or text books.
- Work with high level administrators to allocate specific time during existing professional development sessions to focus on Action Civics pedagogy and content.

Of course, funding helps to effectively implement Action Civics in a district. The districts that have the most expansive Action Civics programs

are those that receive, or have received funding.

Financial resources can go towards:

- Centralized staff. A staff member who can focus explicitly on civics, allowing for more touch points with teachers and the development of more, and more site-specific, resources.
- Professional development. Regular training opportunities that specifically prepare for Action Civics in the classroom.
- Teacher leaders. Teachers who can train and support other teachers and be champions of Action Civics within their schools.
- A targeted framework and curriculum. An Action Civics framework, curriculum, or both developed to address local contexts and meet state standards.
- Evaluation. Partnership with an institution to develop and implement evaluation of Action Civics outcomes in a district.
- Materials and showcases. Materials necessary for completing action projects and a space to share them with peers and the community.
- Programmatic partners. Partnerships with Action Civics program organizations who can work with or train teachers to implement Action Civics in classrooms.

SPOTLIGHT

SACRAMENTO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION'S ACTION CIVICS INITIATIVE:

In Sacramento, a county-level staff person was hired as an Action Civics Curriculum Specialist, and, with the support of The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, a California-based foundation, a three-year initiative was launched to bring Action Civics to schools in districts across the county.

The county-level coordinator works with districts, and the schools within them, to implement Action Civics in cross disciplinary classrooms. In Sacramento County, nearly all of the districts have signed on to a “Civic Learning Resolution,” committing them to creating and implementing a plan for developing the civic literacy of their students. In 11 schools across these districts, 12 teams of 3-5 teachers have formed as Action Civics champions. An initial Action Civics framework and resources were developed by the county, along with additional tools, and teachers have had the opportunity to participate in four day-long professional development sessions annually in addition monthly on-site coaching sessions. Schools are given a stipend to have teachers participate, and to implement their Action Civics plans.

Year 1: Introducing best practices for civic learning and empowering teachers to empower their students. The first year was focused on illustrating the value and importance of community-based civic learning, sharing best practices and pedagogies for civic learning, and offering space for teacher reflection.

Summer between years 1 and 2: A five day summer institute for participating teachers.

Year 2: A deep dive into the steps of Action Civics. Professional development focused on each step of the Action Civics project. Sessions included, for example, how to identify community issues, how to conduct research, and how to develop a strategy for action.

Year 3: A focus on sustainability. Instead of direct trainings, time was offered for teams to refine their plans and consider how they will continue to implement and expand Action Civics in the years to come.

[You can learn more about Sacramento's Action Civics Initiative here.](#)



WHEN ACTION CIVICS IS SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED IN DISTRICTS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, WE WILL BEGIN TO SEE AN ENGAGED CITIZENRY, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES, AND A FLOURISHING DEMOCRACY.

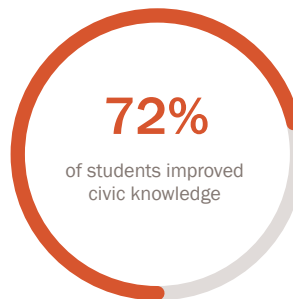
Implementing effective civics education today is a necessary investment for our country's future – with immediate benefits for our youth, schools, and communities. Certainly there are challenges to saturating a school district with Action Civics education and the process of doing so will take time, the support of numerous stakeholders, and sufficient funding and resources. However, we hope that the insights and materials

provided throughout this report are utilized by leaders at the district level to introduce, and improve, Action Civics and that they contribute to an ongoing conversation about how to best prepare our young people for effective citizenship. Practitioners, educators, administrators, policymakers, and students themselves, must work together, and we look forward to continuing to do so.

