



State Support for Civic Engagement

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Executive Summary

Civics education continues to gain national importance, especially in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election and with recent debates about the teaching of history and critical race theory in schools. At the same time, Americans' civics knowledge seems to be in a state of decline, with the first recorded drop in U.S. adults being able to name all three branches of government since 2016. Despite the increasing interest in strengthening civics education, states continue to differ in their interpretation of what constitutes relevant and high-quality civic engagement among students. As of 2018, 42 states required students to take a course in civics and government, with 8 of those states requiring a full year of civics and 19 states requiring a civics exam to graduate, often resembling the U.S. citizenship test. Two states, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania, allow local education agencies to develop locally determined assessments of students' civics knowledge or else require that students take the U.S. citizenship test.

A growing number of states are encouraging civic learning and acknowledging that students can be active participants in civic life. This report describes how 10 states are implementing policies that increasingly support a new approach to civics education that engages students in inquiry, civic reasoning, and civic action.

Seven states (Arizona, California, Georgia, Nevada, New York, Ohio, and Virginia) currently offer an opportunity for students to receive a seal on their diplomas that recognizes their civics knowledge and skills, and two states (Kentucky and Rhode Island) are considering or planning to offer a civic seal for their students. One state, Tennessee, offers such a seal for districts or schools. Three states (California, Massachusetts, and Tennessee) are funding initiatives at the school level that support and acknowledge a commitment to civic learning. Other states, including Massachusetts and Rhode Island, require schools to provide one student-led civics project in either middle or high school. Washington requires one classroom-based performance assessment in civics at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

States increasingly recognize civic engagement activities through civic seals on students' diplomas, with some requiring that students apply their civic learning by carrying out classroom- or community-based civic projects, which can serve as capstone projects. Some focus on recognizing civics achievement at the school level by conferring seals that acknowledge a school's expertise in cultivating civics learning and instructional capacity through guidance documents, professional development, and funding. As this momentum builds, states can continue to develop structures that allow them to monitor which students have access to high-quality civics learning and ensure that all students have the opportunity to experience authentic civic engagement. With increased opportunities for rich, accessible, and applied civics learning, all students can gain the types of civic knowledge, skills, and abilities that can support them in being active and engaged civic participants throughout their lives.

The Current Landscape of State Civics Education Policies

Civics education continues to gain national importance, especially in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election and with recent debates about the teaching of history that addresses the legacy of racism and discrimination in the United States. At the same time, students' average scores for civics knowledge, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), have minimally increased since 1998.¹ Americans' civics knowledge also seems to be in a state of decline more broadly, with the first recorded drop in U.S. adults being able to name all three branches of government since 2016.² Despite the increasing interest in strengthening civics education, states continue to differ in their interpretation of what constitutes relevant and high-quality civic engagement among students.³ As of 2018, 42 states required students to take a course in civics and government, with 8 of those states requiring a full year of civics and 19 states requiring a civics exam to graduate, often resembling the U.S. citizenship test.⁴ Two states, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania, allow local education agencies (LEAs) to develop locally determined assessments of students' civics knowledge or else require that students take the U.S. citizenship test.

Some states use more robust measures to encourage and recognize students' civic engagement. Seven states (Arizona, California, Georgia, Nevada, New York, Ohio, and Virginia) will offer a seal for students' diplomas indicating civic readiness or engagement in the 2022–23 school year (see Table 1).⁵ Rhode Island has plans to develop a civic seal, and Kentucky has expressed an interest in doing the same.⁶ The National Council for the Social Studies has developed a toolkit to support states that are interested in developing civic seals.⁷ This reflects a national effort to support states in pursuing a high standard of civic learning by building on existing social studies standards and highlighting how they integrate with civics knowledge, skills, and applied practices.⁸

This report describes how states are approaching policies to encourage civic engagement. It first provides an overview of state policies and then describes the work in 10 states that are encouraging both the development of civics knowledge and engagement in civic action.

