

EQUITY IN CIVIC EDUCATION:

Insights from the Massachusetts
Policy Context

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Introduction

Why do we need an equity-centered civics education policy in the United States? Civics education is unequal, in both quality and access, disadvantaging students from institutionally underserved communities from the benefits of the leading approaches. Civics education should strive to provide all students with a comprehensive, culturally relevant learning experience that builds the life-long knowledge, skills, and motivation critical for democratic participation.

The conventional form of civics education prioritizes the study of founding documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation without a corollary emphasis on civic participation or the social context which gave rise to the founding documents. By contrast, a focus on equity-oriented civics education emphasizes the interrelated importance of civic knowledge, dispositions, and participation; the value of a culturally relevant curriculum, and a diverse teacher workforce working with administrators to create democratic school cultures that engage students in the public policy process.

A co-equal emphasis on civic participation, alongside civic knowledge and civic values isn't inherently partisan. Instead, it is a proven method of preparing students to fully assume the rigors, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship. Stated differently, equity-centered civics education isn't a short-term priority in response to the latest social crisis. Rather, equity-centered civics education is

about creating effective learning environments that prepare students, educators, district leaders, and even community members to be informed stewards of the multiracial democracy that America must strive to become.

Realizing this ambition begins in part with a simultaneous focus on developing inclusive statewide coalitions and equitable civics policies that:

1. **Expand equality of access to comprehensive civic learning that blends project-based democracy education with a contextual approach to civic knowledge;**
2. **Amplify the coalitional voice of stakeholders historically excluded from being at the center of civics policy, including parents, teachers, community members, youth organizers, and student perspectives; and**
3. **Ensure the effective implementation of civics education policy that secures adequate financial resources, teacher training opportunities, and strategic priority for civics among indicators of success.**

Given the racial and civic reckoning happening in the country, the need for equity-centered civics education could not be more apparent. Relatedly, the need for statewide models of civics education that, at once, aim for universal access, depth, and equity, is particularly urgent.

This paper explores a coalition-oriented approach to developing equity-centered civic education policy, examining Massachusetts as a model as the state worked to pass comprehensive civics legislation and continues to work to ensure equitable policy implementation.

States as varied in geography, pedagogical approach, and political composition as Illinois and Florida, as well as Indiana and Utah, have pursued a coalition-oriented approach to developing civics education policies. What distinguishes Massachusetts, perhaps, among these states is this: Massachusetts' concurrent revision of its standards and civics education policy statutes; its strong and inclusive civics education coalition; a deep partnership with the state education agency; and arguably the nation's most comprehensive, state-level civics education standards and law.

Best practices and lessons learned from the Massachusetts policy model are worth close consideration by other states, as well as federal level policymakers looking to states to continue their historic role of being laboratories of democracy. This paper lifts up key insights from the Massachusetts civic education policy context, articulating practices that lead to equitable civics education policy at three stages: (1) coalition building, (2) policy proposal and passage, and (3) policy implementation.

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About Generation Citizen

OUR MISSION

Generation Citizen is working to transform civics education so that young people are equipped and inspired to exercise their civic power.

OUR VISION

We envision a just, inclusive democracy that is responsive to all young people.



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Massachusetts Civic Education Context

Massachusetts is consistently ranked as one of the best states for school quality in Education Week's annual report card of state education systems, *Quality Counts*. With 404 districts and each community given local autonomy in their approach to education, Massachusetts leads in Chance for Success and K-12 Achievement in the 2020 Quality Counts report card. The Chance for Success indicator offers insight "on the role that education in a state plays as a person moves from early childhood through the formal pre-K-12 school system and ultimately into postsecondary education and/or the workforce."¹ The K-12 Achievement indicator measures reading and math performance, high school graduation, and success on Advanced Placement tests.

Despite Massachusetts' strong reputation of educational excellence, inequalities exist within the education system related to racial segregation, teacher diversity, and access to quality civic education. Racial segregation in schools continues to be an issue for many communities across the state. Research from Beyond Test Scores Project and the Center for Education and Civic Rights shows the number of intensely segregated non-white schools, or schools that are more than 90 percent non-white, increased by 34 percent in the last 10 years. In Boston, during the same time period, the percentage of intensely segregated non-white schools held steady at 55.6 percent. In Springfield, the percentage increased by 22.5 percentage points and by 8.9 percentage points

in Worcester. Research shows that intensely segregated schools and majority African American/Black and Latinx schools perform far worse than diverse and majority white schools.²

Data collected from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) shows that the teacher workforce does not reflect the students who attend public schools in the state. In fact, the percentage of teachers who identify as BIPOC increased from 7% in 2015 to just 8.3% in 2020. During that same period, students who identified as BIPOC increased from 37.2 percent to 42.1 percent.³ This disparity in teacher diversity, both in terms of teacher recruitment and teacher retention, has many implications for students, namely BIPOC students, and the effects of BIPOC students who are taught by BIPOC teachers have been well documented. Research has shown that BIPOC teachers "have the potential to build bridges to learning for students of color" and that diversifying the teacher workforce is a vital step to closing achievement gaps between BIPOC and white students.⁴ Additionally, multiple studies have shown that BIPOC students who are taught by a BIPOC teacher experience better academic outcomes than those who are not taught by a BIPOC teacher.^{5, 6}

Specific to civic education in Massachusetts, a baseline study conducted in 2018 among district leaders and teachers revealed a stark need for greater civic learning in public schools. Just 40%

of district leaders and 25% of the classroom social studies and civics teachers thought professional development in civics was available to teachers while only 48% of district leaders and 22% of teachers believed that there were opportunities (time, space, and rewards) for teachers to develop civics lessons.

Two years after policy passage, a study called **The State of Civic Education in Massachusetts** commissioned by DESE conducted by Tufts University Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and the Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development assessed progress toward equitable policy implementation goals two years into the civics law's implementation. It revealed that District per-pupil expenditures were positively and significantly associated with civic teaching competency across multiple scales for

elementary and secondary teachers, shedding light on disparities specifically for students attending low-resourced schools districts. At the elementary school level, districts with a high proportion of low-income students and ELLs relative to the state population were less likely to have time dedicated to social studies. Forty-two percent of teachers in the study reported having never been offered civics PD opportunities and only 18% reported being offered learning opportunities focused on civics more than once a year.⁷ A report by Sandra Soto, Jon Basile, and the Office of State Representative Andy X. Vargas revealed that civics projects are least accessible to students with disabilities and students who are English Language Learners.⁸ This data reveals that there remains much work to be done to achieve equitable civic outcomes for all learners in Massachusetts, and the work must continue to receive investment and support from all stakeholders.