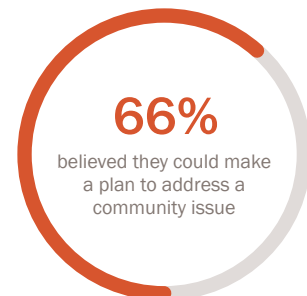
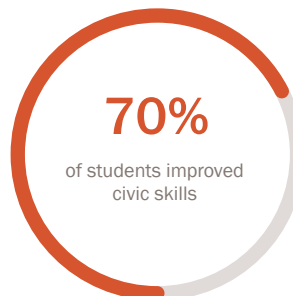
GENERATION CITIZEN'S IMPACT

ACADEMICS AND EXPERTS IN THE FIELD AGREE UPON THREE INDICATORS WHICH BEST PREDICT A STUDENT'S LIKELIHOOD OF FUTURE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: CIVIC KNOWLEDGE, CIVIC SKILLS, AND CIVIC MOTIVATION. GENERATION CITIZEN EVALUATES ITS IMPACT THROUGH PRE- AND POST-SEMESTER SURVEYS OF STUDENTS, MID- AND END-OF-SEMESTER SURVEYS OF TEACHERS, AND ONGOING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS.

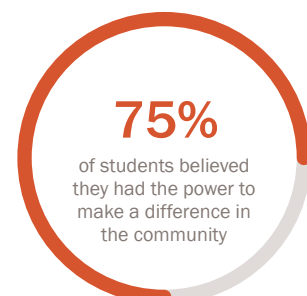
Civic knowledge - a student's ability to grasp basic civic knowledge, which is taught throughout the course. This includes understanding how the governmental process works, and who the basic players are.



Civic skills - is a student's ability to use acquired skills to effectively participate in the political process. This includes oral and written persuasive communication, group-work, and critical thinking - all vital to being an engaged citizen.



Civic motivation - is a student's desire to actively participate in the political process and take action on issues they care about. This includes actual behaviors, like voting and volunteering.



INDIVIDUALS WORKING IN 14 SCHOOL DISTRICTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY WERE INTERVIEWED IN THE PROCESS OF WRITING THIS REPORT:

- Austin Independent School District
- Baltimore County Public Schools
- Boston Public Schools
- Chicago Public Schools
- Des Moines Public Schools
- District of Columbia Public Schools
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools
- New York City Department of Education
- Oakland Unified School District
- Oklahoma City Public Schools
- Sacramento County Office of Education
- Salt Lake City School District
- Seattle Public Schools
- St. Louis Public Schools

ACTION CIVICS SUPPORTS YOUR GOAL OF LITERACY

ACTION CIVICS IS AN APPROACH TO LEARNING THAT DIRECTLY SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERACY SKILLS. THE STUDENT-CENTERED, EXPERIENTIAL, AND PROJECT-BASED NATURE OF ACTION CIVICS INVITES STUDENTS TO READ, WRITE, SPEAK AND LISTEN DEEPLY THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS. ACTION CIVICS CAN HELP SUPPORT:

Academic Engagement: When students are interested in an academic subject and participate deeply in the learning of that subject, they are considered academically engaged. Academic engagement can ultimately lead to performance gains in literacy, as students put forth more effort and participation in the subject area generally, and literacy-based skill development specifically. Action Civics cultivates a keen interest in the subject area by making it personally relevant to students. Students are asked to take real action on issues that affect them in their communities and apply the knowledge gained from reading, writing, speaking and listening to their real-world advocacy efforts. Students can see the relevance of closely reading local research articles about their issue and of constructing persuasive arguments to share with community decision makers. In turn, they more deeply engage in these exercises and gain important literacy skills along the way.

Dialogue and Deliberation: At the core of Action Civics is the process of engaging in meaningful dialogue across citizens and citizen groups and deliberating among each other to decide upon a direction for community action. Students must implore literacy skills when they prepare for such deliberation and during it. Students closely read and draw from texts to develop the ideas they introduce into deliberative dialogue. They must listen to each other, construct questions to pose to each other, and speak their ideas to others in order to move action forward.

Speaking and Writing for the Public Sphere: Action Civics increases the stakes of argumentative speaking and writing by placing it in the public sphere. During an Action Civics project, students must examine an issue that they care about and make a strong case for their ideas to the people or groups in their community that hold the power to make change. Students spend extensive time reading and synthesizing research and personal stories to then present in written or oral format to decision

makers. From testifying at a city council meeting, to writing a persuasive letter to a state representative, to showcasing their work at the end of the semester to a public audience, students develop their literacy skills as they prepare for and deliver high-stakes public presentations.