Overview of Policies

Seven states (Arizona, California, Georgia, Nevada, New York, Ohio, and Virginia) have enacted policies to offer students a seal on their diplomas in the 2022–23 school year indicating civic readiness or engagement, and Rhode Island plans to develop one.⁹ One state, Tennessee, offers such a seal for districts or schools, and California offers a Civic Learning Award to schools through a partnership between the state's department

of education and judicial branch. Other states, including Massachusetts and Rhode Island, require schools to provide one student-led civics project in either middle or high school. Washington requires one classroom-based performance assessment in civics at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

How states are assessing and validating students' civic engagement

States typically assess and validate students' civic engagement through graduation requirements in service learning, civic participation, participation in a government or civics course, and/or a passing score on a civics literacy test. In the seven states that provide students the option to earn a seal indicating their civic engagement, all require students to complete service learning, community service, or civic action, combined with course requirements, such as obtaining a 3.0 or higher GPA in a prescribed number of social studies units.¹⁰ Six of the "states that offer a civics seal" require additional criteria (see Table 1), and four of those states provide a menu of options that students can choose to complete to qualify for the seal. New York uses a point-based system that allows students to choose how to satisfy the criteria. Three states—California, Georgia, and New York—allow students to complete a civics or capstone project to qualify for the seal. In all seven states, LEAs validate requirements, confer seals, and report that data to the state education agency.

State support for civic learning and engagement

Three states (California, Massachusetts, and Tennessee) provide funding for LEAs and/or schools to use for professional development and to support students' civic engagement. California recently established funding to increase and bolster the quality of service learning instruction through professional development, paid planning time for teachers, instructional materials, and personnel costs for service learning coordinators, which can, if the project is in service of the civic engagement criteria, support students in attaining the State Seal of Civic Engagement.¹¹ New York requires that schools conferring seals establish a civics-themed pathway with an oversight committee and provides state-defined models and criteria for LEAs to use as guidance for students' civics capstone projects.¹² Ohio also encourages the use of capstone projects as part of the locally defined seals and provides guidance, a toolkit, and a sample rubric to support their use.¹³ In Washington, the state superintendent provides examples of classroom-based civics assessments for educators and grants to support professional learning in civics, as well as open educational resources that support civic learning.¹⁴

Table 1
Criteria That Can Determine Student Eligibility for Civic-Based Seal

State	Applied civics project or capstone	Portfolio and reflection	Pathway option	Service learning or community service	Course requirements (e.g., social studies, International Baccalaureate)	Citizenship test ^a
Arizona		X		X	X	X
California	X			X ^b	X	
Georgia	X		X	X ^c	X	X
New York	X		X	X	X	
Nevada				X	X	X
Ohio ^d	+			+	X	X
Virginia				X ^c	X	

^a Some states allow students to choose to take either a state-developed civics test or the U.S. citizenship test.

^b California students can demonstrate their civic-mindedness by engaging with service learning that meets the expectations of a civic engagement project, either at school or in partnership with a community-based organization.

^c Enlisting in the military can fulfill this requirement.

^d Ohio students can earn the Citizenship Seal (state-defined criteria, signified by an X) and/or the Student Engagement or Community Service seals (locally defined criteria, potential options signified by a +). See the Ohio section of this report for more detail.

Sources: Kissinger, L., & NCSS Seal of Civic Readiness Task Force. (2022). *Civics diploma seals: Energizing civic education for students*. National Council for the Social Studies. <https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/2022-06/SE-860322209.pdf>; Waller, T. (n.d.). Seal of civics literacy [PowerPoint slides]. <https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2019/08/Seal%20of%20Civics%20Literacy.pdf?id=5d4b087b1dcb2512042e97e8>; California Department of Education. (2022). State Seal of Civic Engagement. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/hs/hssstateaseal.asp>; Georgia Department of Education. (n.d.). Social studies civic engagement diploma seal [PowerPoint slides]. <https://lor2.gadoe.org/gadoe/file/5929e222-d82a-4503-9169-04dc3f5c75d3/1/Social-Studies-Civic-Engagement-Diploma-Seal-Information.pdf>; New York State Education Department. (2022). *The New York State Seal of Civic Readiness handbook*. <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/curriculum-instruction/civic-readiness-manual.pdf>; Ohio Department of Education. (2020). *Ohio's graduation requirements: Long-term requirements 2023 and beyond*. https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Ohio-s-Graduation-Requirements/Ohio-s-Graduation-Requirements_Long-term-Requirements-2023-and-Beyond.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US; Virginia Department of Education. (n.d.). Diploma seals. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/parents-students/for-students/graduation/graduation-requirement-resources/graduation-diploma-seals>

