



Implementation **IN ILLINOIS**

What States Can Learn from How Illinois Implemented its 2015 Civic Education Law

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In effect, the law prescribed for the entire state the best practices a number of Illinois school districts — in partnership with educators, nonprofits, and foundations — had put into place over decades to establish effective civic education.

Introduction

George Washington High School

It's a late spring Chicago afternoon in 2019. The students of Rachel Roti's first period AP Civics class are poring over the results of a survey they hope will help make the case that George Washington High School should build study hall periods into its school day.

The survey, which the students conducted, looks at how many of their peers were doing homework in the cafeteria during lunch the previous day. It's part of a lengthy research process Ms. Roti's class will complete before the end of the year—they'll talk with parents and teachers, they'll talk with Washington High's administration and coordinators, and they'll talk with students and administrators at other schools that have successfully implemented a study hall. They'll look at data both in favor and against study hall, then they'll craft an argument.

This isn't simply an exercise in persuasion, however. The students' research will not just end up saved for posterity in a binder or a flash drive. They will present their findings to the school's principal, Kevin Gallick, to the local council that governs the school, and to key stakeholders. And if the arguments are convincing enough, George Washington High School will, in fact, incorporate a study hall into its daily schedule.

This isn't a one-off project, nor one that only AP classes conduct. It's how Washington High School now makes many of its most important decisions—by empowering students to drive those decisions. Among the more significant changes they have made: The student body has successfully lobbied to put an end to the school's dress code. And a student voice committee—a student group designed to explore issues within the school—was formed to take on some of the toughest problems at Washington High, such as lead in the school's water, a leaking roof, and a bathroom in disrepair, Gallick said. It's all part of a \$20 million capital improvement campaign with major input from the students.

This is just one snapshot of how George Washington High School teaches civic engagement.

As one of 74 Democracy Schools in the state of Illinois, Washington High School practices a comprehensive model

of civic education that includes rigorous content instruction, civic skills and action civics. Civics isn't just taught within the confines of a social studies class. Rather, it speaks to students' individual identities, and civics and civic empowerment are infused throughout the school and are central to Washington High's mission—and it is an exemplar of what schools across Illinois have done as they work to implement one of the country's most aggressive state mandates on civic education.

About this Paper

On August 21, 2015, Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner signed into law Public Act 99-0434, which stated that all high schools in the state must provide at least one semester of civics coursework for its students. The class should “help

young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives,” according to the law. Though the law did not mandate a specific curriculum, leaving that open to each school district to decide what would work best for its students, it did require that the course content “focus on government institutions, the discussion of current and controversial issues, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process.”

The requirement, according to a second law, Public Act 099-0485, was set to take effect in July 2016 and apply to all incoming freshmen

for the 2016-2017 school year, meaning it had to be fully implemented by the start of the 2019-2020 school year. A subsequent law passed in August of 2019, Public Act 101-0254, required a similar class for the state's middle school students to be implemented by the 2020-2021 school year.

In effect, the laws prescribed for the entire state what had been done for decades by a number of Illinois school districts—in partnership with educators, nonprofits, and foundations—to establish effective civic education practices.

This paper will look at those efforts, how that work helped inspire and inform the 2015 law, and how it ultimately led to a statewide plan to implement the new law—so those in other states now contemplating similar laws can learn from the process.



**The principles guiding
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The Implementation at Washington High School

George Washington High School is a shining example for civic education advocates of what can happen if schools truly embrace civics, not simply as a discrete class, but as the centerpiece of its pedagogy.

Set in Chicago's far southeast corner, tucked just inside the Illinois-Indiana border, in an industrial corridor once supported by steel mills that closed long ago, Washington High struggled for years as an Illinois Priority School. A decade ago, it was not just one of the worst performing schools in Chicago. It was in the bottom 5% of the entire state. Washington High was dying.

"No one wanted to come here," said Susan Sadlowski Garza, the Alderwoman of Chicago's 10th Ward and a Washington High graduate.

But the school started a transformation in 2013 when the newly-hired principal, Gallick, and his faculty and administration decided to embrace civics as its centerpiece.

The decision inspired more collaboration between teachers and students, and among teachers themselves. And it attracted a different kind of teacher to Washington High, Gallick said. That buy-in was critical, as teacher leaders really drove change in the school.

But most importantly, by inculcating Washington High with student empowerment throughout its halls, the leadership

has been able to install a new spirit into the school—one that embodies the central argument behind why civic engagement is essential to the body politic: Civic life is about connection between community members, and it's about how individuals relate to each other and solve problems together.

For Washington High School, the passage of the 2015 law mandating every high school in the state teach a civics course became central to its mission. The school implemented the required civics course as its basic freshman civic literacy class. It now uses the class to teach the foundations of the democratic process. From there, students are encouraged to apply that foundation to every other class and experience they have at the school. "It created a platform for more democratic schooling," Gallick said.

Now, Chicago Public Schools considers Washington High a Level 1 school, the highest rank the system awards. In less than five years, academic achievement improved, discipline incidents dropped, graduation rates have increased from 61% to just over 85%, and college enrollment has increased from 35% to 70%.