Collaborating with Community Partners: Action Civics projects incorporate other members of the school and larger community at each stage. When students research their focus issue, community experts are invited in to share knowledge and local context. When students implement their advocacy tactics, they meet with individuals and coalitions to discuss their ideas. Students must listen closely to the ideas and feedback from community partners and synthesize this information to inform their action projects, which leads to literacy skill development. Further, when students see that there is a shared concern for the issues they care about from community partners, their interest in and engagement with the process deepens.

Cross-Curricular Integration: Action Civics projects can be incorporated cross-curricularly among subject areas. Students interested in an environmental issue can learn about the biological consequences in Science, the related laws in Social Studies, conduct a survey and analyze statistical information in Math, and write a report for a legislator in Language Arts. The literacy-based components of an Action Civics curriculum involving reading and writing on a particular issue can be examined from multiple subject-based 'lenses'. Students have the opportunity to engage with oral and written material on multiple occasions and in multiple contexts. The repetition supports literacy development, and the relevance from seeing cross-curricular connections contributes to students' interest and excitement.

ACTION CIVICS SUPPORTS YOUR GOAL OF EQUITY IN ACADEMIC SUCCESS

TO ENSURE EQUITY IN ACADEMIC SUCCESS SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS MUST EMPLOY A NUMBER OF EFFORTS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE STUDENTS THEY SERVE. WHILE THERE ARE MANY METHODS SCHOOLS USE TO ACHIEVE EQUITY IN ACADEMIC SUCCESS, SOME OF THE KEY METHODS THAT ACTION CIVICS ALSO HELPS TO SUPPORT ARE:

Student-Centered Instruction: Student-centered classrooms are ones in which the focus on instruction shifts from the teacher to the student, whereby the teacher becomes a facilitator, empowering students to lead in the learning process. In student-centered classrooms, a premium is placed on student choice, giving students the opportunity to serve in leadership positions and make a wide array of decisions. This type of pedagogy has been proven to engage at-risk students and to empower students from marginalized communities. In Action Civics classrooms, students are the leaders throughout the process. They identify an issue in their community, research the root cause of the issue, create a goal, and take action toward solving the issue.

Project-Based Learning: Action Civics is a form of project-based learning that has the capacity to engage students in interactive and exciting ways and keep them engaged over time. Students conducting Action Civics projects create plans to address pressing issues in their communities and take action to address those issues by working in small groups to achieve their advocacy goals. Often times the students who struggle with academic success are the same students that have frequent absences. In order for growth to occur, students have to be in the classroom and engaged in the lesson. Research shows that schools providing project-based learning have higher rates of attendance over time.

Inquiry-Based Learning: Inquiry-based learning can help combat disinterest that students feel towards school by engaging them in in-depth inquiry into real-world problems. Students engage in classroom activities that ask them to share their knowledge of these problems and explore a variety of sources to develop a deep and nuanced understanding of them. Action Civics projects require that students develop critical thinking and research skills as they investigate community issues and work to address them.

Collaboration: Action Civics relies heavily on group work and collaboration which are key classroom practices when working to ensure equity. When students have the opportunity to work with peers, they interact with students of varying learning abilities and different cultures and backgrounds. These interactions are crucial to leveling the playing field among students. The positive peer relationships that are developed through collaboration also contribute to academic performance and an increased sense of school community. In Action Civics classes, students not only receive the benefit of collaborating with their peers, but also with members of the community who they engage in their advocacy projects.

Culturally Responsive Instruction: Action Civics classroom content and activities are culturally relevant and of immediate use to students because they are the ones who generate the focus of the community issues they address. Teaching Action Civics encourages teachers to learn more about their students' backgrounds and cultures in order to support projects that address issues in students' communities. This builds greater understanding and respect between teacher and student, and fosters a culturally responsive classroom. The collaboration required for Action Civics also contributes to culturally responsive instruction. By having students work together, Action Civics builds a greater understanding and appreciation of students' diverse backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. The more knowledge classroom members have of one another and the more opportunities they have to work together, the more culturally respectful and responsive a classroom becomes.

