

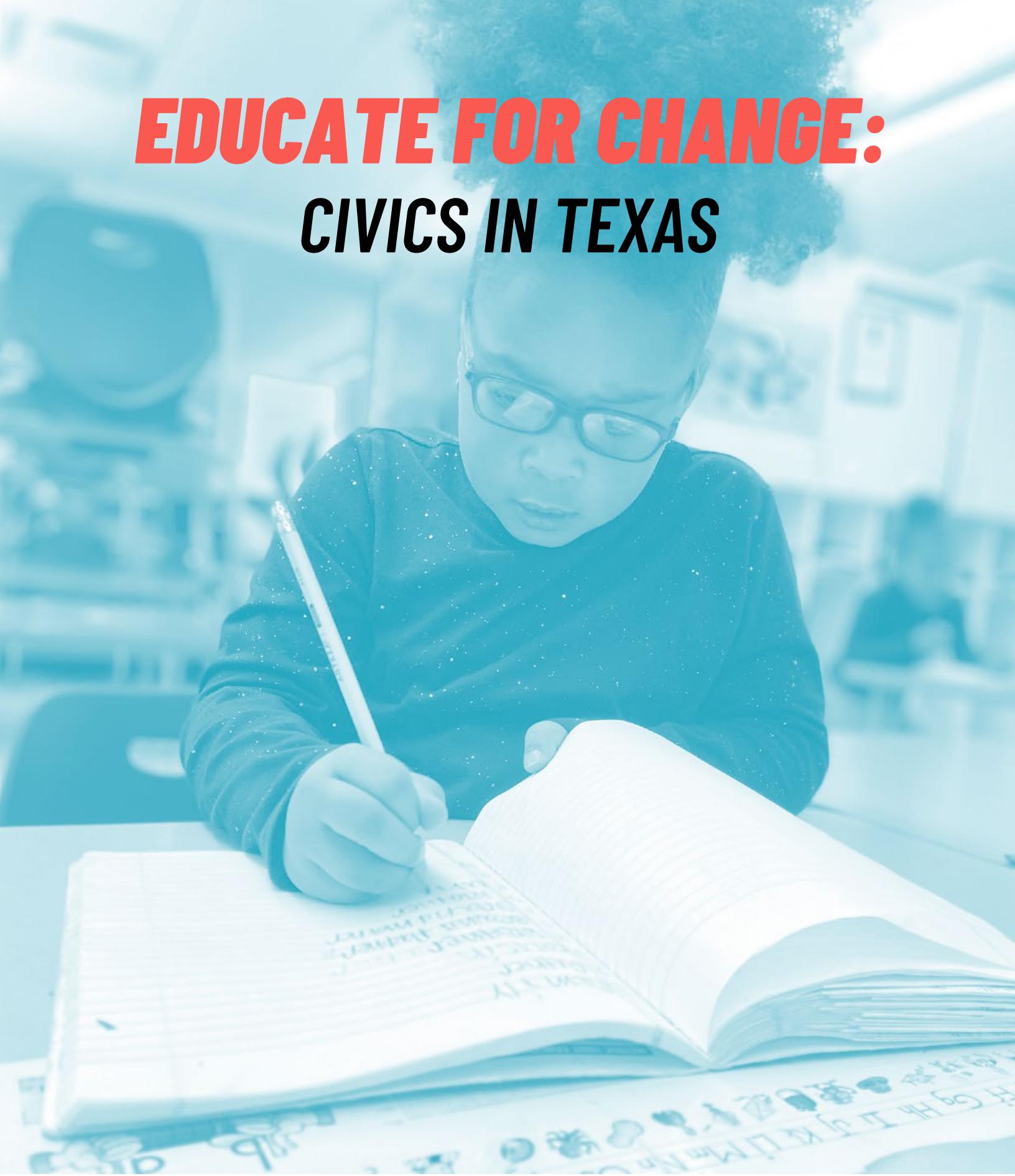


# EDUCATE FOR CHANGE: CIVICS IN TEXAS



# **EDUCATE FOR CHANGE:**

## **CIVICS IN TEXAS**



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# 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- **Outdated and whitewashed standards:**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 de-

prioritize 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Bill 3979 went into effect on September 1st, 2021 and will remain effective until December 2nd, 2021, when it will be superseded by SB 3.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.



# The State of Civics in Texas

**“Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it.”**

— Marian Wright Edelman,  
Founder of the Children’s Defense Fund

## INTRODUCTION

Young people are living through a real-life lesson in civics, from the COVID-19 pandemic to a national uprising for racial justice to a contentious presidential election marked by high levels of participation and anti-democratic attacks on voters. Youth have not just witnessed history being made. They are the ones creating it: voting, protesting, and supporting their communities through these interlocking crises. While young people have always led social and political movements, the past several years have heralded a renewal of youth civic engagement.

Civic engagement broadly refers to people’s activities and behaviors that shape and improve their communities. Widespread civic engagement helps ensure that people live in representative communities that meet their needs. Voting and civic participation through democratic governments are common forms of engagement, although volunteering and mutual aid are also civic behaviors.<sup>1</sup> Despite rising interest in civic engagement, the U.S. lags behind other countries in common civic indicators like voting,<sup>2</sup> and Texas trails other U.S. states in civic participation.<sup>3</sup>



The state of civic education in Texas is one of many factors contributing to the state’s low civic participation rates. Civic education in schools involves teaching youth civic knowledge (e.g. facts about national history and democratic institutions) and civic attitudes, skills, and behaviors (e.g. understanding how to be involved in one’s community and the benefits of doing so).<sup>4</sup> Comprehensive, quality civic education is critical to informing and developing skills so that youth are prepared to work together to address the problems that confront us all today. Yet civic education has lagged due to: tensions in defining the goals of civic education;<sup>5</sup> the politicization of civic learning;<sup>6</sup> increased pressures of standardized tests and subsequent focus on more frequently-tested subjects;<sup>7</sup> and the lack of opportunities to apply civic learning.<sup>8</sup>

Recent legislative efforts in Texas also threaten the quality of civic education available to our students. Texas state lawmakers passed House Bill 3979 in May 2021, creating new restrictions for Social Studies in K-12 classrooms, and they passed Senate Bill 3 in August 2021 to expand those restrictions to all K-12 courses.<sup>9</sup> The legislation follows a growing trend, with laws

introduced around the nation attacking social justice teaching and efforts to center equity and inclusion in the classroom.<sup>10</sup>

Backers of the law (aside from completely misappropriating the term “critical race theory”)<sup>11</sup> have argued that HB 3979 and SB 3 will increase students’ national and state pride and foster unity. In reality, these bills create another institutional barrier for teachers hoping to implement civics curriculum that represents the diversity of youth in Texas and confronts issues of racism and oppression. Additionally, these bills send harmful messages to history and civics teachers that they do not know what is best for their classrooms and that discussions about social issues do not belong in the classroom. Altogether, the bills create fear among teachers, limit opportunities

for difficult yet necessary conversations among students, and restrict civic learning opportunities.<sup>12</sup>

Quality civic education is even more critical in today’s current climate since Americans’ trust and confidence in the civic landscape are at extreme and historic lows. Almost 90% of Americans feel the country is more divided than before the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>13</sup> Only 29% of Americans express confidence that other people are trustworthy, fair, and helpful,<sup>14</sup> meaning most Americans have little or no interpersonal trust in others. Aside from suppressing thoughtful solutions to our country’s most pressing issues, these low levels of trust and confidence mean that today’s youth are growing up in a particularly jaded environment that may threaten their hope for civic engagement and optimism for making change.