Examples From the States

Arizona

In 2019, Arizona established the State Seal of Civic Literacy as a mark of distinction that is added to a typical diploma that local education agencies (LEAs) offer to their students.¹⁵ This seal is an optional program, and many of the portfolio requirements are intended to be completed outside of classroom time. In order to receive a State Seal of Civic Literacy on their diplomas, students in the class of 2021–22 were required to complete all social studies courses with a 3.0 (out of 4.0) or higher GPA; pass the Arizona Civics Exam; and complete the following portfolio requirements, all during their 4 high school years. These portfolio requirements include participating in three civic learning programs, two civic engagement activities, and 75 or more hours of community service (or enlist in the military prior to graduation).¹⁶

The state’s definition of “civic learning programs” includes: the completion of a civic assessment, specifically receiving a score of at least a 3 on the Advanced Placement Government or Politics exams; the completion of approved summer institutes and intensives, including Junior Statesman, Senate Youth Program, or similar; participating in Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) for at least 2 years; or participating in school-sponsored extracurricular activities, including Model United Nations, Project Citizen, or similar.¹⁷ The state provides a list of civic engagement activities, including participating in Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts; participating in voter registration activities; serving on a tribal council; and attending a protest, march, demonstration, or similar.¹⁸

Each student must also complete a written reflection on their portfolio, the parameters of which are determined at the LEA level. The state department of education does not have a plan to support instruction toward the seal through professional learning, capacity building, or other initiatives throughout the state. There are no publicly accessible data on how many students have attained the State Seal of Civic Literacy.

California

In 2020, California adopted criteria and guidance for LEAs to award a State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) to students who meet the following five criteria:

1. Be engaged in academic work in a productive way.
2. Demonstrate a competent understanding of the U.S. and California constitutions; functions and governance of local governments; tribal government structures and organizations; the role of the citizen in a constitutional democracy; and democratic principles, concepts, and processes.

3. Participate in one or more informed civic engagement project(s) that address real-world problems and require students to identify and inquire into civic needs or problems, consider varied responses, take action, and reflect on efforts.
4. Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection.
5. Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community, and/or society.¹⁹

In the first year of the SSCE (2020–21)—one in which a global pandemic raged and students in California largely attended school in a hybrid or remote capacity—the state awarded a total of 5,359 SSCE insignias, roughly 1% of the state’s approximately 400,000 graduates.²⁰ In its second year, the number of insignias requested nearly doubled, to 10,104, roughly 2% of the state’s graduates.²¹

How Districts Are Implementing the California State Seal of Civic Engagement

The state has not provided additional guidance for how to implement State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) criteria 3 and 4 (see the list above), which has allowed local education agencies to be creative in their approach to implementation.²² For example, a study of Year 1 of implementation by Leveraging Equity and Access in Democratic Education (LEADE) at University of California, Los Angeles and University of California, Riverside reported that Anaheim Union School District built upon its existing California Democracy School initiative—which emphasizes civic learning through the practices of inquiry and investigation, service, and civility—by designing districtwide guidance for a civic engagement project that aligned to SSCE criteria 3, 4, and 5 (see the list above).

At each Democracy School site, all students in a single grade level participated in the project and teachers submitted descriptions of passing projects—such as the project in which a student interviewed community members about their reluctance to get COVID-19 vaccinations and proposed solutions—to the district’s SSCE leads.²³ Counselors monitored and reported completion of criteria 1 and 2 to the same SSCE leads, who kept track of all qualifying students. Anaheim Union School District also provided opt-in professional development to 243 educators throughout the district through its internal training program to scale up the California Democracy School initiative.²⁴ In Riverside Unified School District, schools chose a variety of approaches. In one small school, 11th-grade students completed an English language arts–embedded project in which they researched an issue before writing and presenting a soapbox speech to their peers.²⁵ At a larger comprehensive school in the district, staff provided several pathways for students to pursue their civic engagement project requirements during curricular and extracurricular activities, and they plan to build on an existing oral history project that features veterans in the community.

Other districts and county offices of education focused on building capacity first. For example, Salinas Union High School District convened stakeholders to develop a districtwide civic learning plan in its first year rather than conferring seal insignia immediately, so that they could build buy-in from educators. Regional leads in Shasta County similarly focused on the infrastructure supporting the state seal by providing professional learning support to educators in launching the initiative.