ACTION CIVICS SUPPORTS YOUR GOAL OF SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING

ACCORDING TO THE COLLABORATIVE FOR ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (CASEL), STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING DEVELOP AND DEMONSTRATE:

Self-awareness: Action Civics empowers students by helping them reflect on their own civic identities, perspectives, and habits of mind. Students first reflect on issues that they care about in their own communities and, over the course of the program, explore their personal roles in addressing those issues. While collaborating with their classmates, students learn more about their own strengths and consider their contributions in a group setting. Their confidence improves as they engage in different aspects of the class' final project, be it through research, outreach, artistic design, persuasive communication, or other behaviors. At the conclusion of an Action Civics curriculum, students celebrate their work and reflect on their successes, challenges, and plans on moving forward.

Self-management: Action Civics prepares students to present themselves to different groups through various mediums. This includes students working with peers and problem solving, leading them to take on new perspectives and respond appropriately. Students learn how to modify their behavior to get better results, thus reinforcing self-control and awareness of others. Action Civics projects are student-driven so students set the pace and are responsible for completing the portions they choose to work on while tracking their progress with the overall group progress and goals. Students can apply valuable feedback they receive during the process to help improve their efforts.

Social awareness: Action Civics improves civic engagement among young people. Students are pushed to make connections beyond their coursework and begin recognizing current events and relevant community problems and the systems in place that are involved. In addition, they become more aware of community resources and how to utilize them. While working with their peers, students take on other perspectives and make decisions accordingly in an effort to bring about real, lasting change.

Relationship skills: Action Civics projects requires that students engage with others, including their fellow students and community leaders. In an effort to solve problems, students debate with one another and build consensus. In addition to the differences of opinions that arise within the classroom, students also have to negotiate conflict and challenges outside the classroom in order to achieve their goals. As a result, students learn collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills.

Responsible decision making: Action Civics places responsibility for action on the student, thus encouraging thoughtful and strategic planning. Students identify issues, conduct research and evaluate it to develop plans that are beneficial to their communities. Students are forced to consider the causes and effects of the issues they focus on, as well as the actions they take. As a result, students learn productive and responsible ways to channel their feelings and frustrations. They also spend time reflecting and exploring concrete ways to remain active even after the program is finished.

TIPS FOR FINDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS OF WHERE TO LOOK FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS THAT FOCUS ON ACTION CIVICS PEDAGOGIES AND CONTENT:

American Bar Association hosts a summer institute for teachers about federal courts and the role federal courts have played in addressing public issues that have impacted the constitution and legal rights in the US. State Bar Associations can serve as an additional resources. For example, The State Bar of Texas' [The Law-Related Education Department](#) offers educator training for law related and civic education programs.

A number of **States' Secretary of State offices** offer trainings for teachers' teaching civics and local government. For example, [Tennessee's Secretary of State](#) offers workshops to help teachers learn more about resources that the office provides on topics such as local government, and civic engagement.

The National Archives offer professional development webinars and workshops on the use of primary sources. Check state archives for additional, local focused resources.

National Council for the Social Studies offers a wide array of trainings for social studies teachers including promising pedagogies and civics content.

Many **state and other historical and cultural museums** offer professional development workshops locally. For instance, the [Chicago History Museum](#) offers workshops focusing on civics that incorporate engaging teaching strategies.

A number of **education organizations** such as the [Highlander Institute](#) and [Buck Institute for Education](#) offer professional development for innovative teaching methods.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

HERE IS A LIST OF SELECT CIVICS RESOURCES AND LESSON PLANS. ACTION CIVICS WORKS TO PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' CIVIC KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND MOTIVATION. THESE RESOURCES SUPPORT ONE, BOTH OR ALL OF THESE GOALS

[Generation Citizen \(GC\)](#) created 2 lesson plans, [Beyond the Ballot](#), for teachers not teaching GC's full Action Civics curriculum. The goal behind the lessons is to draw students' attention to their local governments, systems and services and encourage them to get involved at the local level to support issues they care about. With a focus on local government and action, it supports student civic knowledge, skills, and motivation.