Not every school could replicate what Washington High School has accomplished. But the principles guiding Washington High's implementation of a highly successful civic education program are nearly universal: Teach students how the civic process works, make it relatable to them, and help them put that process into practice.



Building the Foundation of the Illinois Implementation

The History of the Civics Movement in Illinois

The principles Washington High School applied—and that are at the heart of the law in Illinois—were honed over more than four decades.

That is the story of civic education in Illinois: Over the course of years, piece by piece, Illinois built what would become the foundation for a civic infrastructure in its schools. Working separately, dozens of nonprofits, individuals, and city and state officials built programs that would establish the teaching practices that became seen as the building blocks of effective civic learning. These efforts engaged educators, schools, districts, nonprofits, universities, and policymakers—dedicated stakeholders with a common mission.

And one of the state's most powerful foundations, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, stepped in to help coalesce and harness their resources and to produce the research that Illinois would need to build support to pass then implement the law.

Collectively, they laid the groundwork for effective professional development and would bring together the funders and nonprofits that would ultimately play significant roles in the implementation of the 2015 law—all of this before legislation was even a notion. That meant once civics legislation did pass, the state already had in place some structures—as well as best practices—upon which it could build.

The history of this movement underscores one of the critical principles in implementing a statewide civics program: Such a complicated undertaking shouldn't be built from scratch, but those devising the broad strokes of a civics structure should carefully assess what is already in place, what works, and build out from that foundation.

The Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago

The civics movement in Illinois can be traced as far back as 1974, when Carolyn Pereira founded the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC). The CRFC set out to strengthen American democracy by providing elementary and secondary students with hands-on learning about the Constitution to prepare them for informed civic engagement.

It created programs for both students and teachers that would ultimately become not just the seedbed for civic education in Illinois, but a model that groups such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York would look to as they prescribed effective modern civic education practices. At the heart of these programs was the idea that difficult and controversial topics had to be discussed between students and teachers of different backgrounds, and

that hands-on activities and simulations of democratic processes were key to teaching how democracy works.

For instance, in 1995, the CRFC established the Illinois Youth Summit, an annual conference that in its heyday brought together more than 1,000 students from across the state to study and discuss two focus issues students select each year. The students would talk to each other about those issues, share their positions, meet with state and federal policymakers to express their thoughts and experiences, conduct a service project to teach each other more about those issues, then report back to their own classrooms about their experiences. The CRFC's goal: Introduce students to the foundations of constitutional law and have them see firsthand how it profoundly affects their everyday lives.

The CRFC also created professional development programs for teachers and districts—workshops, day-long seminars, and multi-day institutes—were built upon engaging teachers in activities that emphasized authentic, relevant issues involving rights, law, and policy. It was another tenet that would become central to the PD model the state would establish to implement the 2015 law.

In addition, the CRFC created innovative curricula focused on providing students with facts, then animated them by creating interactions such as mock trials and discussions, as well as programs that brought lawyers, judges, legislators, police officers, and other public officials into schools to work with students and teachers and bring authentic experience to the teaching of the law.

The Civic Mission of Schools

The civic movement in Illinois got a significant boost in 2003 when the Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Center For Information & Research On Civic Learning And Engagement at Tufts University (CIRCLE) published one of the seminal modern papers on civic education, *The Civic Mission of Schools*. The paper outlined the goals of civic education, why schools should be the institutions to teach civics, the “Six Promising Approaches to Civic Education,” and a series of recommendations for building better civic education¹:

- ✧ Formal instruction in U.S. government, history, law, and democracy using interactive methods and opportunities to apply learning to “real life” situations.
- ✧ Discussion of current local, national, and international events students view as important to their lives, and discussion of controversial political and social issues within political and social contexts.

¹*The Civic Mission of Schools*, Carnegie Corporation of New York, CIRCLE, 2003

- ✧ Service learning linked to formal curriculum and classroom instruction.
- ✧ Extracurricular activities that encourage greater involvement and connection to school and community.
- ✧ Authentic student voice in school governance.

Participation in simulations of democratic structures and processes.

The Democracy Schools Initiative and The Illinois Civic Mission Coalition

In concert with the paper, Carnegie launched the *Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools*, a nationwide movement designed to use the “Six Promising Practices” to renew and restore public education’s role in preparing America’s youth to develop into informed and active citizens. This had two effects in Illinois.

This led the CRFC, with Pereira at its helm, to form the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition (ICMC) in 2004. It was the first attempt to formally gather teachers, administrators, students, universities, funders, policymakers, and representatives from private and nonprofit sectors to work on sharpening civic education in the state.

Initially formed as a means of identifying the professional development needs of high school teachers, the ICMC has, over the past 16 years, become the driving advocate for policy around civic education. Its annual convenings have been at the core of a cohesive civic movement.

As part of the *Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools*, the Carnegie Corporation of New York started issuing grants for state-based civic education programs.

Pereira applied for one of the grants and received it.

“I saw that there was money available from the *Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools* to do a statewide initiative, and thought ‘We should really do that,’” Pereira said. “I thought I might get \$100,000. In fact, I got \$10,000. And I said, ‘Now that’s interesting. What do you do with \$10,000?’”