The 2022 California state budget established the California Serves Program, a partnership between the California Department of Education (CDE) and California Volunteers, that will allow both agencies to provide recommendations and develop programs related to service learning and “develop model uniform metrics, based on the criteria for the [State Seal of Civic Engagement], for the measurement of student progress toward academic, civic engagement, and other learning objectives, including awarding the [seal].”²⁶ This program also provides a total of \$5 million appropriated annually to the CDE for grants of up to \$500,000 to high-poverty LEAs that may be used to increase and bolster the quality of service learning instruction, beginning with the 2022–23 school year, which could be put toward the SSCE. The funds can support, for example, professional development, paid planning time for teachers, instructional materials, and personnel costs for service learning coordinators. California also recently enacted complementary legislation that provides middle and high school students one excused absence for civic engagement, such as attending a town hall meeting.²⁷

California’s State Board of Education has expressed interest in adding data on schools’ attainment levels of the SSCE to the state’s accountability system as part of California’s multipart College/Career Indicator, and they have convened a working group to explore this possibility. Data on students’ attainment of the State Seal of Biliteracy—the only other seal offered to graduates in California—are already included as one of several measures in the state’s College/Career Indicator.²⁸

Georgia

In 2018, Georgia introduced the Civic Engagement Diploma Seal. Districts can apply to offer this seal to their graduates. Each district’s application to offer the seal must be cosigned by both its civic engagement program specialist and its director of curriculum and instruction. There are state-level professional development resources targeted toward general civic engagement activities and social studies, but these resources are not specifically directed toward supporting the implementation of the state’s Civic Engagement Diploma Seal. This seal is an optional addition to a traditional diploma and does not count toward any additional accountability metrics. Data are not yet available on how many schools have applied to offer this seal, nor on how many students have pursued the seal thus far.

Qualifying for the Civic Engagement Diploma Seal

Students must meet four criteria to qualify for this seal:

1. Complete preapproved civic engagement electives or a civic engagement pathway (Law, Public Safety, Corrections and Security, or Government and Public Administration).
2. Pass the American Government Civic and Basic Skills test, which is akin to the U.S. citizenship exam.
3. Complete 50 hours of community service or civic engagement activities, including 15 hours of civic engagement activities, such as serving as a legislative page or participating in Model United Nations.
4. Complete a capstone portfolio presentation on knowledge gained in social studies, civics, or government classes, which is assessed by rubrics that each district must develop and submit in its application to offer students the Civic Engagement Diploma Seal.²⁹

Students in approved civic engagement pathways can count their courses toward community service activities (Criterion 3 above), in addition to satisfying all other criteria.

Massachusetts

In July 2018, Massachusetts enacted S.B. 2631, which required that schools serving students in grades 8–12 provide them with the opportunity to complete at least one student-led civics project before graduation.³⁰ These projects can be individual, small group, or classwide. They are intended to provide an opportunity for students to analyze complex issues; consider differing points of view; make logical claims using valid evidence; engage in civil discourse with those who hold opposing views; and demonstrate understanding of the connections between federal, state, and local policies. The state board of education provides educators with a guidebook for implementing the civics project that includes instructional planning tools, sample project assessment tools, and models of student work.³¹ In 2023, the state department of education provided funding for districts to host local or regional showcases for students' civic projects or to send their students to statewide civics showcases, with the opportunity to present to legislators, subject matter experts, and community members.³²

In 2018, the state established the Civics Project Trust Fund, intended to assist Massachusetts schools and districts in implementing the civics project. It has received at least \$1.5 million annually from the state since 2019 and received \$2 million in 2023.³³ This fund allows for private funding via gifts, grants, or donations once they are approved by the education commissioner.³⁴ The fund can support professional development or collaboration with institutions of higher education or other

stakeholder organizations, particularly in underserved communities. Through this budget, the Civics Project Trust Fund offers the Civics Teaching and Learning Grant, which can be used by LEAs for high-quality professional development, civics projects implementation, or civics learning experiences for students.³⁵

New York

In September 2021, New York state introduced the Seal of Civic Readiness Pathway and the State Seal of Civic Readiness, which stemmed from the recommendations of a 2018 Civic Readiness Task Force. In addition to completing the requirements for a local or Regents diploma, students who earn a Seal of Civic Readiness must demonstrate Civic Knowledge and Civic Participation (see Table 2). Students demonstrate their eligibility in these domains by completing the activities outlined below and accruing at least 6 points, with at least 2 points in each domain.