## WHAT IS CRITICAL RACE THEORY?



Critical race theory is a field of scholarship developed in the 1980s and typically taught in law schools. According to leading scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, critical race theory focuses on the ways race and racism have shaped institutions such as the legal system or public education. For example, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students have disproportionately higher rates of suspension, expulsion, and other forms of school discipline.

Proponents of school censorship laws incorrectly use “critical race theory” as a catchall term to oppose any effort to discuss or address race and discrimination in the classroom.

Although levels of trust and confidence are low, increasing civic participation could boost feelings of trust, community ownership, and belonging both locally and nationally.<sup>15</sup> A robust civic education is one promising pathway to encourage civic participation and rebuild American trust. Yet research shows that civic education receives little priority and funding in schools. A recent analysis of funding for civic education found that the federal government spends only \$4 million a year on civics, compared to about \$3 billion on STEM subjects.<sup>16</sup> This equates to only 5 cents per US student for civics learning, compared to \$54 per student for STEM learning each year. Additionally, civics learning often involves politics, and many teachers are understandably wary of appearing partisan or provoking any sort of political discussions that may anger community members, particularly after the passage of anti-civics bills across the country.<sup>17</sup>

Given the state of civics and the actions of U.S. legislators, it is important to center the lived experiences of teachers when considering how to improve civic education. After all, they, along with students and parents, are the key stakeholders involved in civic education and can provide crucial insights on what works and what needs changing in the classroom. Based on interviews with Texas teachers, this report presents key themes and issues they see in their classrooms, as well as potential solutions.

## CURRENT PERFORMANCE ON CIVIC (ED) INDICATORS

Civic participation in Texas lags behind other states due to a combination of passive obstruction and active policy barriers.<sup>18</sup> A community's "civic health" can be measured through civic habits such as residents' political participation, measures of social connectedness, and civic involvement. A 2018 assessment of Texas' civic health reported dismal findings about Texans' civic habits. Compared to other states, Texas ranked 44<sup>th</sup> in voter registration, 47<sup>th</sup> in voter turnout, and 50<sup>th</sup> in the frequency of political discourse.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Texas ranked in the bottom quarter in donating and volunteering.<sup>20</sup>

More recently, tireless advocacy and organizing efforts have resulted in surging voter registration and turnout despite the many barriers to engagement across the state. The 2020 general election saw the highest turnout in Texas since 1992. About 66% of registered voters cast ballots (Figure 1).<sup>21</sup> Despite this growth, Texas still ranked among the lowest ten states in voter turnout.<sup>22</sup> Voter participation also remains low among Texas youth, who face additional barriers to the ballot box. Recent data shows 41% of Texas youth (18-29 years old) voted in the 2020 general election (Figure



## ISSUES

Outdated and whitewashed standards

Lost instructional time

Lack of institutional support

Inequitable access



## SOLUTIONS

Focus on depth over breadth

Provide professional development

Reflect students' communities

Pair knowledge with action

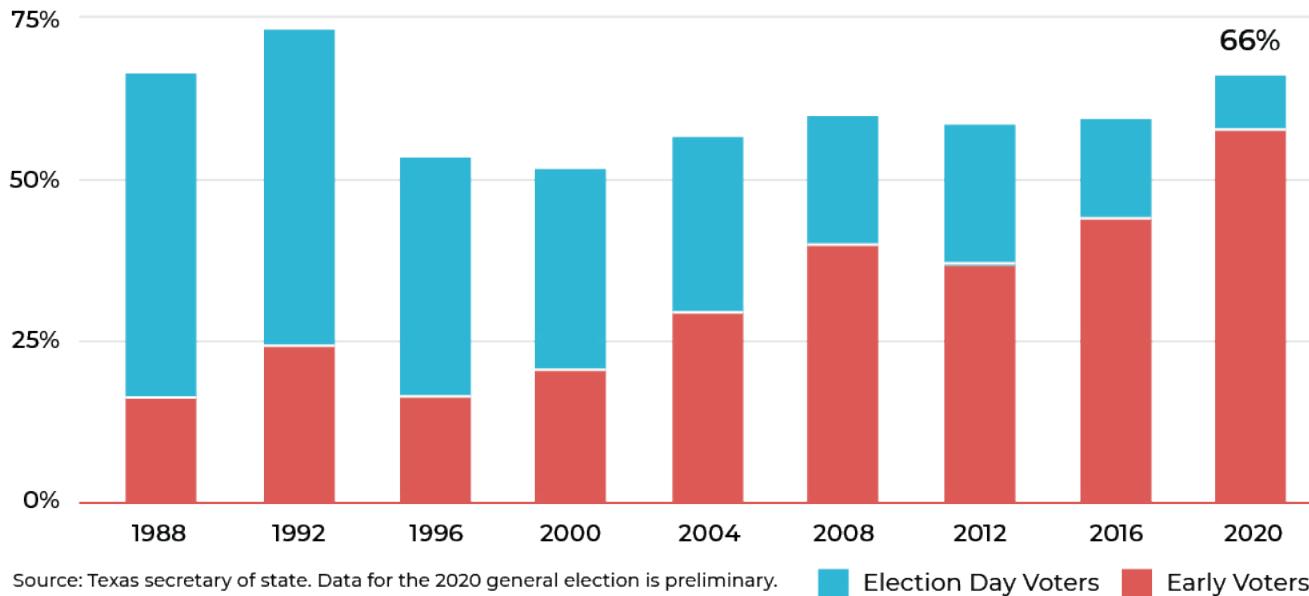
Connect locally

Create a supportive school climate

Listen to communities

**Figure 1.** Texas voter turnout in 2020 election, from Texas Tribune.

100%



Source: Texas secretary of state. Data for the 2020 general election is preliminary.  
Credit: Mandi Cai, Texas Tribune

■ Election Day Voters ■ Early Voters

2).<sup>23</sup> This was an increase from the 2016 general election, yet Texas youth turnout in 2020 was still nine points below the national average (50%).<sup>24</sup>

We must also consider how Texas youth are doing in other forms of civic participation. About 18% of youth 18 to 24 years old participate in community service, and data show that only 20% of youth in this same age group belong to a social group, such as a church group or sports league.<sup>25</sup> The majority of Texas youth are not formally involved in community activities. This data on service and social groups, when taken together with data on voter turnout, paints a picture that youth are often *not* connected to their communities in a way that would facilitate feelings of trust and belonging that foster sustained civic engagement.