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Pereira convened education leaders from across the state, including members of the Illinois School Board Association, legislators, and a substantial number of educators to figure out what to do with the money.

From these meetings, the ICMC established what would become known as the Democracy Schools Initiative (DSI), out of which programs such as the George Washington High School effort later emerged.

Modeled after a similar program in California, the DSI set out to identify schools committed to civic learning and to recognize schools that provide their students with an environment that essentially simulated what it means to live in a constitutional democratic republic. This concept—which is known by different monikers, such as Civic Readiness Schools—is based on the six proven practices that the *Civic Mission of Schools* prescribed.

The DSI was created to help these schools build out their practices so

civics and the democratic process permeated their entire schools.

The Democracy Schools the ICMC identified have civics woven throughout their formal curricula, and they embrace proven civic-learning practices. The schools provide their students with a range of classes and clubs that teach the democratic process in action. They encourage debate among students and faculty, and they provide simulations such as town halls and mock elections along with service learning opportunities that bring civic education to life. And the schools, much like Washington High, depend on hiring and training administrators and teachers who buy into this concept.

The utility of this philosophy is that it could potentially be replicated in every school district in the country.

In the decade and a half since the initiative started, the DSI has evolved significantly. To date, the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition has recognized 74 Democracy Schools—both private and public schools—out of roughly 713 total high schools in the state, that demonstrate the ideals of lived civics throughout their hallways.

The McCormick Foundation

The Democracy Schools Initiative was important on several fronts.

For one, it had a champion in the Robert R. McCormick Foundation. Long a supporter of civics in Illinois (including the work of the CRFC, the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, and a host of nonprofits and initiatives to drive civic engagement), McCormick brought the Democracy Schools Initiative under its own umbrella in 2010.

It now funds the initiative and assigns staff to administer the program. McCormick's annual operating budget for Democracy Schools is roughly \$300,000 per year. In addition, it links grants to nonprofit partners to needs identified by Democracy Schools, awarding over \$3 million annually in grants addressing youth civic engagement. And the schools themselves receive nominal funding to recognize time spent on the application process. They are also eligible for modest grants in support of needs that emerge as a result of the process.

The initial effort was led by Shawn Healy and Janice Lombardo.

Now the Program Director for the McCormick Foundation's Democracy Program, Healy was among the early participants in the CRFC's meetings that led to the establishment of the DSI in 2004. Back then, he was a social studies teacher at West Chicago Community High School. Largely credited with driving the movement behind the High School and Middle School civics laws, Healy emerged as the predominant educational policy leader on civics within the state through his work with the ICMC.

When McCormick took over the DSI, ten schools had been recognized as Democracy Schools—most of them in suburban Chicago. But Healy and his team worked with institutional partners in every region of the state, such as the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute in southern Illinois, to help identify schools that were potential applicants, recruit them, then set up professional development training.

Under McCormick's watch, the DSI network grew to 74 schools distributed throughout the state and Chicago. And even though the Democracy Schools Initiative was not a part of the 2015 law, expanding the DSI's reach, Healy and his team



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solidified a network of administrators, nonprofits, and other parties in every corner of the state. That network ultimately helped create the professional development infrastructure needed to implement the new law once it was passed.

But most importantly, as the DSI thrived statewide, it gave proof of concept to both legislators and doubters, that full-scale implementation of a civic education program was possible.

"Democracy Schools ended up being critical," Healy said. "They are essentially demonstration projects of how we can scale civic learning. That is very important in a system that says that you have to *show* success. They allow us to show what we are saying about civic education when we have politicians asking questions like 'How does [civic education] work?'"

Chicago Public Schools Build a Service Learning Infrastructure

To understand how the 2015 law was implemented in Chicago, one must step back in time, as the city and its public schools were also on their own decades-long path toward civic education reform.

That path started back in 1998, according to Jon Schmidt, who served as the Manager of Democracy Education and Student Leadership for the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) from 2002-2014 before joining the faculty of the School of Education and the Center for Experiential Learning at Loyola University Chicago.

That year, the CPS under then-CEO Paul Vallas, established the Service Learning Initiative which required all high school students complete 20 hours of community service to become high school juniors then another 40 hours to graduate.

The program had a challenge, though, according to Schmidt: The community service had no connection to what students were learning in the classroom, and most often the requirement amounted to rather meaningless volunteer projects. When Schmidt was hired by then CPS CEO Arne Duncan in 2002, he was charged with making that connection and gaining buy-in from almost every school in the country's third-largest school district.

Schmidt, who had significant influence because of Duncan's support, put in place teacher professional development programs, school presentations, trainings, and resource development, all designed to integrate the district's service learning requirement with classroom instruction. Each year, he estimates he was able to engage 10 to 15 schools.

"I knew that was gonna be a long, long process, because at that point, we had 100 high schools in the district and about 105,000 high school students," Schmidt recalled. "So my strategy was to take it piece by piece."

His work also coincided with the launch of the *Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools*, and much the same as Pereira at the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago, his work hinged on engaging dozens of nonprofits that could act as partners in the CPS's work.

"Part of the way I understood my work was to build collaboration among organizations and institutions in my work with schools," Schmidt said. "So we built both local affiliations and partnerships between schools and organizations, and also on a city-wide level."