[iCivics](#) exists to ensure all students have the knowledge necessary to understand how government works. The site includes lesson plans, activities, games, and other resources. The games can serve as simulations to help students evaluate best next steps or actions in a civic situation. iCivics is useful for developing student civic knowledge and skills.

[Annenberg Learner](#) has a wealth of resources for civics teachers much like iCivics – lesson plans, activities, and videos. It is helpful as it supports development of student knowledge, skills, and motivation. While there are many lessons on knowledge, this [lesson on Civic Engagement](#) does a great job of supporting student growth in skills and motivation.

[Mikva Challenge](#) is an organization that works to develop youth voice and eliminate the civic achievement gap. In addition to multiple program offerings, Mikva offers lessons and resources to teachers online for implementation in the classroom. Some of the topics covered in their [classroom resources](#) include: elections, civic literacy, and analyzing news media. Mikva supports student development of civic knowledge, skills, and motivation.

[Politcraft](#) is an “action civics card game, endorsed by the National Council for the Social Studies, that guides students through varying levels of civic engagement. Through game play, students are guided by the deck to craft narratives based upon civic issues of their choosing. Doing so informs students of the multiple pathways available to them to achieve real change in their community.” To bolster the game's learning

outcomes, teachers can build in student reflection by having students keep track of their actions and do a short write up at the end about the actions they took, and why. Politcraft is useful as it supports the goal of civic skills.

[We the Voters](#) works to ensure Americans have access to nonpartisan information about democracy, elections and U.S. governance. They partnered with [PBS](#) to [create short films and lesson plans](#) to “provide a fresh perspective on democracy, elections, governance, and debating.” We the Voters resources contribute to the development of student civic motivation.

[From Inquiry to Action](#) is a book written for teachers that lays out, step by step, how to use project-based learning to facilitate student civic action. The book includes stories of classroom instruction, activity templates, and assessment recommendations. You can also refer to the author, Steven Zemelman's New York Times article, “[Ideas for Student Civic Action in a Time of Social Uncertainty](#),” which summarizes five steps for student civic action in the classroom. Using the strategies and practices outlined, teachers can support student growth in civic knowledge, skills, and motivation.

[Teach Interact](#) is a company that produces resources for teachers to create engaging learning experiences for students. “Each unit includes a teacher's guide, purpose and overview, daily lesson plans, student materials, time management guidelines, and support materials.” Though they have units on dozens of subjects, their unit entitled [Taking Informed Action](#) has great step by step resources and plans for teachers to implement civic engagement projects with their students. This particular unit enables teachers to support student growth in civic skills and motivation.

[The Constitutional Rights Foundation](#) provides a Civic Action Project known as [CAP](#) that “is a free project-based learning program for civics and government... it is a culmination of students' social studies education, a chance for them to apply what they have learned to the real world and impact an issue that matters to them.” CAP provides an action civics project that supports student growth in civic knowledge, skills, and motivation.

APPROXIMATE COSTS OF IMPLEMENTING ACTION CIVICS IN A DISTRICT

Saturating a whole district and ensuring that every student has received an Action Civics education by graduation, should be an ultimate goal. However, it is challenging to implement overnight. Below you will see a menu of ways, and steps, to bring Action Civics to a district, and an approximation of their costs. We have created three buckets of resources that will allow for varying levels of district saturation, and estimated costs for districts of four different sizes.