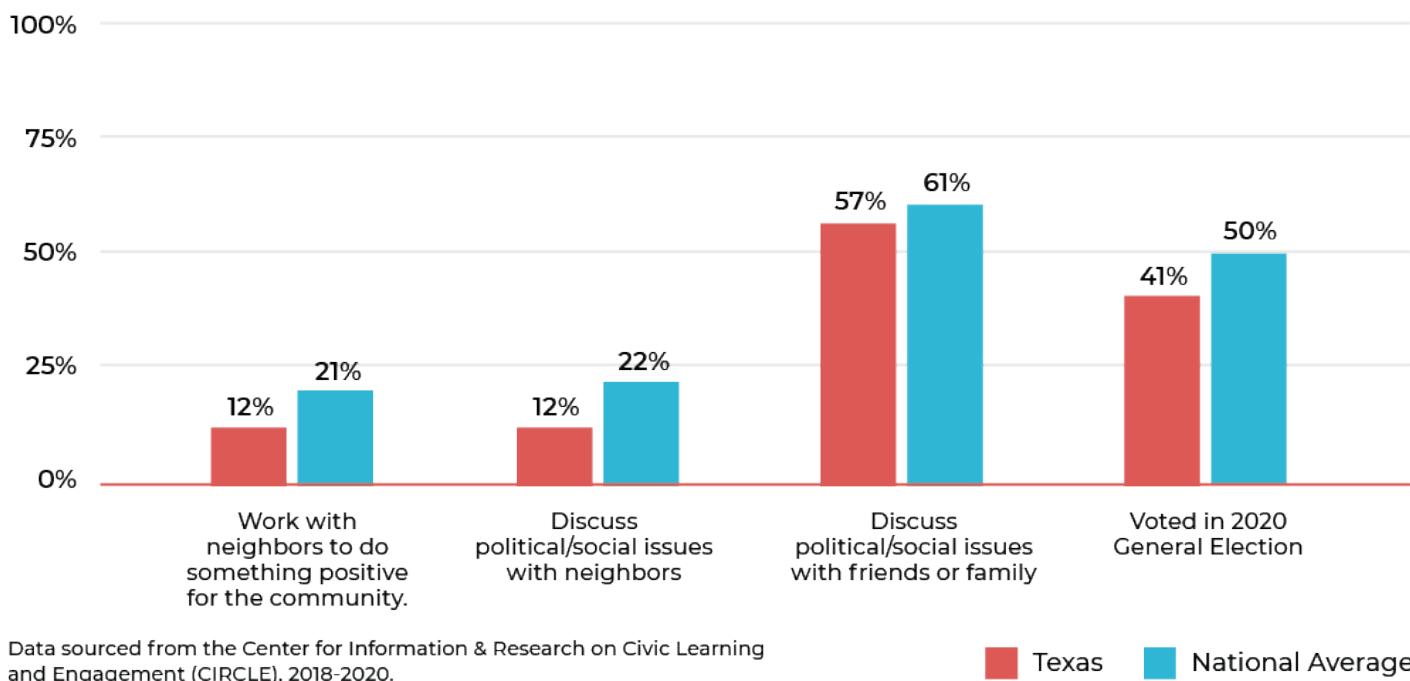
Schools play a critical role in shaping how young people understand their roles in U.S. society, and civic education specifically teaches youth how to engage with and contribute to their broader community,

from voting to volunteering. School experiences are even more important considering that only 57% of Texas youth talk about political or social issues with family or friends, meaning nearly half of youth are left to make sense of civic ideas on their own (Figure 2).<sup>26</sup>

But many Texas youth do not have access to engaging and equitable civic education. Only 35% of Texas 8<sup>th</sup> graders met grade level standards on Social Studies in 2019. While 75% of high school juniors met grade level standards on the U.S. History exam, Black and Latinx students received worse scores on the government and citizenship questions than their white peers.<sup>27</sup> To be clear, test scores do not reflect the full picture of civic learning, but these disparities point to broader and systemic inequities that affect civic learning opportunities.

Overall, these civic health indicators suggest that Texas youth are not civically educated or engaged at the same rates of other U.S. youth. The underlying reasons

**Figure 2.** Texas youth civic behaviors compared to national averages, data from CIRCLE.  
Youth age group is defined as 18 to 29 years old.



are complex. Youth, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, experience significant policy and personal barriers to involvement in civic spaces. We can begin to break down those barriers by working towards equitable access to quality civic education, but current standards and implementation do not meet the needs of our diverse Texas youth.

The next section highlights interviews from several Texas teachers to ground our report in real-life classroom experiences. The eight participating educators are from across the Houston area, and all taught through the 2019-2020 academic year. Five educators identified as Black (two women and three men), and three identified as white (two women and one man). Five teach in charter school settings, two in community college settings, and one in a high school in an independent school district. More information on their roles and experience is listed in Table 1 in the Appendix.

## ISSUES WITH CURRENT CIVIC EDUCATION STANDARDS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The participating educators pointed to several key issues with civic education in Texas schools today, including:

- Outdated and whitewashed TEKS;
- Lost instructional time due to state testing;
- Inconsistent high school voter registration;
- Little support in providing opportunities for student civic engagement;
- Over-reliance on students to navigate barriers on their own; and
- Inequities in access to quality civic education.

## **Outdated and Whitewashed TEKS: “There are too many” and “it’s a White man’s curriculum.”**

Texas civic education is largely shaped by the state curriculum standards, also referred to as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), for Social Studies. Social Studies TEKS have specific civic learning standards focused on government and citizenship for grades K-8 and course-specific standards for high school grades.<sup>28</sup> Table 2 lists some examples of the learning goals related to government and citizenship that are explicitly stated in the TEKS. Most of these learning goals focus on teaching about governmental institutions and building students’ knowledge of “American” symbols, beliefs, and principles, such as patriotism and the free enterprise system.<sup>29</sup>

The Social Studies TEKS received their last major revision in 2010 following a controversial process in which state board members ignored suggestions by historians and educators and instead made changes to standards that aligned with their own beliefs and political agendas.<sup>31</sup> Some standards were historically inaccurate or misleading, while others leaned towards the political right.<sup>32</sup> In November 2018, the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) voted on a streamlined set of standards, and there was no shortage of controversy over the historical accuracy and

## **“HOW CAN I COVER THESE TEKS, BUT ALSO EXPLAIN THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT’S HAPPENING?”**

ideological bias of certain standards during this process either.<sup>33</sup> Most recently, a youth-led petition that gained support from over 15,000 people urged the SBOE to adopt anti-racist standards and move up the planned 2023 review of standards.<sup>34</sup> In part due to this student pressure, the SBOE will begin the review process of Social Studies standards during the 2021-2022 academic year.<sup>35</sup>

The upcoming review will likely revolve around the same issues educators and activists have been fighting for years regarding the TEKS—the balance between breadth and depth, the importance of representation, and the politicization of US history and curriculum.<sup>36</sup> The current standards, in fact, exclude, distort, or politicize important moments in Native American, Mexican American, and Black history.<sup>37</sup> This means that many teachers are left on their own to find ways to make sure their curricula are culturally-responsive, unbiased, and cover all the necessary standards. One teacher describes doing this in his classroom:

*I came in with my identity as a young Black male... I was teaching a lot of Black and brown kids about U.S. History, which is very whitewashed. So I often tried to figure out, how can I cover these TEKS [teaching standards], but also explain the truth about what’s happening? Especially when it came to the 13 colonies or reconstruction and slavery, because those are all topics that I had to discuss throughout my classes that had really deep, rich op-*



For a comprehensive list of standards – including history and economics standards that are related to civic education – we urge readers to visit the Texas Education Agency website.<sup>30</sup>

*portunities for thinking and talking about race with my class. So I looked for those opportunities...any chance I got.*

This teacher's story leads to several crucial takeaways: 1) there is a distinction between the TEKS and "the truth," even though there should not be, which is the byproduct of setting standards based on political views rather than pedagogical needs; 2) the burden of calling out racism and addressing race in the classroom falls on educators of color, which can exacerbate burnout and turnover;<sup>38</sup> and 3) the TEKS sometimes act as a barrier to deep, rich conversations in the classroom, as teachers are torn between addressing specific standards and being responsive to student needs and interests.

Overall, the current TEKS provide a basic foundation of what government and citizenship mean in the U.S., but the history standards are at times inaccurate and exclude historical contributions of people of color. The Texas Legislature did direct the SBOE to include more diverse read-

ings and topics in amendments included in HB 3979, but SB 3 later removed that language. While the State Board has ultimate jurisdiction over requirements, this decision signals that Texas lawmakers who support SB 3 do not place as much importance on these diverse readings as they do on less diverse ones already listed in the standards.<sup>39</sup>

Understanding U.S. and Texas history is a crucial component of civic life. History allows us to understand our strengths and weaknesses as a society, how far we've come, and how far we still need to go. As a state (and nation) with tremendous history involving the influence of diverse communities, Texas needs to provide an education that showcases the contributions of people of all backgrounds and reflects honestly on the ways marginalized groups have faced, challenged, and continue to experience discrimination, as well as how they have shaped our nation.