The process was one of search and discovery, finding out what each school was doing—then mobilizing teachers who were already inspired. "We were just uncovering these amazing teachers who were able to not just do their own work, but bring other teachers into the mix, and do their own professional development," Schmidt said. "They would generate these extraordinary projects and programs, and I just looked at them and said, 'Wow, how do you do all that?' And so there was some really, really good practice beginning to emerge there."

In order to give teeth to the Service Learning Initiative (SLI), the CPS transitioned the requirement from one that was hours-based to one that was project-based. Schmidt, who had a background in youth development and community organizing, took the service learning requirement and built a powerful force for innovation and civic education in CPS, according to Brian Brady, the President of Mikva Challenge, a Chicago-based national nonprofit that promotes programs and curricula that help young people put democratic ideals and



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youth voice into action. He matched innovative teachers to a network of innovative service-learning organizations, so the CPS had a network of strong civic educators and practice to build around.

To support the service learning, Schmidt gathered a team of educators to design a curriculum and student workbook that guided students and teachers through four units over the course of a semester or a school year. And the CPS built professional development around the SLI and trained ten teachers who could run annual workshops for other teachers across the CPS, Schmidt said.

"Jon's move to project-based service learning was an important transition and building block for the civics course that came later," Brady said.

A Time for Civic Experimentation and Innovation in Chicago

Brian Brady described the first part of the 21st century as something of a new frontier for civic education in the CPS—one of civic experimentation and innovation—as Jon Schmidt's work had opened the door for dozens of partnerships with individual schools that centered on civics.

"There were a thousand small experiments happening within Chicago," said Brady, who is largely credited with helping spur the civic education movement within the city. In addition to assisting Schmidt build his curriculum, nonprofits such as Mikva Challenge helped create a number of important programs, including:

- ✦ **Student Voice Committees:** Developed with Mikva, the CPS developed committees of students at individual schools, which would work with adults to address important issues within their schools. Created in 2009 based on student recommendations from students to then-Superintendent of CPS Ron Huberman, the committees were designed to give students a voice in the matters that affected them. These Student Voice Committees, such as the one that was created by George Washington High School, would also work with committees from other schools to talk about best practices, what they've done and learned. There are now Student Voice Committees in place at every CPS high school, and a few dozen CPS K-8 schools. They provide youth leaders at

schools a valuable way to improve their schools and have a seat at the table with the principal and the administration—helping improve policy, school culture, and student safety. Each year, more than 100 student action projects are exhibited at the Action Civics Showcase.

★ **CPS Student Advisory Council:** Also working with Mikva Challenge, the CPS developed a committee of 20 students from schools representing each part of the city that meets quarterly with Chicago decision makers to give policy recommendations on youth issues such as youth safety, teen health, and education. This helped the CPS's CEO create action plans based on youth-led research on building community investment in neighborhood schools. The Mikva facilitated CPS Student Advisory Council has won a number of policy victories around student voice in schools, security guard training and sexual harassment policies, student input on social-emotional learning practices, teen health classes—particularly sex ed—and improved student lunch food, Brady said.

★ **The Global Citizenship Initiative:** In 2012, the CPS, along with the McCormick Foundation, introduced the Global Citizenship Initiative, designed to address the civic empowerment gap and inequity through two courses for high school seniors, one in civics and one in financial literacy. The civics course would become instrumental in implementing the 2015 law, as it integrated service-learning and civic action practices in social science classrooms—and it provided the foundation for a civics curriculum the CPS would create as the centerpiece of its implementation plan.

“We were pushing the envelope on taking action, pushing the envelope on student voice,” Brady said. “Public officials and school leaders who interacted with youth leaders started to become converts to the power of youth engagement and



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And that emphasis on student voice would become one of the central themes of the 2015 law.

The Disparate Projects Coalesce into Policy

The work in the CPS, the work of the Democracy Schools Initiative, and the work in broader Illinois proved invaluable to the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition (ICMC), as it cumulatively provided proof of concept for what high-quality civic education could look like. All of this work would become the centerpiece of two seminal reports—one in 2009 and one in 2013—known as the *Illinois Civic Blueprint*. Drawing from examples such as the ICMC's Youth Summit, the CPS/Mikva Youth Policy Councils, and learnings from the Democracy Schools Initiative, the papers provided the foundation for recommendations that districts and schools from across the state could follow to implement effective civic education practices and outlined five “common elements” for civic learning: “(1) vision and leadership; (2) proven civic learning practices; (3) teacher hiring, assessment, and professional development; (4) school-community connections; and (5) school climate.”

Working with one of McCormick's grantees, the Citizen Advocacy Center, the ICMC was able to leverage the Illinois Civic Blueprint into what became the precursor for the 2015 law.

The Illinois Task Force on Civic Education

On August 9, 2013, the Illinois General Assembly passed Public Act 098-0301, which authorized the creation of the Illinois Task Force on Civic Education. Made up of bipartisan legislators and education stakeholders from across the state, the Task Force was charged with outlining the need for better

civic education in Illinois. They analyzed other states that had implemented statewide civics programs, identified best practices, and made recommendations to the General Assembly on ways to boost civic knowledge and skills in the state.