Massachusetts Civics Policy Timeline & Milestones

In response to the need to bolster civic education, key milestones were advanced by community members, educators, students, and elected and government officials over the last five years, leading to the development of a robust ecosystem of policies and resources to support civic learning in Massachusetts.

In 2016 the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education convened a Task Force of educators, nonprofits, and researchers to develop a [**Civic Learning and Engagement Strategic Plan**](#) for the state. Published the following year, the plan outlined key recommendations for civic education identifying the following areas to improve civic learning and engagement⁹:

- Create policy and broad-based, consistent support
- Create relevant resources
- Align existing resources for civic learning
- Provide professional development for educators
- Develop data and accountability measures to elevate the importance of civic learning and engagement among educators and the general public

Soon after in 2017, Generation Citizen, iCivics, and the JFK Library formed the first iteration of the Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition (MCLC). This coalition formed to re-draft and advocate for the passing of legislation that would strengthen civics education in Massachusetts. Until that point,

nonprofits, as well as student and community advocates such as Teens Lead the Way, who began much of the work on strengthening civics education in the years leading up to 2017, advocated for civics legislation independent of each other.

With the formation of the MCLC, and the inclusion of those who were working on strengthening civics education, the coalition focused efforts on redrafting existing legislation and introducing An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement with Massachusetts State Senator Harriette Chandler and State Representative Linda Dean Campbell, and working with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to align the bill with the revised History and Social Science Framework. After the legislation was introduced, the MCLC focused their efforts on advocating for the bill. The MCLC hosted Lobby Days, organized phonebanks, met with representatives and senators, and worked with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to advocate for the legislation's success.

After nearly a decade of advocacy by disparate groups and stakeholders, and a little more than a year advocating as a coalition, [**An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement**](#) was signed into law by Governor Charlie Baker in November 2018. Immediately following its passage, the MCLC advocated for a \$1.5 million Civics Project Trust Fund, which was written into the FY19 state budget and each year since, and is used by school districts

to provide professional development opportunities to educators and purchase curricular materials to implement civics education.

Meanwhile, during the same time the civics legislation was being passed into law, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) conducted a **History and Social Science Framework** revision process. Members of the MCLC were contributors to this revision which concluded during the summer of 2018, just months before the civics bill passed into law. The majority of its core changes centered civic knowledge and practice standards throughout each grade level, including dedicating all of the 8th grade to civics, thus establishing a full-year civics course.

These three key policy reforms, the new civics law, funding of the Civics Trust Fund, and revision of the History and Social Science Framework, paved the way for the years to follow of intentional work throughout the state to equitably implement quality civics learning for all young people in Massachusetts. The MCLC now works in partnership with the state education agency, DESE, to advise and assist with the equitable implementation of the civics law and standards and the spending of the \$1.5 million Civics Project Trust Fund each year.

Massachusetts Civic Education Policy Milestones



3 Stages of Equitable Civic Education Policy



In order to address the inequities that exist in access to high-quality civic learning for young people in the United States, it is imperative we ensure that the content of civic education policies lift up equitable definitions of civic education, while also ensuring the processes communities engage in to design policy, build coalitions, and implement policy center equitable practices and outcomes at all stages. **Equity must be the ‘north star’ in guiding what success looks like both in policy content and implementation practices.**

During each stage of the policy process — (1) coalition building, (2) proposing and passing policy, and (3) policy implementation — careful consideration must be given to how equity is being centered in

the processes that coalitions, elected officials, and community stakeholders engage in together. If we interrogate the process in this way, the goal the goal of passing policies that lead to equitable outcomes for youth will invariably follow.

The sections to follow offer “promising practices” and “lessons learned” about how to center equity in civic education policy at each stage of the process using the successful passage of civics education policy in Massachusetts as a reflective example to illuminate both approaches to lift up and areas that can be strengthened.

3 Stages of Equity-Centered Civics Education Policy



Stage 1: Coalition Building

Coalitions allow policy efforts to reflect the true needs of a community and be pursued in a sustained manner over time.

When done well, a broad and diverse network of organizations working to accomplish shared goals allows for the building of community power. It also ensures those closest to the impact are involved in the design, advocacy, implementation, and defense of policies and funding.

Ensure diverse and broad stakeholder engagement

A coalition grounded in a value of equity when pursuing the advancement of civics education must ensure diverse stakeholder representation in its membership. Diverse representation will be defined differently by each community depending on their unique context but includes consideration of diversity in race, ethnicity, age, region, and engaging stakeholders from different sectors involved in civics education (students, teachers, nonprofits, executive and legislative offices). Those who convene a potential coalition must realize everyone who has an interest in strengthening civic education is not always connected to a traditional classroom. Moreover, a coalition should set a goal to reflect the demographics of the state, and more ideally the demographics of young people, to ensure that leadership represents the stakeholders most affected by civic education policies.

Building diverse and representative coalition membership poses a challenge given that the civic

education field in Massachusetts and across the nation is historically and currently predominately white, including the teacher workforce.¹⁰ When the MCLC was formed, the coalition reflected the civic education field and mostly consisted of people and organizations who were already connected to each other, including member organizations with predominantly white leaders. Within the last two years, the MCLC has begun the process of thoroughly examining its coalition structure and setting new member recruitment goals to ensure it moves closer to the goal described previously, taking steps to achieve some promising practices that can help achieve greater coalition diversity.

One promising practice to accomplish diverse representation and broad stakeholder engagement is to conduct a comprehensive landscape analysis of the civic education field in the region or state before a group of stakeholders is convened. This involves researching and engaging a wide array of those in your state who have a history working on civics related issues and thinking outside the usual mold of what civics work looks like. Some groups to consider include engaging youth-led and youth-centric organizations, educators, community organizers, those working to strengthen democracy, civics education organizations, civil rights organizations, faith communities, government partners, and democracy reform organizations.