### ***State Testing Restricts Instructional Time: “You don’t always have to take from Social Studies”***

Social Studies requires the least amount of state-mandated testing out of all four core subjects (Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies). From grade 3 to grade 12, Texas public school students are only required to take two Social Studies state tests: Social Studies in grade 8 and U.S. History in high school. In comparison, Texas students take eight Math tests, three in Science, and eleven in Language Arts.<sup>40</sup>

Despite having fewer tests, many interviewees discussed how "teaching to the test" can interfere with meaningful learning. In the face of pressure to achieve high test scores and school ratings, one middle school teacher discussed the difficult de-



**“THEY TOOK THE U.S. HISTORY TEST LAST YEAR, SO NOBODY REALLY CARES ABOUT THOSE STUDENTS ANYMORE...AS FAR AS TESTING IS CONCERNED.”**

cision to ignore important learning standards in order to prepare students for the state test:

*There's something called processing standards that are important in Social Studies [such as] can you identify cause and effect? Can you identify how the geography of Maryland caused them to have had this type of economy? Because we focused on the test, we didn't really look at some of the processing standards...So that's how many of the other teachers approached it. It was to make sure the kids could pass the next assessment or the STAAR test... We were also in a school that was in a district that had a B rating. And it might have been five declining campuses away from being an A rating, and we were one of them...So we also had a lot of pressure coming from the district to be teaching to the test.*

While having fewer state tests means Social Studies teachers on average feel less pressure from high-stakes testing, it is clear that many Social Studies teachers still struggle with balancing state test achievement with real, meaningful learning goals.

Having fewer state mandated tests also means that Social Studies is prioritized less within schools. One government and economics high school teacher shared their experience:

*If you teach US history, you have to teach the test. As a government teacher [in 12<sup>th</sup>*

*grade], well, they took the U.S. history test last year, so nobody really cares about those students anymore. Yeah, they care whether they graduate from high school, but they're done as far as testing is concerned...The administration is not putting their nose in my business and saying you need to teach government and economics this way...they just bother all the other teachers who have those state mandated tests that they have to teach towards.*

As this teacher states, the lack of a mandated test means government teachers have more freedom in the classroom outside of state testing years and face less pressure from administrators—but for teachers, this also means school administration may have less concern and attention for government than for other state-tested subjects.

Teachers also reported receiving less instructional time for Social Studies as a result of having fewer mandated tests—a trend that happens in schools across the country. One national study found evidence of this phenomenon happening even in elementary classrooms, where teachers reported spending less time on Social Studies when there was not a mandated test and instead focusing more on STEM and Language Arts subjects.<sup>41</sup> One middle school history teacher shared that their school often cut into Social Studies instruction time:

*If there was any...logistics type of things like testing or picture day...Social Studies class would be like the time they used as a school to do all of those things ...You don't have to always take from Social Studies. Take from Science and Math and English sometimes...That also sends a message to the kids that [Social Studies is] not really that important.”*

This teacher echoes that spending less instructional time on Social Studies sends the message that Social Studies—and civics—are not important. This will only get worse if high-stakes testing continues or intensifies.

To be clear, teachers are not advocating for more Social Studies tests. Absorbing more subjects into the rigid culture of high-stakes testing would only hurt the potential for high-quality, engaging, and creative civic education by focusing on rote civic knowledge. Instead, educators and administrators need more time and resources to explore potential solutions on how to prioritize civic education outside of testing.

### **High School Voter Registration: “They’re just not doing it”**

High school voter registration efforts also suffer from lack of institutional support and attention. The Texas Election Code requires high schools to offer voter registration opportunities to their students twice a year. In practice, many schools are not aware of or do not comply with this requirement.<sup>42</sup> While some schools host voter registration drives and heavily encourage voting, many schools still do not build a culture of encouraging youth to vote. Some schools may simply be unaware of this state law—perhaps due to minimal state oversight or assistance—but others might shy away from voter registration efforts for fear of being “too political” or of being punished



by state officials who have worked to deter high school voter registration in the past.<sup>43</sup>

Some schools set up registration cards in the front office, putting the burden on students to figure out the voter registration process on their own. One Government professor relayed that, according to their students, “in the state of Texas, high schools and superintendents, they’re supposed to register their students to vote... but that doesn’t always happen.” In fact, only one teacher who participated in the interviews mentioned taking direct action to help students get registered to vote, and while that effort was supported by the school, it was not *initiated* by the school. Instead, voter registration depended solely on the teacher, who made a relationship with an external voting rights non-profit.

High school voter registration is a vital step to ensuring young Texans are able to vote, and the lack of infrastructure to support this effort fails new voters each year. Youth want to vote.<sup>44</sup> One teacher described how excited their students were to vote in the 2020 election:

*There was a massive conversation about students who were really excited to vote and get out there. Some weren’t there yet...it was really cool to see some students literally get mad at each other be-*

**“WHAT I SAW FROM A LOT OF MY STUDENTS WAS ACTIVISM IN FINDING THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE IN VOTING IN AN ELECTION.”**

*cause, “you can vote and I can’t”...“I really want to get out and vote.” I think what I saw from a lot of my students was activism in finding the importance and value in voting in an election. I think they all recognized that this was an important election and that they needed to address some issues through the ballot box.*

Voter registration and education are especially important in high school, which is the last stop in formal education for youth who do not plan to attend college. In Texas, about 48% of youth 18 to 24 years old have no college experience,<sup>45</sup> and young people with no college experience are both less likely to be contacted by political campaigns and parties as well as less likely to be aware of all their voting options.<sup>46</sup> Clearly, there is a gap in support for youth beyond college campuses to be civically engaged, which only adds to the urgency of making sure youth receive the education they need while they are in high school.

### **Community Service: “An ordeal”**

Students and teachers also often take on the burden of strengthening civic learning through community service. Students need opportunities to learn through action, and community service presents a profound opportunity for youth to practice the civic skills needed to make an impact in their local communities. However, providing service opportunities takes time, resources, and tremendous effort in order to ensure they are meaningful for students and communities alike.

The state of Texas does not have a state-wide high school service requirement, nor does the state allow districts to adopt a service requirement for graduation.<sup>47</sup> Many schools encourage community service, but ultimately, many students must find service opportunities—and time in their busy

**“THE PIECE THAT’S MISSING IS...WE NEVER DID ANY SORT OF ADVOCACY [ACTIVITIES] WITH PARENTS OR STUDENTS.”**

schedules—on their own. Some students are lucky enough to attend high schools that provide service opportunities, such as a service day described by one teacher:

*Every six weeks we took all the students out to the community and we called it service day... It was an ordeal...We took them to community centers or the Houston Food Bank, parks, so they got to dabble in some different kinds of service.*

Hosting a school-wide service day requires tremendous effort and resources from schools, and not every school or teacher has the resources to host a similar event. It is important to consider how government and community groups can support schools in organizing these opportunities for students. The same teacher also makes the point that service alone isn’t enough—we must integrate *learning* into service projects, so students critically reflect on how this type of civic engagement serves the community:

*I think the piece that’s missing is... we never did any sort of advocacy [activities] with parents or students. So they knew what community service was and they knew, oh volunteering is important. [But] creating change, they didn’t really have exposure to that aspect of it.*

As this teacher points out, one of the most important takeaways of participating in community service is being able to recognize how your actions contribute to change in that community. Such learning ensures

that students build civic efficacy, ongoing community ties, and the ability to reflect on and analyze the impact of their service. Without both service and integrated learning opportunities, students are getting one less chance to understand the ways their classroom learning applies to the outside world.