Submitted to then-governor of Illinois, Pat Quinn, in May of 2014, the 50-page report outlined a dire state of civic education in Illinois²: Compared with other states, Illinois was simply failing, as it was one of only ten states in the country that did not require a civics or U.S. government course for graduation from high school. “You can graduate from this state’s largest school district, in the heart of the nation’s most corrupt city, and never have taken a course that explains to you how a government works—or what it is,” the report stated.

The Task Force made seven recommendations. Among the most important³:

- ✦ **Civics Course Requirement:** Illinois should require a standalone civic education course at the high school level. The course’s content should “transcend a simple focus on government institutions and include participatory civic learning practices like current and controversial issues discussions, service learning, and simulations of democratic processes.”
- ✦ **Revisions of Illinois’s Social Studies Standards:** This revision should address skills such as news literacy, as well as content and should follow the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards*.
- ✦ **Project-Based/Service Learning Requirement:** This should require students to conduct a service learning project by the completion of eighth grade and again by the completion of 12th grade. The projects should be administered by individual school districts and should have “concrete links to the formal curriculum.”
- ✦ **Licensure and Certification of Teachers of Civics:** Illinois should ensure licensure and certification requirements for



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preservice teachers of all disciplines and grades be aligned with best practices in civic education, including direct instruction, current and controversial issues discussions, service learning, and simulations.

- ✦ **Professional Development:** Illinois should ensure in-service educators have access to professional development aligned with best practices in civic education. The Illinois General Assembly should seek an efficient and effective method of providing professional development for teachers of civic content and skills.

Recommendations Led to Bill that Became a Law

On February 27, 2015, Representative Deb Conroy (D-Villa Park, 46th District), who had been a member of the Illinois

Task Force on Civic Education, filed HB4025 with the Illinois State Clerk.

The bill called for amending the School Code in Illinois to require “every public high school to include in its curriculum a separate civics course of study with the goal of helping young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives.”

The bill collected 30 bipartisan co-sponsors in the House of Representatives and 15 sponsors in the state Senate. Representatives from the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Teachers Union, teachers, students, and nonprofits from across the state, filed electronic witness slips in favor of the bill, and the nonprofits with years of experience statewide spoke to its importance.

On May 30, the bill passed the House and Senate. And on August 21, 2015, Governor Bruce Rauner signed Public Law 99-0434.

“In the intervening years, we’ve been working on implementing those recommendations,” McCormick’s Healy said.

² <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/il-civic-ed-task-force2014.pdf>

³ <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/il-civicFed-task-force2014.pdf>

The Implementation of the 2015 Law

Overview

Once the law was passed, the state of Illinois built upon the work that these disparate interested parties did previously, as they provided the parameters for the implementation of the course all high schools had to have in place by the time the state's high school class of 2020 started its senior year.

As mentioned previously, the course had to include instruction on government institutions, current and controversial issues discussions, service learning, and simulations of democratic processes. But the Illinois General Assembly did not mandate that the state create that curriculum. Instead, the law left the implementation up to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), its Regional Offices of Education, individual school districts, and ultimately high schools and their teachers.

The implementation plan, therefore, relied on providing districts and schools with resources they could use to create their own courses. And—even more importantly—it was based on creating a vast professional development network

Here again, the broader state of Illinois and the Chicago Public Schools followed different paths, both built on the pockets of infrastructure they already had in place. The way each has carried out its implementation plan holds lessons that other states and school districts can follow as they contemplate what civic education legislation might mean for them.

Building a Public-Private Partnership

One of the key aspects of Public Act 099-0434 was a stipulation that school districts could utilize private funding in order to offer the course the law mandated. This was significant because Illinois has a history of bills, such as the 2007 bill which endorsed Democracy Schools, that went unfunded and were rendered toothless. This new law, however, was

designed to be supported by private money. This led to the formation of a private-public partnership that has driven the implementation process over the law's first three years.

The McCormick Foundation took the lead, but was able to bring in funding partners such as the All-State Corporation, the Boeing Corporation, the Chicago Community Trust, the Joyce Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation, to secure \$1 million annually for each of the first three years of the implementation phase and to build a campaign it dubbed #CivicsIsBack.

The campaign mobilized the state's school districts, its 38 Regional Offices of Education, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and a network of nonprofit partners to help implement the new high school civics course, build a teacher professional development program to support the course, and create an evaluation program to assess the initiative's progress.