A second promising practice is to design coalition infrastructure with a focus on member access and

engagement. The MCLC is currently rethinking what it means to be a member of the coalition, by engaging in a process to define membership in a way that is accessible to a wider range of organizations. This includes creating a tiered membership structure based on minimum commitments, so potential members who have limited capacity but want to have ways to engage and have voice in decisions are not excluded.

Given the time and capacity involved in coalition membership, additional ways for stakeholders closest to the work, students and teachers, to engage if they cannot be full members include developing a Teacher Advisory Board or an annual Student Summit to ensure teachers and students are informing the goals and direction of the coalition at strategic points during the year. Directing funding toward stipends for youth and educator participation can help increase access to these opportunities. Intentionally engaging diverse voices and offering varied ways to engage is critical for coalitions to advance equity-centered goals that reflect the needs of the community.

Establish a Shared Definition of Equitable Civics Education

Identifying a shared definition of what equitable civics education means to the coalition, one that reflects that community's unique context, is vital to ensuring equity is at the center of a coalition's work. Articulating what equitable civics education means can help guide a civics education coalition's design process, goal setting, and how resources and time are used. For this to be done well, the process of identifying a shared definition must include input from all members of a coalition, multiple opportunities for feedback, and consensus building that includes opportunities for amendments. This process can be revisited on an annual basis, to assess the changes and emerging needs in community context.

Fortunately, definitions have been offered by researchers that can help start discussions among coalition members to establish a shared understanding, and definition of equity in civics education. Two notable papers, the [Equity in Civic Education White Paper](#) and the [National Academy of Education \(NAEd\) Educating for Civic Reasoning and Discourse Report](#), offer definitions that coalitions can reflect on to guide their thinking. Definitions of equitable civic learning offered by researchers are often connected by shared themes related to *access, quality, and culture*.

Access: An equitable definition of civics education is one that ensures all students have access to quality civics education. This includes ensuring that socioeconomic status, zip code, and racial identities do not impact a students' ability to access a quality civics education. Examining data that reveals disparities across lines of identity can help determine where coalition goals and policy efforts should be focused.

Quality: The main areas to consider when defining quality civics education are content, pedagogy, student experience, and student voice. "Quality civics education also depends on allocating sufficient instructional time dedicated to civics education. Across the research, equitable civics education includes content that is inclusive, representative, and relevant."¹¹ This means a civics education that is project-based and inquiry-oriented. Further, quality civics education should provide knowledge and political acumen that is connected to students' identities, race, and lived experience, elevates and respects student voice, and develops civic reasoning and discourse skills that involves weighing multiple points of view and analyzing information to identify misinformation.^{12,13}

Weighing multiple points of view is especially important. Quality civics education encourages students to embrace viewpoint diversity and to practice active listening, particularly when encountering perspectives different from their own.

Culture: Schools are one of the first civic spaces young people encounter in their lives. In schools, students are sent messages based on the culture of these spaces about their role and voice as a member of the community. Equitable civic learning practices consider school-level efforts to build youth voice into school and district decision making, for example through participatory budgeting practices and engaged student government, and consider ways to address the racially disparate impact of harsh discipline policies in schools. Such policies can help ensure democratic cultures exist for all young people. The goal of building an equitable classroom culture is to emphasize that students are part of school communities that consider them as civic actors.¹⁴ Those working in education must practice centering democratic culture both in classrooms and school-wide, elevating and respecting student voice in learning and contributing to the vitality of the school-wide community.^{15,16}

Early on the MCLC identified three policy core “must-haves” for quality civic learning that they felt could lead to the greatest equitable outcomes for young people: (1) Robust teacher professional learning, (2) access to student-led civics projects, and (3) funding. The group prioritized these three areas as the greatest areas of need in order to pursue equitable civic learning in the state and continued to advocate for them in all policy efforts despite those provisions being the hardest aspects of policy reform to uphold. For example, in a number of instances when advocating the civics bill, the project requirement

was discussed as being omitted to secure its ease of passage. Ultimately, the MCLC was able to retain to its original definition of equitable civic learning and uphold this aspect of the bill in its final version, despite the risks of doing so.

MCLC’s commitment to centering equity did not as consistently show up in the later phases of the work. The Coalition would have been well served to revisit their definition of equitable civic learning following policy passage of the civics law and Framework when entering policy implementation phase. By doing so, the coalition may have been better equipped to address issues around implementation regarding civic project access, for example, for ELLs and students with disabilities which there presently exist continued gaps in access and quality.

Center Equity in the Coalition Mission, Values and Goals

It is crucial that during the initial stages of coalition building that a consensus is reached about how to center the goal of equity in civic learning in a coalition’s mission, values and goals. Doing so can help ensure that equity is the cornerstone and a guiding principle for members of the coalition which can then inform the design of the coalition, the content of policies, and strategies for sustaining the work.

When initially developing the MCLC mission and values, equity was not named explicitly as a value or in the mission statement. Two years after its founding, however, the MCLC conducted a series of value-setting activities with the membership, including naming equity as a core value that would guide the work moving forward. The Coalition then revised its mission and vision statement to explicitly name equitable civic learning and equitable student outcomes as central to its purpose.

MCLC, at the time of this publication's report exploring how to center the named core value of equity more robustly in its annual goal-setting processes and coalition structures. The first step to doing this, involves taking the definition of equitable civic learning and exploring where inequities exist in the state and national civic learning field. Understanding these gaps can direct goal setting toward closing them and help ensure those farthest away from access to equitable civic learning are prioritized.

Another critical element to the goal setting process is the understanding that the purpose of the coalition is not solely about passing a single policy reform. Focusing only a single policy reform is of course important, but insufficient by itself. Only reform that focuses on developing an ecosystem of civic learning policies over time will lead to sustained and equitable outcomes for youth. The hard work of persisting beyond policy passage to support equitable implementation of public policy is a moral imperative that helps ensure the realization of laws intended to advance equitable outcomes for students and their families imperative.

The MCLC recognized the importance of setting a multitude of policy goals that build a strong civics learning ecosystem early on. As a coalition, they pursued three policy efforts across legislative, executive, and budgetary means to tackle the issue from multiple angles, recognizing the varied levers of change. After supporting successful policy passage on all three fronts, MCLC began setting its annual goals to support the policy implementation phase, using a multitude of approaches including partnering with the department of education to ensure community input is received and acted on; advocating for an equitable distribution of resources

to support professional development for educators; and developing state-wide professional development opportunities and civic learning resource hub.