***Putting the Burden on Students:  
“Education wasn’t their priority. It was,  
‘we need to survive.’”***

High school voter registration and community service are both civic opportunities that would benefit from additional support from the state, district, or local administrators. Many schools depend on student initiation to fuel civic engagement because teachers and administrators are overstretched with other priorities. But placing the responsibility solely on students is far from ideal, since students already have other obligations in their lives, such as schoolwork, extracurricular activities, jobs, or familial responsibilities. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has only

worsened the burden for many students, who have been cut off from their normal routines and communities, experienced higher levels of stress and anxiety, and had to maintain jobs throughout the school year to support their families.<sup>48</sup>

Youth of color have been hit especially hard by COVID-19. Across the country, Black children accounted for 20% of children that lost a parent to COVID-19, despite only making up 13% of children in the U.S.<sup>49</sup> In October 2020, about 7 months into the pandemic, about 10% of Latinx households still lacked consistent computer access, compared to 6.7% of White households;<sup>50</sup> and one survey estimated about 25% of Asian American youth experienced bullying, harassment, or assault during the pandemic.<sup>51</sup> These trends aligned with what educators participating in our project saw in their schools. One high school teacher recounted that towards the beginning of the pandemic:

*A lot of the kids did say, I’m 18. My family lost their jobs. I need to work, so...a lot of my students were just gone. ‘Sorry miss, I can’t like, I can’t attend class, I can’t study...’ Quite a few of them just didn’t earn AP credit because they just didn’t show up. And, I mean, yeah, I get it. Your family lost their jobs, you need to go work...I think it was rough because they had to become adults and do adult things, and school was not a priority, which is completely understandable.*

This teacher highlights one of the major issues that students, particularly low-income and BIPOC students, have faced during the pandemic. Students who were not able to prioritize school did not have access or availability to participate in civic activities such as voting or volunteering. Thus, these students missed out on a peri-



od of civic learning — one that is especially crucial for students who do not attend college and are often left out of youth civic engagement programming.<sup>52</sup>

Teachers have also been struggling with balancing students' safety with their burgeoning curiosity when it comes to in-person events. One teacher said:

*What you don't want to encourage is to do something that's not safe. So in the past, you might have said...go to the courthouse at five o'clock on Friday for this event or go to the state legislature and you'll have a chance to speak. I've been very wary, and I think most of us have been very, very wary about...not pressing them to do anything in person.*

As a result, many teachers have been encouraging students to move their civic participation online. The same teacher describes though, how online participation is less personal for students:

*I think the big thing is to use the resources that we do have...If you're going to reach out to people, do it through email, with a Zoom call, Teams call, however you like to. It just makes it that much tougher for them to get the actual, one-on-one experience, because sending an email is so impersonal. Sending, you know, a Zoom call is much better, obviously... So it does make [engagement] more difficult. I think the process does come [down] to just how can you [teach the students how to] communicate virtually to the communities [they're] trying to get these messages out to.*

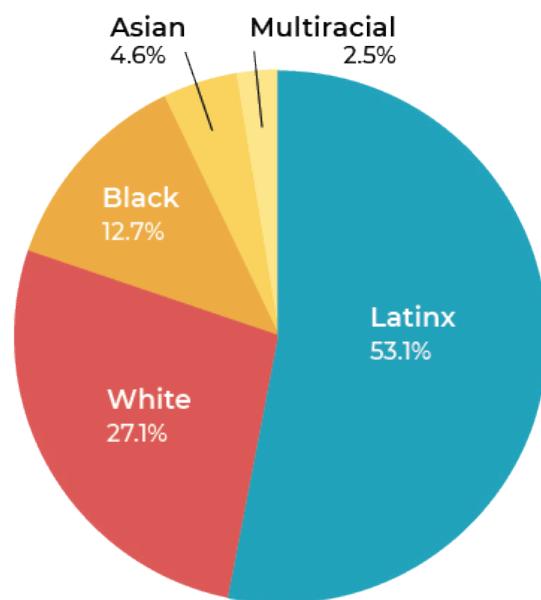
This teacher highlights the struggle of online advocacy and engagement, yet they end on the understanding that virtual communication is an important skill and one worth exploring. Their optimism

despite barriers posed by the pandemic and limited resources likely resonates with teachers across the state, who have demonstrated extreme resilience and flexibility while teaching this past year. Unfortunately, teachers can only do so much, and COVID-19 has heightened the "civic education gap" faced by marginalized youth.

### **Civic Education Gap**

Racial and socioeconomic factors affect every facet of students' civic education and engagement. The term "civic education gap" is used to describe how youth from marginalized backgrounds have inequitable access to quality civic education, which creates an additional barrier to civic engagement.<sup>53</sup>

According to data from the 2019-2020 school year, the Texas student population is approximately 52.8% Latinx, 27% White, 12.6% Black, 4.6% Asian, and 2.5% Multiracial. Approximately 60% of public school students are considered economically disadvantaged (or low-SES).<sup>54</sup>



**Figure 3.** Texas student population

Texas students of color are more likely to live in and attend school districts with fewer resources than their white counterparts.<sup>55</sup> Texas also has the largest number of rural students in the country,<sup>56</sup> and rural students, particularly those who are low-income, are more likely to face education barriers (such as less access to AP and dual credit courses), less access to basic services like internet, and living in places with few civic engagement opportunities, also known as “civic deserts”.<sup>57</sup>

Often, schools with fewer resources are more likely to receive lower scores on state-mandated tests (for reasons related to systemic inequity), meaning these schools face even more pressure to prioritize more frequently tested subjects (Math, Language Arts) over Social Studies. One teacher described how many high school students in their majority BIPOC, low-SES school come into the classroom below grade-level on these subjects:

*[Civic education] is lacking...[We're] so focused on filling the gaps because our kids come in very behind, most of them. It's focused on filling the gaps and student achievement, which is great. We need that. [But] that piece, that other civics piece just isn't there...I wouldn't say it's not there intentionally, if that makes sense. It's not like, 'oh, let's not do it'...it's, 'let's just get these kids up and running.'*

Many teachers don't intend to de-prioritize civics, but if they fail to focus on getting students to state-mandated grade level on other core subjects, then their students may be held back or face other negative consequences. On the other hand, schools with more resources (predominantly white, suburban, higher-income schools) tend to have higher-performing students, as well as more access to extracurricular activities



and other academic learning opportunities that support quality civic education. Altogether, students of color, rural students, and low-income students face many barriers to the quality education necessary for youth to not only understand how civic engagement works, but also motivate them to take civic action. Addressing the civic education gap is crucial to increasing civic participation among communities that have historically been excluded from civic spaces.

Marginalized youth also face barriers beyond the classroom, such as restrictive voting policies and various forms of discrimination that make it difficult to participate in civic life. For example, undocumented youth experience heightened barriers when trying to engage in their communities.

One teacher said:

*My school is...the last census [said it was] 94% Latinx. And we have a solid undocumented population...I don't want to generalize, but a lot of them do walk into 12th*

*grade into government thinking, it doesn't relate to me, so why should I care? I don't have power, I can't do anything—I'm either a minor, or I am undocumented, or I am not a citizen, but my residency status does not allow me to actively engage...It's not my government, so why should I care?*

Undocumented students are members of their communities and still have avenues to engage outside of voting. The same teacher said, "I have some students who are undocumented so I always make sure to let them know...you can't vote but here are other avenues that you could still get engaged...You can stay at home, do this, [but] I think that's like the one piece I need to do more, honestly." But not every undocumented student has access to knowledgeable teachers, and it is easy to understand why many undocumented students feel marginalized.