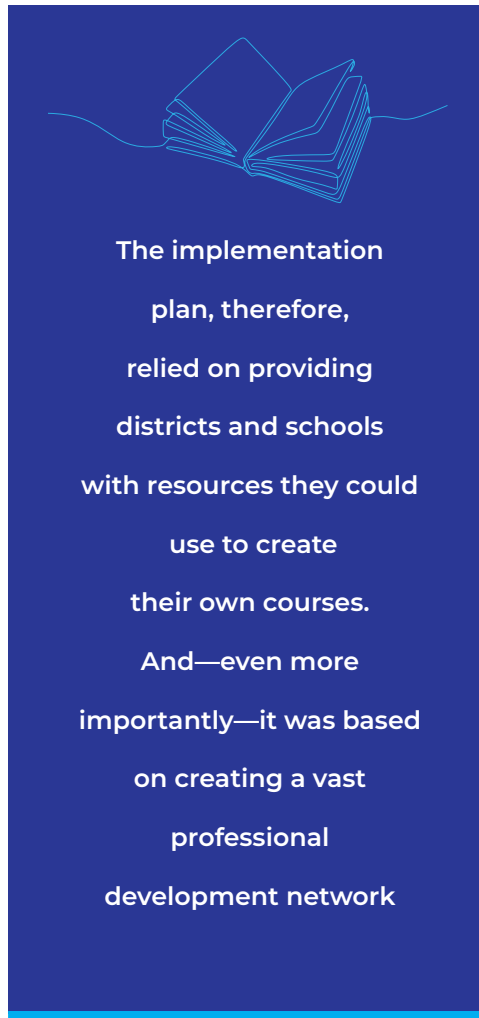
To carry out this mission, McCormick built an advisory board that included representatives of ISBE, CPS, the Illinois Council for the Social Studies, the academic community, and funding partners that convened periodically throughout the three-year implementation period.

Revision of the State Social Science Standards

The implementation plan was anchored by a move by the Illinois State Board of Education to revise the Illinois social science standards. The revision, which had been a recommendation of the Illinois Task Force

on Civic Education in 2014, was a year-long project to have new standards in place for high school students starting with the 2016-2017 school year—and fully implemented by school districts by the 2017-2018 academic year.

ISBE instructed the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition to create a task force in partnership with the Midwest Comprehensive Center at American Institutes for Research to make recommendations to ISBE by 2015 for standards it should accept. The Social Studies Revision Task Force was made up of



educators from across the state, as well as nonprofits and universities based in Illinois.

The standards the task force suggested—and that were ultimately adopted by ISBE—required all high school students in the state receive a semester long civics course within the two years of social studies that the state’s laws already mandated. The standards helped inform how this civics course would be taught.

This not only gave teeth to the 2015 law, but the language within the standards mirrored the law itself through an accompanying Illinois Civics Mandate Guidance Document⁴. The semester in civics, according to that document, should “help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives. Civics course content shall focus on government institutions, the discussion of current and controversial issues, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process.”

According to the standards, the civics course should be divided into four core disciplines:

- ✧ Civics
- ✧ Civic and Political Institutions
- ✧ Participation and Deliberation: Applying Civic Virtues and Democratic Principles
- ✧ Processes, Rules, and Laws

Like the 2015 law, the standards did not provide a specific curriculum. Instead, it allowed each school district to create a curriculum that works best for its own schools. And like the 2015 law, the standards permitted school districts to utilize private funding to implement the civics mandate.

Importantly, the new standards were based on the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* developed by 15 professional organizations committed to the advancement of social studies education, including the *Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools* and the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago. The C3 framework emphasized learning through inquiry—and required many teachers in Illinois to transition from the “sage on the stage” method of teaching through lecturing and toward the “guide on the side” method, which makes their teaching more interactive.



⁴ <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Guidance-Doc-Civics-HS.pdf>

Statewide Implementation

Establishing a Baseline

To build an effective implementation plan, Illinois first had to map out what exactly was happening in terms of civic education, and who was doing what—so it could set a course and measure success over the first three years of the law's existence.

The McCormick Foundation created the Illinois Civics Teacher Survey and disseminated it to teachers across the state by working with the state's Regional Offices of Education, as well as educational nonprofit partners. Between August 10 and September 30 of 2015, more than 700 teachers from 74 of the state's 102 counties completed at least part of the survey.

The survey found some positives: A previous estimate, later confirmed by a head count of schools, found that 60% of the state's schools had a civics or government course in place as of 2014–2015. Another 27% offered it as an elective, and 13% either had no course or we were unable to find the information.

Among those schools, more than 60% offered direct instruction, nearly 60% offered discussion of civics, and between 50% and 60% offered simulations depending on locality.

But it did find weaknesses. For one, much of that instruction offered was geared toward preparing students for a multiple-choice test. And teachers were not prepared to incorporate service learning into their lesson plans. While 30% of Chicago Metro schools said they offered service learning, less than 20% of schools in the rest of the state did so. In addition, the survey found a severe paucity in professional development when it came to service learning.

Based on the results, the McCormick Foundation, the Illinois State Board of Education, and their partners designed an implementation plan centered on professional development. And that, according to observers, was the greatest effect of the 2015 law: From afar, one could look at the 2015 law and

think simply that a state mandated a semester for civic education. In reality, Illinois passed a law that led to a multi-million-dollar statewide effort involving hundreds of institutions, administrators, and educators to create a network of professional development to recommend how best to teach civics.



**Professional development
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The Teacher-Mentor Model

Professional development in Illinois was based on a teacher-train-teacher model.

The McCormick Foundation, working with local Regional Offices of Education and partners throughout the state that were familiar with local school districts, started the effort by recruiting 38 veteran teachers known to be exemplars in civic education to serve as teacher mentors.