*** The costs are estimations based on what we have seen in select districts, states, and programs. Costs will vary depending on district size, location, and partners. The numbers are calculated based on an assumption that all social studies teachers of two grades (e.g. one middle school grade and one high school grade) will be Action Civics teachers.**

Resource	10k students k-12, 24 schools, 20 Action Civics teachers	25k students k-12, 60 schools, 50 Action Civics teachers	50k students k-12; 120 schools, 100 Action Civics teachers	250k students k-12; 600 schools, 500 Action Civics teachers	Notes
Full district integration and saturation (these are ideally collectively implemented, but some items can also be implemented independently)					
Dedicated staff person at 20%, 50%, 75%, 100% (respectively)	\$20,000	\$50,000	\$75,000	\$100,000	Centralized capacity to organize and support Action Civics
Ongoing training & professional development	\$10,000	\$25,000	\$50,000	\$250,000	Initial training for teachers with organizational partners, and regular check-ins and resources
Additional staff support	N/A	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$50,000	Staff, from the district office, or teachers who can work part-time with the district admin. to support and plan professional development, organize events, offer coaching, and develop resources
Stipends for teacher leaders	\$24,000	\$60,000	\$120,000	\$600,000	Incentive, and compensation for teachers committing to teaching and leading Action Civics in their schools, and supporting and training other teachers to do the same. Assume one per school
Curriculum	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	Purchasing or designing an Action Civics curriculum. NB: Costs for this do not yet exist, it will vary depending on where the curriculum is coming from, with whom it's being developed, or if costs are shared
Action Civics showcase	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$30,000	\$50,000	End-of-semester event where students present their Action Civics projects, similar to a science fair The costs here account for 2 end-of-semester events, 1 per semester; they could be reduced significantly if events are hosted in schools
Evaluation design and implementation	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$25,000	\$50,000	Measurement of Action Civics outcomes, e.g., a pre/post survey for students. NB: This is a recurring cost, but it will decrease once the design is complete and costs are only required for implementation
Website	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	Resource hub
Supplies	\$4,000	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$25,000	Printing, poster boards etc...
Total (range)	\$103,000	\$210,000	\$350,000	\$1.160,000	
Priming teachers to teach Action Civics					
Summer professional development institute	\$10,000	\$25,000	\$50,000	\$250,000	Summer multi-day professional development workshop, addressing all aspects of Action Civics
Action Civics from the outside					
Organizational partnership	\$2.5K/class	\$2.5K/class	\$2.5K/class	\$2.5K/class	Partnership with organizations such as Generation Citizen who teach Action Civics in the classroom

ABOUT THIS REPORT

1. A list of these districts can be found in Appendix 2.

WHY WE NEED ACTION CIVICS

2. All Together Now: Collaboration and Innovation for Youth Engagement. (2013). CIRCLE.
3. Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools. (2011). Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools.
4. Dávila, A., & Mora, M. (2007). CIRCLE Working Paper 52: Civic Engagement and High School Academic Progress: An Analysis Using NELS Data. CIRCLE.
5. Rosefsky Saavedra, A. (2012). Dry to Dynamic Civic Education Curricula. In D. E. Campbell, M. Levinson, & F. M. Hess (Eds.), Making Civics Count: Citizenship Education for a New Generation (pp. 135-159). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
6. Kawashima-Ginsberg, K. (2013). Do Discussion, Debate, and Simulations Boost NAEP Civics Performance?. CIRCLE.
7. Kawashima-Ginsberg, K., & Sullivan, F. (2017). Study: 60 percent of rural millennials lack access to a political life. The Conversation.

ACTION CIVICS CAN SUPPORT STATE MANDATES (AND STATE MANDATES CAN SUPPORT ACTION CIVICS)

8. Public Act 099-0434 mandates that for high school graduation, students must have “at least one semester must be civics, which shall help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives. Civics course content shall focus on government institutions, the discussion of current and controversial issues, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process.”
9. “The result of a three year state-led collaborative effort, the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards was developed to serve two audiences: for states to upgrade their state social studies standards and for practitioners — local school districts, schools, teachers and curriculum writers — to strengthen their social studies programs. Its objectives are to: a) enhance the rigor of the social studies disciplines; b) build critical thinking, problem solving, and participatory skills to become engaged citizens; and c) align academic programs to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies.” <https://www.socialstudies.org/c3>

ACTION CIVICS CAN BE INTEGRATED INTO TEACHERS’ EXISTING PRACTICES, BUT TEACHERS NEED SUPPORT

10. Read more about Tennessee’s law [here](#).

THANK YOU

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