Table 2
Criteria for Earning a Seal of Civic Readiness in New York State

Civic knowledge	Pts.	Civic participation	Pts.
4 credits of social studies	1.0	High school civics project (limit two times during grades 9–12)	1.5
Mastery level on Social Studies Regents Exam	1.5 ^a	Service learning project (minimum 25 hours) and reflective civic learning essay, presentation, or product	1.0 ^a
Proficiency level on Social Studies Regents Exam	1.0 ^a	Earned credit in an elective course that promotes civic engagement	0.5 ^a
Advanced social studies course(s)	0.5 ^a	Middle School Capstone Project (only grades 7 and 8 are eligible for this point)	1.0
Research project	1.0	Extracurricular participation or work-based learning experience (minimum 40 hours) and an essay, presentation, or product	0.5 ^a
		Civics Capstone Project	4.0

^a Students may receive these points more than once.

Source: New York State Department of Education. (2023). *Seal of Civic Readiness*. <http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/seal-civic-readiness>

The Civic Readiness Capstone Project has the highest number of potential points, and the state has provided explicit guidance for its completion.³⁶ For their civic readiness capstones, students must identify an issue facing them, their school, or their community; analyze the issue, evaluate alternative solutions, and design and/or execute a solution; take informed action to address the issue; reflect on what they have learned about their school or community through the capstone; and make a presentation about their capstone. The New York State Education Department has also published the “essential elements” for students to complete a capstone project, which are aligned to the American Association of Colleges and Universities VALUE rubric for Civic Engagement.³⁷

In New York, both schools and districts can apply to award their graduates the Seal of Civic Readiness, and they must provide the seal through the establishment of a Seal of Civic Readiness +1 Civics graduation pathway. Schools and districts that apply to provide this pathway must outline a plan to establish a Seal of Civic Readiness Committee, which handles the communication to students and families, tracks activities and extracurricular activities pertaining to civic readiness, develops a tracking process for students who are eligible for the award, approves all potentially qualifying projects and learning experiences, and reviews all coursework and civic learning completed by each student earning the seal. The state’s education department has published an extensive handbook with several models for schools and districts to follow in implementing the various elements of the Seal of Civic Readiness, including model rubrics for the service learning, research, and civics projects.³⁸

In the 2021–22 school year, 117 schools were approved to pilot the Seal of Civic Readiness, 39 of which were in New York City. An estimated 4% of New York graduates (approximately 8,000 graduates) received the Seal of Civic Readiness in 2021–22.³⁹ All schools were eligible to apply to offer their students the Seal of Civic Readiness +1 Civics graduation pathway and award as of the 2022–23 school year.⁴⁰ There were 335 schools approved to provide the Seal of Civic Readiness for the 2022–23 school year.⁴¹ Moving forward, at the end of every school year these schools will be required to report to the state education department the number of Seal of Civic Readiness recipients, the names and titles of their Seal of Civic Readiness Committee members, and any changes to their approved program for offering the Seal of Civic Readiness.

Ohio

In 2014, Ohio passed new graduation requirements, which included expanded opportunities for students to gain recognition for exceeding the state’s graduation requirements, including in the realm of civic engagement. Beginning with the class of 2023, graduates must earn at least two seals on their diplomas, one of which can be a Citizenship Seal.⁴² To receive a Citizenship Seal, graduates must satisfy one option that falls under American history and one that falls under American government, as listed in Table 3.

Table 3
Criteria to Receive a Citizenship Seal in Ohio

American history	American government
Earn a final course grade that is equivalent to a B or higher in an American history course	Earn a final course grade that is equivalent to a B or higher in an American government course
Earn a score of proficient or higher on the Ohio State Test in American History	Earn a score of proficient or higher on the Ohio State Test in American Government
Earn a score equivalent to proficient on an appropriate Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate test in U.S. history	Earn a score equivalent to proficient on an appropriate Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate test in U.S. government
Earn a B or higher in an appropriate American history College Credit Plus course	Earn a B or higher in an appropriate American government College Credit Plus course

Source: Ohio Department of Education. (2023). *Citizenship Seal*. <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Ohio-s-Graduation-Requirements/Ohio%e2%80%99s-Graduation-Requirements/Graduation-Seals/Citizenship-Seal>

Other seals, including the Student Engagement Seal and Community Service Seal, are locally defined.⁴³ However, state guidance encourages the use of capstone projects as part of the locally defined seals, and provides guidance, a toolkit, and a sample rubric to support their use.⁴⁴ Though the Ohio Department of Education includes attainment of a different, more established seal in reports, it does not currently publish data on student attainment of any other seals, including Citizenship.⁴⁵ This may be because no students have attained the newer seals yet, or because the state does not plan to publish these data.