These mentors, who represented each of Illinois' 38 educational regions—including three in Cook County, the second most populous county in the nation—were tasked with providing in-school and in-service mentorship to less experienced teachers and individually consulting with teachers. They also helped facilitate professional development workshops during the summer and throughout the school year. For their efforts, the teacher mentors are given a semi-annual stipend of \$2,000, and the McCormick Foundation covers all of the teachers' expenses incurred as part of their mentor duties.

The program hinged on the workshops, according to Mary Ellen Daneels, a long-time teacher at West Chicago Community High School who was recruited by the McCormick Foundation to serve as

its in-house Lead Teacher Mentor and head up the mentor training process throughout the state.

Daneels is the perfect example of what McCormick was looking for in a teacher mentor. Long before the 2015 law,

⁵ <http://documents.mccormickfoundation.org/pdf/2015-IL-Civics-Teacher-Survey-Report.pdf>



Just as the new standards stressed moving away from the “sage-on-a-stage” method, Daneels and her team created teacher professional development (PD) that was designed to engage teachers in the type of instruction they were being taught to use.

West Chicago Community High School was known statewide for its legislative semester civics program required for graduation.

“When the law was written in the state of Illinois, the proven practices in the law are also reflected in how we teach civics at West Chicago,” Daneels said. “We always did simulations of democratic processes and discussed current controversial issues.”

It didn’t hurt that she was also the lead writer on the state’s new high school social science framework.

Her classroom background meant that Daneels was able to work with local institutional partners such as universities, as well as the civic education nonprofits that had long worked with individual schools to create a mentor training program based on true classroom experience and knowledge of what could work.

The workshops focused on imparting best practices for each of the four areas of concentration for the 2015 law and the new social science framework:

- ✦ Direct instruction on civics and government.
- ✦ Simulation that teachers could use to show how democratic processes and practices work.
- ✦ Support for teachers to help them understand how to design and implement service-learning programs that both give students a chance to apply what they learn by taking it out into the real world and linking those actions with formal curriculum and classroom instruction.
- ✦ Guidance on how to incorporate and lead discussion of controversial topics in order to increase interest in civic topics and to help build critical thinking skills.

Just as the new standards stressed moving away from the “sage-on-a-stage” method, Daneels and her team created teacher professional development (PD) that was designed to engage teachers in the type of instruction they were being taught to use.

“Some 60% of schools were offering something, but in



**All of these resources
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requirements and how to
implement them in
their own classrooms.**

general, it was geared towards a multiple-choice constitution test, and it did not necessarily improve practices in civic education,” Daneels said. “So generally speaking, teachers at the high school level were pretty confident in their ability to teach content. But [they were less confident] in the idea of leading a current and controversial issue discussion or a simulation or a service learning project... We really had to give teachers a clear idea of what are the attributes of those civic practices, and then show them what are free resources that could help them do that. We had to model these proven practices, actually have them do them so that they can then replicate that perhaps in their classroom.”

A PD workshop, Daneels said, might include 20 minutes of direct instruction giving teachers information and content, then it would shift into engaging the teachers in a simulation.

For instance, one professional development workshop in the Chicago suburb of Skokie focused on the controversy around arming teachers—a topic the local district had been debating in the aftermath of school shootings. She engaged the teachers in a “controversial issue discussion” and then conducted a simulation that included a mock legislative hearing using parliamentary procedure to deliberate over a resolution. The resolution she used was the actual resolution the Illinois Association of School Boards was going to vote on a few weeks later, Daneels said. To teach the service-learning component, she discussed how teachers could have their students engage in the deliberation, then write letters to school board members trying to persuade them to vote one way or another.

“That was a lesson plan that teachers could take right away back to their classrooms and use with their kids,” Daneels said. The workshops in general involve “a lot of doing and practicing the pedagogy and then reflecting on how it could be iterated in one’s own classroom,” she said.

The workshops were designed to be engaging and to tie to actual current events and local issues. During its first year of implementation, the training was connected to teaching about the 2016 election. Subsequently, they dealt with other topics such as the Justice Kavanaugh confirmation process

and how Supreme Court nominations work, the 2018 elections, presidential executive orders, and the 2020 census.

Making Professional Development Accessible

The process was designed to be accessible—workshops were planned in every one of the state’s ten educational regions so no teacher in the state would have to travel more than an hour to attend one. And all sessions were free.

Beyond that, they were tailored to each individual group of attendees.

McCormick worked with The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University’s Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life (CIRCLE) to conduct surveys shortly before each session. Daneels would take the information and use it to determine which topics would be the focus of her team.

“Teachers in Carbondale might be more nervous about one element, and those in Macomb might be more nervous about another element. So I was really able to differentiate the needs of the different regions,” she said.

Creating Content

Because neither the 2015 law nor the new social science standards required the creation of a curriculum, the McCormick Foundation and Illinois Civics Mission Coalition (ICMC) worked with partners such as the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago, Mikva Challenge, Facing History and Ourselves, and others to create content that teachers and districts could use to develop their own curriculum.

Drawing from the *Civic Mission of Schools* reports and the work of the Democracy Schools Initiative, the ICMC created a list of Civic Learning Practices Indicators, which define best practices for each of the requirements: direct instruction, simulations of democratic processes, service learning, and discussion of current and controversial issues. It created a Curriculum Design Toolkit for teachers that covers teaching strategy, content, critical thinking exercises, and skill-building for each of the four requirements. And it created a series of lesson plans for teachers that cover topics such as the Bill



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of Rights, the 2020 census, civil and human rights, local government, and news literacy.