In addition to concrete policy goals, a coalition should also set goals that focus on building capacity and resources to cultivate and realize power as a coalition in the long-term. This will allow coalitions to emerge from being volunteer-led to having the resources needed to fund staff positions and stipend youth and teachers to engage in the work. Building resources and capacity for the coalition to persist and grow ensures that it is set-up to do the long-term work of implementing, not just passing, policies with stakeholder engagement that reflect the needs of all community stakeholders.

Ensure the Coalition Engages in Equitable Organizational Practices

Coalitions, however voluntary or informal, are working organizations and, as such, must develop equitable organizational practices that ensure access, voice, and power for all members.

Establishing equitable coalition structures is another vital component of coalition building. Without equitable organizational practices, the process of advancing coalition goals can become unsustainable or unintentionally privilege certain voices over others, leading to goals that do not reflect the needs of the community. Completing an intentional design of coalition structures is critical to upholding and advancing equitable civic learning outcomes.

The MCLC started as a volunteer run group but over time identified and raised resources that allowed it to have part-time staff and interns support its function. Over time, two key needs were identified that were lacking in organizational structure and process.

Firstly, there was a lack of formal decision-making processes and some decisions were being made in silos without certain voices at the table. Second, there was a lack of clarity on who was completing the work and outlined commitments for members to advance the work forward.

While there is no “one size fits all” for this part of coalition building, the strategies below provide promising practices for establishing equitable coalition structures and processes.

Developing structures, like committees and working groups, is a great way to ensure clarity around how the work is being done and how to best leverage the assets and talents of members to advance the coalition goals. MCLC uses five committees to make progress on different goals: the Advocacy Committee, Marketing & Communications Committee, Teaching & Learning Committee, Fundraising Committee and Membership Committee. These committees, respectively, are designed to engage the legislature and policymakers, implement strategies on marketing and communications, design and compile state-wide resources for civic learning to support educators, build resources for the coalition and its goals by engaging funders, and implement policies to improve membership experience. Chairs of these committees along with the coalition leaders sit on a Steering Committee to collectively drive forward the vision.

The MCLC found committees that work in tandem with working groups to be a good strategy to ensure work is completed in a more equitable way, equitable here meaning to maximize coalition member voice. When there is a concrete project or event in need of dedicated organizing, members from different committees can join a working group and volunteer

to lend their perspective and expertise in planning, design, and implementation. The working group structure also can lead to deeper membership engagement, the spreading of responsibility, and opportunities to engage youth and educators in concrete projects who may not have the capacity for full coalition membership.

Determining decision-making processes in coalitions is another area that can support equitable and inclusive membership engagement. Mapping the out core decisions a coalition will make and who holds decision making responsibility can lead to greater transparency and collaboration. Using consensus building for the most important decisions, in lieu of a majority vote, can help ensure that all voices are heard and is a powerful opportunity for trust building. Consensus building takes time, but creates the buy-in needed to robustly engage membership in advancing goals. While it may not be possible to use consensus building for all decisions, it is important to utilize it for crucial decision that a coalition makes, such as deciding its annual goals and forming its mission and values.

Secure Resources to Build and Sustain Coalition Capacity

The need to to raise adequate financial resources and capacity to sustain coalition work is critical for the work to be done well. Whereas a majority of members of a coalition will do this work on a volunteer basis, there is a limited amount of time members can use to focus on coalition efforts. This makes funding essential for coalition work to be effectively done and to execute the work outlined in this paper.

MCLC first began as a completely volunteer-led coalition. Members quickly realized that in order

to accomplish our goals and to ensure equity is centered at each step, the coalition needed resources to dedicate staff time. To that end, the coalition formed a Fundraising Committee and members came together from different organizations and sectors to compile a list of potential funders to approach and map their relationships. The Committee approached

and secured resources from several different foundation funders that were then applied towards dedicated staffing of the coalition and its core projects and goals. The MCLC eventually secured a fiscal sponsor in order to take in revenue to fund the coalition's staff and special projects.

Stage 1: Coalition Building

Strategy	Looks Like
Ensure diverse and broad stakeholder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a comprehensive landscape analysis of potential coalition members, considering organizations outside the traditional mold of what civics work looks like. • Create levels of Coalition membership and varied ways to engage to ensure access to core stakeholder groups.
Establish a Shared Definition of Equitable Civics Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and review available data to understand inequities that exist in the civic education field in your state. • Explore pre-existing definitions of policy platforms that advance equitable civic education • Through consensus building, reach a shared understanding of the meaning of equity in civics education to ground future goal setting and policy priorities
Center Equity in the Coalition Mission, Values and Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage coalition in setting core values and guiding principles • Center equitable outcomes in civic learning in coalition annual goal-setting processes • Build an ecosystem of policy reforms to tackle the issues in multiple ways
Ensure the Coalition Engages in Equitable Organizational Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop structures like committees and working groups to engage members voice and talents in different ways • Develop transparent and inclusive decision-making processes for core decisions the coalition makes
Secure Resources to Build and Sustain Coalition Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Fundraising Committee to pursue philanthropic support • Establish the coalition with a fiscal sponsor to be able to take in and distribute funding

Stage 2: Policy Development and Passage

Develop policy language in stages, alongside coalition partners and lawmakers

As a best practice, policy language for civics education should be crafted in stages so that there are ample opportunities for community input. This includes involving stakeholder groups, particularly young people, parents, educators, civics education providers, and researchers, as an active part of the process. The MCLC, to some degree, approximated this process by engaging its member groups in the stages of creating policy provisions for what would eventually become S. 2631, the landmark civics bill. In addition to community-based groups and stakeholder groups, legislators and their staff, particularly legislative directors, policy analysts, and chiefs of staff, should be consulted early in the process of forming a bill.

Practically speaking, every civics bill needs a bill author and credible, bipartisan pathway for amassing co-sponsors, champions in the relevant committee (usually an education committee), and legislative supporters who will either endorse the bill — or minimally, remain neutral — once it reaches the floor. The odds of a bill garnering affirmative votes in the legislative chamber is heightened when both lawmaker and coalitional voices that represent the breadth of the state are early stage designers, advisers, and ultimately, champions of a comprehensive, equity-centered civics education policy.