While there has been an increase in youth-directed outreach by civics organizations including the Children's Defense Fund—Texas, these programs only serve a limited number of schools and youth. Texas needs far-reaching and comprehensive civics reform that will ensure all youth, regardless of their backgrounds, are learning why and how their civic participation is crucial to our democracy. Ample research has shown that when given the opportunities, students rise to the occasion. Students, especially those from marginalized groups, are likely to become both civically engaged and develop civic purpose when they are given opportunities for active civic learning.<sup>58</sup> Now, we need to fight for students and teachers to have the necessary resources and support to make their vision for civic education a reality.



# **What Civics Should Be, From Texas Teachers**

## **WHAT CIVICS SHOULD BE, FROM TEXAS TEACHERS**

Current civic education standards are outdated. Understanding the history of democracy, the functions of government, and the mechanics of voting are all important, but civics involves so much more. Teachers highlighted several practices that are already working well for them and their students in the classroom, as well as several areas for improvement and areas where they need more support.

### **TEKS & Curriculum Support: Teachers want “more depth” and professional development**

Multiple interviewees said Texas TEKS should aim for more depth over breadth when it comes to covering civics in the Social Studies curriculum. Instead of being bombarded by standards—some of which teachers feel are not relevant to the real world—teachers expressed a desire for more flexibility and support in diving deeper into civics topics. To support this, one teacher suggested offering more content-specific professional development:

*I need content-specific [professional development]...After being a teacher for nine years, I don't need to go to the [professional development] about modifying work or, like, what do you do in a crisis?...I need to be at the content-specific [training], where they're doing activities that I can take back specifically to Government that show me, this is how you can embed civics into government. Here is the action, here's the activity...give me something to*

*walk away with....Where's the good quality PD? The quality content-specific PD?*

**“I NEED TO BE AT THE CONTENT-SPECIFIC [TRAINING], WHERE THEY'RE DOING ACTIVITIES THAT I CAN TAKE BACK SPECIFICALLY TO GOVERNMENT THAT SHOW ME, THIS IS HOW YOU CAN EMBED CIVICS INTO GOVERNMENT.”**

Not only can school administrations work to provide civic educators with quality professional development, but state institutions should also work to provide schools with the necessary resources to ensure teachers receive time and compensation for this work. Additionally, civics organizations can work to connect directly with teachers to provide learning materials and “teachback” opportunities on how to incorporate civic learning in schools. This opportunity has the potential to be very accessible, as civics has lessons and applications that can be incorporated in every school subject.

Importantly, some teachers and administrators are already doing the extra work of gathering resources to help facilitate civic learning. One teacher noted that the head curriculum writer for their district goes the extra mile to gather resources for them, so that teachers can focus their time on making the content specific and meaningful:

*I'm really lucky...our main curriculum writer... gives me really good resources to work with, so I don't have to dig all that deep. But I always wish there was more...I always find myself wanting to dig [in] more so I'll accommodate something or modify something, I'll always want to add more current event examples.*

In this situation, the teacher has extra time and energy to ensure that the curriculum caters to the needs of their classroom, goes as in-depth as they desire, and provides opportunities to connect learning back to current events. But not everyone school district has a curriculum writer like this one, so it's important that stakeholders in power do what they can to support teachers in providing great civics lessons.



### ***Having the Hard Conversations: “They’re going to ask questions”***

Civics curriculum should also provide time and resources for teachers to discuss political events and social issues, especially during the middle and high school grades. Adolescents are intensely curious and often left to make sense of complex social issues on their own. Teachers should have the opportunity to guide students through these difficult discussions.

While the teachers interviewed expressed that conversations around current events were always important in their classroom, many teachers said that they have become more crucial over the past few years. The COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd and subsequent growth of the Black Lives Matter racial justice movement, and the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection on the Capitol each had profound impacts on the U.S. and on Texas students. Several teachers shared the importance and impact of talking about these events in their classroom:

*About the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection: I was in the middle of a government lesson when everything was going on and we just pumped the brakes, turned on the news, and just adjusted course from there. And I think every day since that, there are students that will walk into a Government classroom and say like, what are we doing today? Like, what's going to happen? And [now] there's more of a willingness on behalf of the kids though to shift from theory [to] talk more about application...“What's going on right now can you tell us?” So they almost use the classroom as a way to get more up to date on current affairs, and they're more interested in that.*

*January 6th was when we saw the dark side of engagement. I wouldn't call it civ-*

*ic [engagement] because it was not civil, but that's when we saw the dark side of it. And I think it really helps students see the other side.*

*About the 2020 election voter fraud myths: I told them yesterday that [in] everything that I read and study, I found no evidence of widespread voter fraud in the 2020 election. It was so quiet in that in that classroom...And I felt I had to tell them that. I don't like diving into all that, but I'm supposed to, so I told them that... there's no widespread voter fraud, maybe something here and there, one or two people may have done this, but nothing to sway the election.*

While these conversations were likely difficult, these teachers shared that they were necessary. Through these experiences, it is clear that discussing current events helped students see that what they were learning in class was directly applicable to real world situations, solidifying the importance of civics in their minds. Grappling with news, such as the insurrection or lies about the election, helped students see the consequences of spreading false information and see how being an informed citizen is crucial to the country's civic health.

Teachers must feel comfortable and supported in facilitating these conversations, especially because students will bring them up even if teachers do not. One teacher shares their experience working with students: "They'll ask the political [questions]...You can't expect to teach 17- and 18-year-old kids really divisive things, and...expect them not to question...At the end of the day when you look at just general child development, school is one of the biggest agents of socialization. They're going to ask questions." This teacher notes that schools are a socializer, where young people learn

about their classmates, their communities, and the issues of today alongside their academic lessons. Bills such as HB 3979 and SB 3 harm civic learning in Texas by ignoring this function of schools and discounting students' natural curiosity.

**"SCHOOL IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION. [STUDENTS] ARE GOING TO ASK QUESTIONS."**

***Diversifying the Standards and Acknowledging Students' Experiences: "It affects them"***

Civics standards should also be representative of and responsive to diverse populations. Young Texans are the most racially diverse generation in our state's history and they deserve an education that tells a comprehensive, honest history and includes a variety of perspectives.<sup>59</sup> Current civic education standards do not do enough to highlight the enormous roles played by historical figures from marginalized groups. For example, Dolores Huerta, W.E.B. Du Bois, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Frederick Douglass are listed as suggestions in the standards, but Tubman and Truth are each only mentioned once, during Grades 2 and 3.<sup>60</sup> Figures such as James Baldwin<sup>61</sup> and Malcolm X<sup>62</sup> are not mentioned at all, even though their criticisms of the U.S. and our federal government provoked important change in our country and our democracy. Native Americans are only mentioned in Grades 4, 5, 7, and 8, and only one Social Studies TEKS refers to Native Americans after 1900.<sup>63</sup>



***“I love America more than any other country in this world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.”***

— James Baldwin

Understandably, it is difficult to create standards that include all the key figures while leaving space for in-depth lessons. Some amendments included in HB 3979 started to address this issue by calling educators to pay special attention to “historical documents related to the civic accomplishments of marginalized populations” and explicitly addressing “the history of white supremacy.”<sup>64</sup> Yet SB 3 stripped these amendments from the Education Code, leaving the State Board of Education to take up the task of diversifying the standards.

Even with better standards, educators must also be able to find ways to connect these standards to students’ own experiences. More curriculum support for teachers, as mentioned previously, would aid these efforts of making curriculum responsive to students’ lived experiences, particularly for BIPOC youth in the U.S.

