

Executive Summary



Our youth need comprehensive civic education, and they need it now. We live in a time of complex current events, dwindling civic literacy, and decreasing trust among Americans, all of which emphasize the urgent need to teach youth how to work together towards collective societal goals.

This report leans on the powerful testimonies of eight civic educators in Texas to discuss current state civic education standards and the experiences of educators teaching civics today, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and amid the passage of anti-civics legislation like HB 3979 and SB 3 by the Texas Legislature.

The teachers discuss experiences that spell trouble for the future of civic education. There were several recurring themes throughout the interviews, such as:

- **Outdated and whitewashed standards:** Several Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for Social Studies are historically inaccurate and politically biased, while others exclude or distort the histories of people of color.
- **Lost instructional time:** Schools may deprioritize Social Studies due to the pressure of high-stakes testing in other subjects, leading to reduced instructional time and less attention from administrators.

- **Lack of institutional support:** Most schools rely solely on students and teachers to take on the burden of coordinating civic learning opportunities such as high school voter registration or community service projects.

- **Inequitable access:** Marginalized students – particularly students of color, rural students, and students living in poverty – face more barriers to civic engagement. These students are also less likely to receive a quality civics education because schools in marginalized communities often have fewer resources, may lack access to basic services such as internet, and experience additional pressures to focus on standardized testing.



HOUSE BILL 3979

[House Bill 3979](#) went into effect on September 1st, 2021 and will remain effective until December 2nd, 2021, when it will be superseded by SB 3. HB 3979:

- Applies only to social studies courses;
- Restricts course credit for student engagement; and
- Prohibits certain concepts about race, sex, and discrimination.

Our report also makes recommendations on what our state and our school districts must do to move towards comprehensive civic education, based on the expertise, experiences, and suggestions from teachers:

- **Focus on Depth over Breadth:** Change the standards and TEKS implementation to promote deep and meaningful civics learning across subject areas.
- **Provide Professional Development:** Provide more support for educators as they teach “hard history” and prepare them to lead difficult conversations.
- **Reflect Students’ Communities:** Explicitly include key historical figures from communities of color in the TEKS and curriculum.



SENATE BILL 3

Senate Bill 3 will go into effect on December 2nd, 2021, superseding HB 3979. SB 3:

- Expands censorship and civic restrictions to all K-12 courses;
- Restricts course credit for student engagement, with limited exceptions;
- Prohibits certain concepts about race, sex, and discrimination;
- Removes requirements from HB 3979 that would have required the State Board of Education to diversify the TEKS; and
- Requires the Texas Education Agency to create a civic training program for educators.

- **Pair Knowledge with Action:** Support educators and schools to create active learning opportunities that allow students to implement civic learning in real, tangible ways within their communities.
- **Connect Locally:** Encourage outside organizations and public officials to communicate directly with teachers and students about opportunities to engage locally.
- **Create a Supportive School Climate:** Promote meaningful civic education by modeling positive civic behaviors for students and encouraging youth civic engagement.
- **Listen to Communities:** Center teachers, students, and families in future discussions about policies that affect civic education.

SB 3 and bills like it do not support the civic education of marginalized youth and families, or their teachers. Stakeholders should take heed of the recommendations made by participating teachers as well as provide more opportunities for teachers, students, and families to get involved in the standards revision process.