With respect to S. 2631, legislators and the Coalition engaged the Department of Elementary

and Secondary Education early in the bill development process, taking care to align with and reinforce priorities articulated in a strategic plan report released the previous year. Additionally, the arc of the bill, built on the underpinnings of a bill that Teens Leading the Way introduced nearly a decade before the introduction of S. 2631. The precedent of youth legislative engagement and DESE partnership was also augmented by a strong coalition of lawmakers including former Senate President Harriette Chandler, Rep. Linda Campbell, Rep. Andy Vargas, and others. Of particular note, and as an outcome of spirited internal discussion, the coalition (which formally took shape shortly after the bill introduction) agreed that the bill's policy design should retain an inspiring and bold trajectory, rather than a modest, incremental approach to civic learning.

In terms of weaknesses, a full-fledged coalition, rather than a set of loosely affiliated, deeply engaged organizational actors, would have ideally formed prior to the bill introduction. Additionally, even deeper, wider engagement of youth and educator voices, along with more diverse community representation and involvement in the coalition would have strengthened the policy development and advocacy process. These growth areas notwithstanding, the momentum created by the coalition's energy and the bill itself ultimately created conditions for increased coalitional participation in amending, and ultimately, lobbying for the bill.

Prioritize teacher professional development and teacher diversity

Given the centrality of educators to the learning process, comprehensive, equity-centered civics education policy necessarily includes a focus on training and developing teachers to provide culturally relevant democracy education, informed by current events, the lived experiences of students, project-based pedagogy, and the place-based context surrounding districts and schools. The exact nature of policy provisions prioritizing teacher professional development varies, but the underlying design principle is that legislation should authorize and position a state's department of education to allocate staff or consultant capacity, and dedicate training resources — meaning incentives like teacher stipends — in order to encourage the skill acquisition, confidence building, and continuous improvement needed to teach civics well. Notably, S. 2631 contains provisions that encourage to educators teach about structural racism as one aspect of a well-rounded civics education. The bill's provision of “community diversity and historical trends in voter registration and civic participation relative to disenfranchised voter populations”, for example, alludes to structural racism — given the correlations between race and historical trends in voting access and participation - in ways that encourage it to be taught, without requiring educators to adopt any particular position on the content. One North Star of teacher professional development, from an equity-rooted lens, is to prepare educators to facilitate the creation of a democratic school culture and an emphasis on student voice. Additionally, equity-rooted civic education policy should emphasize the importance of both recruiting and retaining a diverse teacher workforce — particularly teachers of color — which is correlated with higher academic outcomes for

students, as well as the value of creating a more inclusive learning environment that reflects the demographics of diverse learners.¹⁷

In the Massachusetts context, support for teacher professional development garnered buy-in from across the political and coalitional spectrum, eventually resulting in the following policy provisions: 1) revenue expressly set aside for teacher professional development; 2) teacher training aligned with Massachusetts' history and social science framework; and 3) the authorization of both statewide and regional trainings, inclusive of teacher professional development opportunities. This work, ultimately, aims to create deep connective tissue among teachers, forging a community of educators, whose practice remains on the cutting edge of innovation, equity, and excellence in providing democracy education for students through schools with strong community based ties.

Strive for comprehensive access to student-led, project-based civics, beginning with historically underserved communities

High-quality, well-rounded civics education should include an experiential component, which refers to methods like service learning and project-based learning. A burgeoning array of research demonstrates that project-based learning, in particular, is an effective method of civics education instruction, indeed more effective than traditional methods of social studies instruction.¹⁸ The Massachusetts legislation includes provisions for “student-led civics projects” as a recognition of the evidence-supported truism that *doing civics* is both an efficient and effective method of learning civics. Civics projects, for clarity, are nonpartisan while engaging the public policy process; rooted in

student-oriented analysis, like root cause research and youth participatory action research, as well as in policy advocacy; and are capable of being administered on a group or individual basis.

States considering project-based civics, additionally, should consider Massachusetts' example of providing expansive access to civics education by utilizing a mandate for its provision. Students of color and learners in lower-income areas, in particular, have not historically enjoyed robust access to project-based education, due in part to inadequate resources, but also to due to implicit bias from education leaders, some of whom presume that the aforementioned students are not ready for experiential pedagogies that engage the whole child.¹⁹ A part of the argument for a universal civics mandate, then, is to ensure access to comprehensive democracy education for all students, especially those who have been institutionally and historically underserved by school systems.

In terms of operationalizing a mandate, particular aspects of Massachusetts' policy example are worth considering closely, including: the increased student access to civics that results from mandating provision of experiential civics; the related equity issue of redressing disparate access to civics through a systems-wide approach to civics; and the necessity of having a revenue solution, such as a public-private trust fund, in order to ensure not only access, but also quality, and district-level support for schools, educators, families, and administrators furthest from opportunity.

Advocate for dedicated civic education funding

The civics legislation in Massachusetts includes a first of its kind civics project trust fund, which

authorizes public and private revenue sources for use to advance civics education. Principally focused on professional development, the fund also permits use of revenue to facilitate collaboration “between institutions of higher education and other stakeholder organizations”, evaluate student-led civics projects, and implement strategies designed to strengthen civic learning. Administered by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the fund notably includes a statutory provision that allows for equity as a distributive principle influencing the allocation of resources. The relevant section states: “amounts credited to the fund may focus on underserved communities...including those school districts with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students”. The revenue provision of the civics bill has inspired a range of bills drawing on its model, including proposed legislation in states as varied as Rhode Island and Texas.

The Trust Fund, in particular, deserves special mention. In the first instance, providing funding for districts with less resources and capacity to dedicate to important functions, like teacher professional development or supporting a community of practice and strategy among administrators, strengthens the civics education ecosystem of the entire state, not the districts themselves. In the second, perhaps more important instance, there's an equity challenge associated with unfunded mandates. When districts receive additional requirements without additional funding support, it pressurizes the ability to deliver an effective, equitable learning environment for students, and can alienate potential stakeholders that would otherwise support increasing quality democracy education. For this reason, retaining a funding component to civics education policy is best viewed as an essential, rather than severable,

portion of the bill. Finally, incorporating public-private revenue mechanisms like a trust fund requires statutory language which ensures that monetary contributions do not unduly influence civics instruction. Both the operation as well as the mere appearance of a “pay to play” provision should be addressed, and prohibited, by explicit provision in a civics education bill.