In addition to representing the communities of BIPOC youth, a strong civics curriculum should also respond to the experiences of students from low-income backgrounds. A majority of Texas public school students are considered economically disadvantaged, and families living in poverty face substantial barriers to active engagement.<sup>65</sup> A comprehensive, equitable civic education can help break down these barriers by empowering students to understand their situation and equip them to advocate for themselves and their families. One participating teacher describes how they try to connect their students’ experiences to their civic learning in class:

*It was a government shutdown and the kids, kind of were very detached...like, ‘oh well, the government shut down, I don’t understand,’ and [I’ll] talk about the principles of what leads to that. And they’re still detached. All of the kids in my district are eligible for free and reduced [price] lunch. We are all below poverty line. So, talking to them about ‘well, these are the actual effects of a government shutdown: we’re looking at subsidized housing, you’re looking at food stamps, you’re looking at things that very much apply to your day-to-day life’...and you kind of get them more [engaged] with the realization*

*that it affects them every day. And [that's how] you get...“okay, so shut downs are bad” and “how do we like mitigate it.”*

The teacher’s description of students being “detached” is likely a result of students never receiving a civic education that feels relevant to them. By making this connection to their lives, while still teaching material required by the standards, this teacher demonstrates the importance of connecting civics lessons to students’ everyday lives. When armed with this knowledge, students have the power to make better decisions for themselves, provide information to their families, and ultimately gain an understanding of the world that will allow them to be more meaningfully engaged.

**“WHAT ARE YOUR SKILLS,  
WHERE ARE YOUR  
PASSIONS?...AND HOW  
CAN YOU COMBINE THE  
TWO OF THOSE TO TAKE  
ACTION ON BEHALF OF  
SOMETHING GREATER  
THAN YOURSELF?”**

#### **Opportunities to Apply Civic Learning: “Knowledge needs action”**

According to teachers, a key piece of teaching civics effectively is integrating *action* that allows students to apply what they learned. One high school government teacher explains that civics can be divided into knowledge and action:

*When I think about civics, I think first and foremost about having a wealth of information and usable knowledge that you can have in order to improve your community...The part two of that comes about with: what actions...are you going to take*

*from there? Not everybody is equipped to be out in the street and protests all the time. Not everybody is equipped necessarily to go and speak in front of the state legislature. Not everybody is equipped to necessarily create a blog post and write an essay about an issue or what areas. If I’m thinking about my students, like, what area are you strong in? What are your skills, where are your passions?...And how can you combine the two of those to take action on behalf of something greater than yourself?*

Without pairing knowledge with *action*, students are less likely to build civic habits. Additionally, this teacher recognizes that there are many different ways to be civically engaged, and that each student may approach it with their own strengths and interests. For example, voting, advocacy, activism, protesting, and philanthropy are all forms of civic participation, and naming each of these actions in civics curriculum gives students examples of various ways to engage in their communities.

An educational framework called “action civics” builds on traditional civic education by incorporating opportunities for students to *act* on issues that they identify as important to them and their communities. Providing civic action opportunities within the curriculum allows students to apply their civic knowledge, which makes them more likely to develop long-lasting civic skills. As one example, an action civics project could involve students researching a community need (e.g. more ADA accessibility in public spaces or more polling stations) and creating a plan to meet that need (e.g. working with city leaders or fundraising for an organization). These opportunities allow students to build concrete skills, such as teamwork and research, and they and their communities benefit from the effort.

Active civics lessons also provide real-world skills that are relevant to other areas of students' lives. Learning the basics of advocacy can be particularly helpful as students enter college or the job market, especially for first-generation students or students of color who have not had a chance to learn the institutional knowledge necessary for navigating systematic barriers:

*In that skill building—it's a lot of self-advocacy...Let's say a student graduates, first-[generation], goes to college. College is really hard. Nobody looks like them. The classes are way more difficult than what they had in high school. But I think if they have the skills to be civically educated, and they got that in high school, they can advocate because they know how to work the system. They can go to their advisor, they can voice their concerns, they can feel comfortable going to their professor. I think it's just a skill that spans—even in the workplace, let's say they get their first job out of college, and there's some sort of grievance at work that they need to address. I feel like if they have [advocacy skills], they're empowered to voice their concerns...they get civic education and know it's actually just a system. You just need to know how to work the system. It can apply in so many different areas.*

Implementing action civics is a challenging feat, especially in Texas where these programs are often met with political controversy,<sup>66</sup> but it is a concrete way for students to build life skills such as communication, problem-solving, and collaboration that are all relevant to civic engagement. Groups like Generation Citizen<sup>67</sup> have already done extensive work creating resources for K-12 educators interested in using action civics in their classrooms. We must challenge the fear from reactionary lawmakers that action civics will turn all

youth into "left-wing activists" and instead support professional development so that teachers can facilitate these conversations without bias and at a developmentally appropriate level.

### **Make Learning Local: "Come to the kids"**

Along with action civics projects, civics curricula should have opportunities to make learning local by integrating community organizations and local policymakers to show how civic opportunities are present everywhere. Offering opportunities for students to form connections with community members helps ground students civic learning in real, local issues. Additionally, when community organizations themselves initiate the connection, those organizations are more likely to get buy-in from and gain credibility among students. One teacher explains:



*Kids are not always going to seek you out first. So if you want them to know about you, come to the kids. You come, present yourself, you be vulnerable. Show them who you are, and then they're more likely to reach out to you afterwards.*

When community organizations initiate the connection, it also alleviates some of the burden for teachers. One teacher, who is also a school administrator, shared that most teachers probably prefer outside organizations reach out first:

*I think the educators would love to work with as many groups as possible on civic engagement projects and ideas. But educators are so bogged down with all these other factors...they have to keep up with... Reaching out to [an] organization and trying to plan an event and things like that... takes a teacher that is really diving into that fully. And it's a burden on them when it doesn't work out, or if it's not as robust as they want it to be. So I would love to see more organizations and groups walk into the doors of the school and saying, what can we do? Who, what? Point us to these teachers. We have some things that we can show them. We have some ideas that we can talk about to get their students more involved.*

Lastly, local issues are often not rooted in partisan politics, which provides an opportunity for even the wariest schools and teachers to teach civic engagement and community activism with a focus on policy over politics. Despite the politicization of the issue, a comprehensive civic education allows students to form their own opinions while practicing civic skills and behaviors.

### **Creating A Supportive School Climate**

Some teachers are fortunate to teach in schools that promote youth civic engage-

ment and discuss community issues, even if they may be controversial. Others, not so much:

*About the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection: The hub district we sit in sent an email...saying, do not turn the TV on. Do not talk about this with students, we will not engage in political conversation in our building. You will not post on social media while you are in this building...you will act today as if nothing is happening. And I kind of looked at their email, and I was just like... we're not at an elementary school. I understand if you want to shield it from the kiddos, but this is a high school. You think they don't know what's going on? You think they don't know that there's a surge on [the Capitol]?*

Some teachers also work in schools where other teachers are directly undermining civic learning:

*Our [Statistics] teacher, [the school was] really upset with her because she did a project on...what ethnic groups were more likely to face police brutality, just based off the statistics. And they posted it outside the classroom...Then [other] teachers were taking her posters down...They were taking her class posters down and like, taking them to their principal and being like, "this is ridiculous...this is promoting police hatred." [But] no, this is statistics... These are the facts.*

Although the previous example may be extreme, it is a telling example of how political biases impact the ways teachers approach certain topics like police brutality. Biases are common, implicit, and inevitable. They can also be examined as part of an open dialogue. But political biases should not be used to shut down productive conflict, especially when this often leads to mean-

## **"HOW EFFECTIVE IS THAT KNOWLEDGE, IF THEY CAN'T TELL ME HOW IT'S AFFECTING THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE?"**

ingful learning. Letting biases hinder learning directly hurts the goal of nurturing the civic behaviors we hope to impart to our youth. Teachers want and need more support in learning how to lean into productive conflict and hold crucial conversations in their classrooms.