Rhode Island

In 2021, Rhode Island enacted the Civic Literacy Act, which requires graduates of Rhode Island public schools to demonstrate civics education proficiency, as defined at the LEA level, beginning with the class of 2023.⁴⁶ The law also requires that each LEA provide students an opportunity to undertake at least one student-led civics project in either middle or high school. This project must be aligned to the state’s history and social studies standards, can be completed at the individual or group level, and should be designed to promote a student’s ability to:

- reason, make logical arguments, and support claims using valid evidence; and
- demonstrate an understanding of the connections between federal, state, and local policies, including issues that may impact the student’s community.

In September 2022, the Rhode Island Department of Education also established a civics education task force as the result of a recently resolved court case in which students and families sued the governor and education officials for failing to prepare young people to fully participate in civic life.⁴⁷ The task force of 15 people will advise the state on how to better prepare students to be engaged and capable democratic citizens and will include plaintiffs from the case. The state will also establish a Seal of Civic Readiness diploma that includes participation in a civic action-based graduate capstone.⁴⁸ Middle school students will also be able to receive an award that acknowledges their civic readiness.

Tennessee

In 2019, Tennessee enacted the Governor’s Civics Seal, which created an opportunity to recognize schools and LEAs that prioritize teaching civics and allocated an initial \$500,000 to support civic education. In January 2020, the governor’s office awarded 21 schools and districts mini-grants that totaled between \$5,000 and \$15,000 each to support implementation of civics education through this initiative.

One of the six criteria for a school or LEA to earn a Governor’s Civics Seal is to have “fully implemented a high-quality, project-based assessment” that is aligned to the state’s social studies curriculum and its civics learning objectives.⁴⁹ The Governor’s Civics Seal amends a 2012 state law that affirms the importance of civics education, urges high schools to provide students with access to civics education, and requires that all LEAs implement at least one civics- and project-based assessment for students in grades 4–8 and again for students in grades 9–12. The law defines project-based assessment as “an approach that engages students in learning essential knowledge and skills through a student-influenced inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks.”⁵⁰ In 2020–21, 3 districts and 53 schools earned the Governor’s Civics Seal.⁵¹

Virginia

The Virginia State Board of Education has provided students with the opportunity to receive the Seal for Excellence in Civics Education since 2003.⁵² To receive this seal, students must first earn a Modified Standard Diploma, a Standard Diploma, or an Advanced Studies Diploma and complete courses in Virginia history, U.S. history, and U.S. government with a grade of B or higher. Students must also complete 50 hours of community service or extracurricular activities. This can include Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) participation, participating in political campaigns or government internships, or other school-sponsored extracurricular activities that have a civic focus. Students who enlist in the military prior to graduation automatically meet this community service requirement. Virginia emphasizes civic engagement as part of its profile of a graduate, which it looks to target through this Seal for Excellence in Civics Education; however, the state has not made publicly available any data on students who graduate with this seal, and it is unclear how the state tracks its implementation.⁵³

Washington

Since 2012, Washington has required students in 4th, 5th, 7th, 8th, 11th, and 12th grades to complete at least one classroom-based assessment in civics.⁵⁴ The state superintendent provides examples of these classroom-based assessments for educators, which include a variety of civics-based performance assessments.⁵⁵ In 2018, Washington invested in an “expanded civics education teacher training program,” overseen by the superintendent of public instruction.⁵⁶ The superintendent identified two diverse districts to serve as demonstration sites for “enhanced civics education”: Franklin Pierce and Sunnyside school districts.⁵⁷ These sites created civics resources for educators that are available through the state legislature website.⁵⁸ In 2020, the state passed legislation requiring high schools to provide a half-credit stand-alone course in civics, in addition to social studies requirements.⁵⁹

Conclusion

There is growing momentum toward a new approach to civics education that engages students in inquiry, civic reasoning, and civic action. States increasingly recognize civic engagement activities through civic seals on students' diplomas, with some requiring that students apply their civic learning by carrying out classroom-based civic projects, which can serve as capstone projects. Some focus on recognizing civics achievement at the school level by conferring seals that acknowledge a school's expertise in cultivating civic learning, while others cultivate teachers' civic learning and instructional capacity through guidance documents, professional development, and funding for learning activities, including collaboration with civic and community-based organizations and paid planning time. As this momentum builds, states can continue to develop structures that allow them to monitor which students have access to high-quality civic learning and ensure that all students have the opportunity to experience authentic civic engagement. With increased opportunities for rich, accessible, and applied civic learning, all students can gain the types of civic knowledge, skills, and abilities that can support them in being active and engaged civic participants throughout their lives.

Endnotes

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