While this provision for equitable allocation of resources, at the time of publication, is perhaps the strongest in the country, it could be further strengthened. During the policy development process, the Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition and its legislative partners considered the possibility of requiring — rather than simply permitting — the use of funds to prioritize underserved communities, but ultimately opted not to do so due to a lack of policymaker support for the amendment.

States considering a requirement around equitable resource allocation might consider building both coalitional and policymaker consensus for the policy provision in the early stages of policy design, rather than the amendment phase of the legislative advocacy process.

Consider alignment and timing when revising legislation to be in concert with statewide standards revision

In order to ensure equity through the entire civics education ecosystem, states should strive towards a congruent, cohesive focus on equitable civics in both legislative and the administrative guidance which social studies standards provide. As recently indicated in the Fordham Institute’s 50-state review of social studies standards, the guiding role of standards and related curricular framework helps to ensure that the skills of critical thinking, problem

analysis, and advocacy are developed among students.²⁰ As an additional incentive to develop or revise equity-oriented standards, the Massachusetts case illustrates that stakeholders can more easily advocate for holistic, universal civics education when standards themselves prioritize without prescribing, what said education might look like at a local level.

For states where revising or developing standards isn’t a near term option, a few alternative options may exist. The state legislature can direct a state educational agency to revise a specific portion of its standards, including targeted sections of social studies standards. Or, as a second possibility, state educational agencies (SEA) and legislatures can jointly authorize a commission, potentially housed with the SEA, to focus on developing equity-oriented social studies standards.

Concurrent advocacy for the 2018 civics bill and the revisions of Massachusetts history and social science framework facilitated an unusual amount of collaboration in terms of civics education policy design across the legislative and administrative branches. Areas of deep alignment with definitions of equitable civic learning included a focus on civic skill development, rather than the traditional weighted priority given to civics content and literacy without a corresponding emphasis on the experiential components of democracy education. Further, the inclusion of culturally relevant civic learning priorities in both the framework revision process, and the legislation itself marked a highwater point of centering equity in the instruction and civic learning experience of educators and students.

Massachusetts’ equity-oriented approach to its history and social science framework provided a constructive complement to civics education

legislation emphasizing equity. The framework and legislation, in particular, both highlighted culturally relevant emphasis on culturally relevant content that speaks to the lived experiences of students, as well as the contextual impact of political culture and history on the context in which students learn about and do civics, i.e. civics projects and other experiential dimensions of civic learning. As an example, one of Massachusetts' guiding principles named in the framework revision for teaching civics highlights the importance of having

“diverse perspectives, identities, and narratives... be a part of how we think about civics education”. This emphasis of multiple perspectives, rather than a single-story or weighted priority approach to integrating civics and history, is an essential, though sometimes overlooked aspect of equitable civics education. In some ways, this focus on a paradigm of diverse perspectives integrating civics and history anticipated the integrative equity framework set forth in the Educating for American Democracy roadmap.²¹

Stage 2: Policy Development & Passage

Strategy	Looks Like
Develop Policy Language in Stages, Alongside Coalition Partners and Lawmakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft policies in stages so as to create multiple opportunities for community input • Engage a multitude of early stage designers and advisers, who ultimately become long-term champions
Prioritize Teacher Professional Development and Teacher Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center teacher professional develop and the state and district capacity and resources needed to robustly deliver it in all policy reforms
Strive for comprehensive access to student-led, project-based civics, beginning with historically underserved communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the benefits of as well as disparities in access to experiential, project-based civics • Consider strong mandates to ensure project-based civics reaches historically underserved communities
Advocate for dedicated funding for civic education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate the need for any policy mandate to be funded in order to produce equitable outcomes for youth • Establishing a state-wide civics trust fund or dedicated line-item to fund civic education policy mandates
Consider alignment and timing when revising legislation to be in concert with statewide standards revision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align through collaboration and timing legislative and administrative approaches to civic education policy reform • Advocate for the launch of a state commission to develop new social studies standards and frameworks

Stage 3: Policy Implementation

Once state-level policies are passed, the next leg of work begins, policy implementation, a stage that deserves years of sustained attention and support. Establishing broad and equitable implementation goals involves deep stakeholder engagement, attention to state-wide capacity building, and careful consideration of how resources are utilized.

Build state, district, and community-level capacity to support policy implementation

Due to the deprioritization of civics over time, capacity and resources to support civic education at the state and district level are limited in almost every state in the country. Often, Departments of Education and school districts do not have a dedicated staff person focused solely on History and Social Studies, nevermind a dedicated staff person focused on civic education. Quality curriculum and resources have often not been vetted or centralized for educator use and rarely has a system and network of quality professional learning already been established. This and other capacity constraints pose challenges at the point of policy implementation once new laws or standards are established.

Increased capacity at all levels is needed in order to deliver quality outcomes and to equitably implement policy mandates. The initial phase of policy implementation, therefore, should focus on building capacity at the state, district, and community level in order to effectively build a state-wide ecosystem for quality civic learning.

During the first two years of policy implementation, Massachusetts built capacity in various ways. At *the state level*, there was a need for added staff capacity dedicated to civic learning. The MCLC advocated for full-time staff increases to bolster the capacity for History and Social Science in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This, in itself, was seen as a small but critical advocacy campaign by the Coalition. Added staffing has noticeably increased the state's ability to engage in initiatives to support educators across the state and to utilize the MA Civics Project Trust Fund for effectively including for state-wide curricular design projects, the creation of a Civics Project Guidebook, and the administration of Civic Learning Grants to school districts of nearly \$1 million each year.