School administrators and district officials should do more to support teachers as they try to teach difficult and potentially controversial topics. Administrators can help foster an open school culture by explicitly encouraging students and educators to engage with others with different opinions. They can also demonstrate their support for civic behaviors by hosting opportunities for voter registration on campus, promoting student leadership, and engaging community partners. For example, they could host local school board members or other local elected officials on campus to form connections between the school and its neighboring communities. Establishing this connection makes learning more real, relevant, and applicable to students' lives. Ultimately, the majority of students, teachers, administrators, families, and lawmakers want the same thing—for students to receive an education that is accurate and relevant to their lives.

### **Involve Teachers in The Process: "There's only so much you can do at the bottom"**

At the end of the day, teachers need to be consulted when lawmakers take actions

that affect their classrooms. Teachers who spoke with us shared ideas ranging from making civics an elective or after-school club, to making Government a year-long course, or adding more inclusive TEKS. Some recognized that any solution must prioritize equity and social justice to address the civic education gap. As a whole, the teachers agreed that legislators need to understand the realities of the classroom to make progress on civic education:

*There's only so much you can do at the bottom level...it needs to come from the top. The top needs to be grounded in an understanding that there is a huge deficit [in civic learning]...Of course I care if students can tell me what the New Jersey Plan was and what the Virginia Plan was. And of course I care if they can tell me what the foundations of the country are based [on], that's important...But how effective is that knowledge, if they can't tell me how it's affecting their day-to-day life? [Or] how it's affecting their personal household...So, I think it really needs to start from...not necessarily rewrite[ing] the curriculum, but re-prioritizing. Yes, there we go. Re-prioritize what we teach students and...what lens we portray.*

If state lawmakers are not prioritizing—or worse, attacking—civic education, then civic learning will continue to be inaccessible and unengaging for many Texas students. It is not sustainable to rely on youth and teachers alone to make civic education more equitable and relevant. Lawmakers must listen to the needs of teachers and students instead of perpetuating harmful political propaganda embedded in bills like HB 3979 and SB 3.

## CONCLUSION

Texas civic education needs serious reform. Many youth and educators are already doing their part, despite extensive barriers and active suppression from legislators who are more driven by their political agendas than our children's well-being. It's time for Texans to come together and utilize our collective power to fight for the education our youth deserve. Our youth and educators deserve better than HB 3979 and SB 3, which work against the goals teachers have listed to improve civic education. Youth and educators must always be centered in discussions about education, and we share the experiences of participating educators to deepen the passionate discussions around civic education across in our state.

We're grateful to the educators who participated in this report. They illuminated tangible next steps as we continue to work towards comprehensive, equitable civic education for all Texas youth:

- **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.
- **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.



# Appendix

**Table 1.** Participant Descriptions.

| Race/Ethnicity and Gender | Grade and Subject/Role(s)  | School context              |
|---------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Black man                 | 8th grade, Social Studies  | Charter school              |
| White man                 | 12th grade, Government and Economics (AP and Dual Credit)          | Independent School district |
| Black man                 | Professor, Politics and Government                                 | Community college           |
| Black man                 | 12th grade, Government, District Social Studies Content Specialist | Charter school              |
| White woman               | 12th grade, Government, School Dean of Instruction                 | Charter school              |
| White woman               | 12th grade, Government, SPED Social Studies Content Specialist     | Charter school              |
| Black woman               | Professor, Politics and Government                                 | Community college           |
| Black woman               | 12th grade, Government and Economics                               | Charter school              |

**Table 2.** Examples of civics-related learning goals in the Social Studies TEKS

| Grade Level  | Examples of learning goals listed in TEKS   |
|--------------|---|
| Kindergarten | <p><b>Government:</b> Understand the purpose of rules and the role of authority figures</p> <p><b>Citizenship:</b> Identify US/Texas flags, recite the US/Texas pledge of allegiance, and use voting for group decisions</p>  |
| 1st grade    | <p><b>Government:</b> Understand the purpose of rules and laws.</p> <p><b>Citizenship:</b> Understand characteristics of “good citizenship,” as exemplified by historical figures like Ben Franklin or Eleanor Roosevelt</p>  |
| 2nd grade    | <p><b>Government:</b> Understand the role of public officials and governmental services in the community</p> <p><b>Citizenship:</b> Understand characteristics of “good citizenship,” as exemplified by historical figures like WWII Women Airforce Service Pilots, Sojourner Truth, Navajo Code Talkers</p>                              |
| 3rd grade    | <p><b>Government:</b> Understand basic structure and functions of various levels of government</p> <p><b>Citizenship:</b> Identify and describe individual acts of civic responsibility</p>   |
| 4th grade    | <p><b>Government:</b> Understand early forms of organized government in Texas history, historical documents of Texas/U.S.</p> <p><b>Citizenship:</b> Explain meaning of various patriotic symbols/landmarks of TX; Understand importance of active individual participation in democratic process</p>                                     |
| 5th grade    | <p><b>Government:</b> Understand organization of governments in colonial America, important ideas in Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights</p> <p><b>Citizenship:</b> Understand American beliefs/principles, individual participation in democratic process, and effective leadership in constitutional republic</p> |
| 6th grade    | <p><b>Government:</b> Understand concepts of limited and unlimited governments, compare various types of governments</p> <p><b>Citizenship:</b> Understand how the nature of citizenship varies among societies; understand relationship between the individual and representative governments</p>  |

**Table 2 continued.** Examples of civics-related learning goals in the Social Studies TEKS

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 7th grade    | <p><b>Government:</b> Understand the basic principles and structure/functions of government outlined in the Texas Constitution</p> <p><b>Citizenship:</b> Understand the rights/responsibilities of Texas citizens, the importance of different viewpoints, and effective leadership in a democratic society</p>  |
| 8th grade    | <p><b>Government:</b> Understand the American beliefs/principles reflected in important historic documents, the purpose of Constitutional amendments, national and state powers, landmark Supreme Court cases</p> <p><b>Citizenship:</b> Understand the rights/responsibilities of citizens, as well as the importance of voluntary individual participation, different viewpoints, and effective leadership</p>  |
| High school* | <p><b>Government:</b> Understand: changes over time in role of government, structure/functions of federal government, constitutional issues in U.S. society, major political systems throughout history, contemporary political systems, global political units, processes that influence political divisions/relationships/policies, American beliefs/principles in the U.S. Constitution, federalism, processes of filling public offices in government, political parties</p> <p><b>Citizenship:</b> Understand: Tocqueville's American exceptionalism, promises and protections of the Declaration of Independence/Bill of Rights, the importance of effective leadership, the significance of political choices, the historical development of legal and political concepts related to citizenship, how different viewpoints influence public policy, the difference between personal and civic responsibilities, the importance of voluntary individual participation</p> |
| Notes        | <p>These are only some examples of Social Studies learning goals and have been summarized. For the full list, visit the TEA website to view subchapters of Social Studies TEKS by school level (<a href="http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/index.html">http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/index.html</a>).</p>   |

\* Listed learning objectives are only drawn from the TEKS for required high school Social Studies courses (World Geography, World History, U.S. History, Government, and Economics).

# Endnotes

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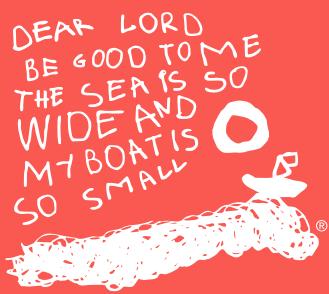
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