At the district level, it is critical to have administrative-level knowledge, buy-in, and support for civic learning. Two years into the implementation of the civics law, the study commissioned by DESE revealed that in Massachusetts only 22% of middle and high school educators had awareness of the civics project legislation and knew how it would affect their instruction.⁷ Without district-level awareness of the new mandate and dedicated focused capacity to lead district-wide adoption, district-leaders and teachers have inconsistently become aware of the law and therefore inconsistently implemented its mandates within and across school districts. To begin to address this capacity gap, DESE and the MCLC have created

networks and professional learning opportunities specifically aimed at engaging administrators, not just teachers, some funded by the Civics Project Trust Fund and some funded by philanthropic dollars the MCLC has raised. Additionally, a reporting mechanism was introduced that requires Superintendents to twice annually report if their districts are implementing the civics projects. This has elevated this part of the new law specifically to the attention of Superintendents who are responsible for completing this reporting and raised both knowledge and prioritization of its need to be implemented. A new piece of legislation, [**An Act creating an inclusive vision for implementing civics studies**](#), has been introduced to require all school districts to assign a staff champion who will be responsible for leading the implementation of the civics law.

At the community level, local coalitions can play a meaningful role in building state-wide capacity for civic learning at policy implementation phase. In the case of the MCLC, the Coalition transitioned its goals from primarily advocacy in nature to a predominant focus on equitable and wide-spread policy implementation. The MCLC secured resources to develop a state-wide hub of civic learning resources and to conduct a state-wide marketing campaign to raise educator awareness about the civics law and new state standards. It runs ongoing professional learning webinars and a Civics Week Event each year with the goal of showcasing and promoting learning about best practices in civic education across the state. The MCLC, importantly, has also positioned itself in an advisory support role with the team responsible for policy implementation in the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and engages in quarterly meetings to offer advice on policy implementation

strategies and to develop concrete ways that the MCLC can bolster policy implementation efforts.

Create Evaluation and Accountability Systems that Disaggregate Outcomes

Another critical step in equitable policy implementation is the establishment of systems that monitor and evaluate progress and that create accountability mechanisms that incentivize robust policy adoption at both the district and state level.

Conducting a state-wide baseline evaluation at the start of policy implementation, one that can be re-administered to measure progress over a multi-year implementation phase, can help not only celebrate the incremental progress being made over time towards implementation goals but also help determine where gaps are emerging or persisting in equitable policy implementation.

The design of a study matters a great deal. What is measured and the corresponding outcomes that are revealed will drive an understanding of the needs that remain in implementation and, therefore, determine what targeted goals are being set to address them. It is imperative that data is disaggregated based on student and district characteristics in order to ensure progress is made toward redressing inequitable access to civic learning. The evaluation must move beyond ‘checking the boxes’ off if a school is doing something broadly (i.e. we do civics projects in the 8th grade, we have integrated the practice standards at the high school level) and examine, more deeply, factors related to quality instruction, including teacher competency-level and student learning outcomes. While a district may be reporting they are integrating, for example, the high school literacy standards for civic learning, the quality of

teaching, and therefore student learning outcomes, may vary dramatically from school to school.

In Massachusetts, an initial baseline study was not conducted of this nature immediately in 2018 following policy passage due to a lack of resources available. However, one year later, once the \$1.5 million Civics Trust Fund was established, DESE immediately allocated resources from the Fund to commission a [study](#) by the Tufts University Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and the Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development to examine policy implementation progress to date. The study design, importantly, disaggregated the data by student and school demographics. Findings concluded that there exist differences in access to civic learning across indicators of identity and social context. District per-pupil expenditures were positively and significantly associated with civic teaching competency, demonstrating inequities in access to civic learning across socioeconomic lines. Elementary school teachers in districts with a high proportion of economically disadvantaged students, or in districts with a high proportion of English learners relative to the state population, were more likely to report not having time dedicated to social studies. These findings are now critical in informing annual goal setting and how resources from the Civics Trust Fund are allocated to address uneven access to quality civic learning.

In addition to ongoing and quality evaluation, accountability mechanisms are important to establish for incentivizing districts to prioritize resources and capacity for civic learning. Overwhelmingly, educators across the state of Massachusetts, including teachers and district

leaders, report wanting to engage their students deeply in civic learning but point to lack of resources, incentives, and competing priorities as barriers. Whether it be state-testing, administrative reporting, or establishing an oversight committee, creating accountability mechanisms that districts and the state must adhere to, directs attention and resources to civic learning.

In Massachusetts, as is the case in many states, the focus on state testing in ELA and Math has directed a great deal of attention and resources to those subjects. During the year the civics bill became law and the Framework was developed, the Commissioner also announced the development of an 8th grade MCAS state civics test. While this is still in the development phase, the anticipation of its roll-out has helped incentivize districts to build their civic learning plans robustly in the years leading up to its enactment. This year, DESE also integrated a reporting mechanism for districts to report at the midpoint and end of each year if they are offering the civics projects. This small accountability metric has brought attention to this mandate at the Superintendent level that is helpful in building district-prioritization of and support for civic learning.

Center Equitable Civic Education Outcomes when Setting Implementation Goals

Following policy passage, a critical process for coalitions and Departments of Education to engage in with a broad group of stakeholders is to collectively answer the question, **“What does equitable implementation of civics policy look like five or ten years from now?”** This definition of success should center a shared definition of equitable civic learning in order to achieve

equitable policy implementation outcomes. Equitable implementation goal setting intentionally aims to make progress toward the ideal that **“access to quality civic learning is no longer circumscribed or disparate based on one’s social context or identity”**.

By centering this ideal when defining success, goals are set that directly address the systemic barriers that exist in the current system of civic learning and education, barriers that bring rise to inequitable outcomes for some groups over others.

Communities will need to ask and seek out data to understand where the gaps are in civic learning across identity and social context, hopefully informed by baseline and ongoing research that is collected using disaggregated data. It is ideal that a baseline study or data collection process be conducted if resources exist, or past data be utilized to draw such conclusions. Some areas to consider examining, while not exhaustive, include outcome differences in access to civic learning among particular grade levels (elementary, middle, high), particular student populations (i.e. BIPOC, ELL, economically disadvantaged) or particular district demographics (i.e. low Per-Pupil spending). In Massachusetts, data has shown that there exist gaps in teacher competency among schools serving students with high numbers of ELL, POC and economically disadvantaged students, those with low per pupil spending and in the elementary grades.

Once data is collected, it can be centered in goal setting to pursue equitable outcomes for youth. Because recent data in Massachusetts revealed that district per-pupil differences constitute one area of inequitable access to civic learning,

a goal focused on ensuring equitable civic learning outcomes for all youth would involve specifically focusing on closing the disparities in civics education among districts with low per pupil spending.

To provide a tangible example, an implementation goal that does not strive for equitable outcomes might state:

At least 80% of schools in the state report high levels of teacher competence when teaching civics by 2025.

An implementation goal that does strive for equitable outcomes might state:

At least 80% of schools in the state report high levels of teacher competence when teaching civics by 2025, with no difference in teacher competence levels among districts below the state average of per pupil spending compared with those above the state average of per pupil spending.

While the first goal is certainly an important one to achieve, achieving this goal runs the risk of neglecting to address the difference in teacher competence based on per pupil spending, an indicator that correlates with student population demographics like socioeconomic status, BIPOC populations, and English language learners. In the first example, the goal could be achieved but the remaining 20% of students could almost exclusively be schools that serve a majority socioeconomically disadvantaged, BIPOC or English language learner students. By setting implementation goals that focus attention on where inequity exists, we can ensure that implementation strategies and ongoing monitoring of progress give targeted attention to

closing gaps in access to civic learning based on identity and social context.

Ensure Equitable Distribution of Resources

Attention to acquisition and how we use resources dedicated to civic education is critical if we are to expect policy mandates to be equitably enacted given the lack of civic education funding that exists across the entire field. Once resources have been identified and secured, whether it be through the establishment of state-level trust funds or identified budget line-items at state or district levels, it is imperative to ensure they are used to support outcomes that promote equitable access to civic learning.

Following the allocation of the \$1.5 million Civics Trust Fund, the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary education took on the major task of administering this Fund, starting with deciding where and to what the funds would be directed. Working in consultation with the MCLC, DESE prioritized and continues to prioritize directing resources to close identified gaps and inequities in access that exist across the state. In the first year of administering the Fund, over \$800K was directed to districts in \$10-50K Civic Learning grants. Among the districts awarded, over 80% went to schools serving economically disadvantaged youth and those that clearly prioritized equitable and deeper learning outcomes.

In order to do this, DESE created a [weighted rubric](#) that gave priority to applications from districts where either (1) greater than 40% of the student population was designated as economically disadvantaged or (2) districts required assistance according to the state accountability system. They also named and gave competitive advantage to

two priority areas, Equity and Deeper learning, and reviewers ranked each proposal's alignment with these priorities.

The Equity priority area was defined as,

“Equity — Civics is not an ‘extra,’ and as such, all students should have access to high-quality civics learning experiences. Proposals will be prioritized for deepening civic learning opportunities for all students; providing professional development for teachers who serve all students; and/or providing civics learning opportunities to all students where previously these opportunities were not available. Proposals that benefit all students, rather than a subset of students, will be preferred.”

The Deeper Learning priority area was defined as:

“Deeper learning. Proposals that will promote student engagement in active, meaningful learning of civics skills, knowledge, and dispositions, which are thoughtfully standards-aligned and part of a larger plan for student civic learning, will be preferred over ‘one-off’ experiences for students.”

Through the consistent use of resources to strive towards universal access to quality civic learning, gaps identified through data collection, over time Massachusetts is striving to implement the myriad of civic education policies in an equitable way.

Stage 3: Policy Implementation

Strategy	Looks Like
Build state, district, and community-level capacity to support policy implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure state departments of education have the staff capacity to support policy implementation• Raise awareness and accountability among district-leaders to implement civics mandates• Reorient coalition goals and resources to provide support for state-wide civic learning
Create Evaluation and Accountability Systems that Disaggregate Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct baseline and ongoing evaluation to monitor progress of policy implementation• Ensure evaluation design disaggregated data to assess gaps in access and quality civic learning among certain student groups• Establish district or state wide reporting mechanisms for core civic learning mandates
Center Equitable Civic Education Outcomes when Setting Implementation Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Target implementation goals to address gaps in civic learning for students of particular identities or social context• Use an equity framework defined by data to inform goal-setting
Ensure Equitable Distribution of Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritize state funding for districts that support students and teachers most in need of civic learning resources• Develop rubrics for determining how funding is spend that center access, equity and deeper learning

Conclusion

In order to create and advocate for equity-centered civic education policy, individuals and organizations designing coalitions must ensure equity in civics education is at the center of what their coalition will aim to achieve. This means, first and foremost, centering equity in coalition design, infrastructure, and decision-making.

In addition, civics education coalitions need to work in concert with those closest to the impact of public policy — especially teachers and students, legislators, and departments of education. This includes during the drafting of legislation that advances equitable civics education and ensuring that legislation prioritizes educator professional development and diversity and comprehensive access to student-led, project-based civics.

Following policy development and passage, careful attention to detail is required to ensure that policy implementation is strong and sound. This involves creating buy-in at all levels to ensure departments of education dedicate staff to civic learning, educators at all levels receive support to implement high quality civics education, and the community can help provide resources and learning to further support civics education. Furthermore, evaluation and accountability systems that disaggregate outcomes must be designed to provide insight on how equitably the policy is being implemented and resources must be equitably distributed to school districts to ensure outcomes that lead to equitable access to civic learning are achieved. The North

Star of equitable civics education policy is ensuring that coalitional engagement, policy passage, and policy implementation can strive toward universal access to high-quality democracy education for all students, especially those which have been historically and institutionally underserved.

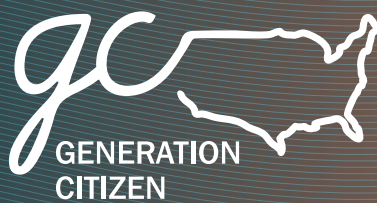
We hope the examples outlined in this paper can serve as a model for states starting a civics education coalition, strengthening an existing coalition, embarking on policy creation, or pursuing sustained policy implementation goals. This model is not intended to be seen as one-size-fits-all. Instead, it is meant to serve as a source of encouragement for civics education stakeholders looking for models to closely consider, adapt, and apply, where it makes sense, to your local context.

This work is challenging but it also provides its own inspiration. Preparing young people for their induction into a multiracial, constitutional democracy as citizens and civic participants is a unique, special obligation that all states and communities must fulfill for their students. We are often reminded why we do this work when we listen to students and teachers who share the impact that a civics class has had on them. From a shy student finding their voice and becoming a leader, to a teacher who witnesses their students engage with civics content more than ever before, to students who realize they can make an impact on their community and the world, we are grounded and sustained by remembering how civics education strengthens classrooms, communities, and our democracy.

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