All of these are housed on Illinois-Civics.org, a website designed as a one-stop shop for teachers in various districts to learn about the state’s new requirements and how to implement them in their own classrooms.

Along with the resources, the website features an incredibly robust blog that has walked the state’s schools through the first three years of implementation. It includes breakdowns of the different elements of the new requirements, suggestions for how teachers can approach them, blog posts from other teachers about how they have implemented the new requirements in their own classrooms, as well as a calendar of PD events and workshops.

In addition, the ICMC sends out a statewide monthly newsletter that covers updates on implementation, links to resources teachers can use for teaching timely topics, and a

calendar of professional development events. The 38 mentors are also expected to send out similar regional monthly newsletters.

Success Metrics

During the past three years, Daneels estimates she and the teacher mentors have conducted more than 1,300 hours of professional development—and that the ICMC and McCormick have reached more than 9,000 educators. (According to McCormick, there are an estimated 1,300 civics teachers in the state, 650 of whom are full-time civics teachers. The 9,000 educator number includes K-8 teachers, pre-service teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, and educators who have attended multiple workshops.)

The numbers alone speak to the successful implementation of the PD program the ICMC and McCormick put into place. But they have been diligent about actually tracking metrics over the first three years so they could make adjustments to programming in real time—and, importantly, report successes

to key Illinois stakeholders and policymakers in order to build support.

McCormick engaged CIRCLE to conduct ongoing research on the progress and issue reports after each of the first three years of implementation. A final report was published in January 2020, according to CIRCLE's director, Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg.

The program showed immense progress during its first two years.

After the second year of implementation, CIRCLE found interest in implementing the new civics course⁶:

- ✧ Grew among principals from 68% in 2017 to 81% in 2018.
- ✧ Grew among superintendents from 53% in 2017 to 65% in 2018.
- ✧ Stayed flat among social studies coordinators at around 90% from 2017 to 2018.

The implementation of the law also saw gains among students after the second year of implementation, as those who took the new course were more likely (than those who did not) to:

- ✧ Engage in civil discourse in class.
- ✧ Discuss controversial issues.
- ✧ Feel safe expressing opinions.
- ✧ Discuss current events.
- ✧ Learn how government works.
- ✧ Volunteer.

Teacher mentors also reported that among their students⁷:

85% were able to demonstrate a general grasp of the concepts covered in the new standards.

67% said their students demonstrated deep and critical understanding of civic knowledge.

85% said their students participated in discussions in their civics courses.

69% said students of all academic levels and backgrounds were able to engage in course activities.

Three-quarters of teachers surveyed reported that they

have all of the information they need to implement the new course, and 64% say they have all of the resources they need for implementation.

The two-year evaluation also included a survey of more than 3,000 students. Those who took the course were more likely (than those who did not) to⁸:

- ✧ Consider multiple viewpoints on controversial issues.
- ✧ Learn about societal issues they care about.
- ✧ Discuss controversial issues.
- ✧ Discuss current events.

In addition, according to the IllinoisCivics.org blog: "Students in civics courses also reported significantly more exposure to simulations, greater participation in a class project to improve their school or community, and exposure to instruction on government institutions and how public decisions are made with respect to these structures."

What Worked?

So what worked?

According to a paper that Daneels, Kawashima-Ginsberg, and McCormick's Healy published in the Journal for Success in High Needs Schools this past spring, the professional development model was successful because it put teachers first. It centered on letting teachers experience firsthand what the new pedagogy would feel like if they were the students. It was flexible, working for the needs of different teachers. It took teacher input seriously and gave them a voice in their own training. And it built upon tools teachers were already using, such as The Danielson Framework.

Importantly, said Kawashima-Ginsberg, the program was able to show teachers that change wasn't just necessary, but possible.

This required motivating teachers, who may have been intimidated by switching from teaching a subject by simply passing on knowledge, to develop a more active, engaged classroom.

"When the conversation in the classroom becomes about informed action, or using inquiry, or incorporating controversial issue discussion on a regular basis, it was really intimidating for some teachers," Kawashima-Ginsberg said. "We had to make teachers feel like this can realistically happen in a classroom without causing chaos."

⁶ <http://illinoiscivics.blogspot.com/2018/07/illinois-civics-courses-changing.html>

⁷ <http://illinoiscivics.blogspot.com/2018/08/illinois-civics-teacher-mentors.html>

⁸ <http://illinoiscivics.blogspot.com/2018/08/students-in-civics-courses-building.html>

Illinois Civics Education Milestones

1974

Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago founded; beginning of modern-day civics movement in Illinois.

1995

Illinois Youth Summit established.

1998

CPS approves Service Learning requirement, placing Arne Duncan in charge of the program.

2003

The Civic Mission of Schools, seminal paper on civic education, published.

2004

Illinois Civic Mission Coalition formed to sharpen civic education in the state.

2005

General Assembly adopts resolution acknowledging value of Democracy School Initiative.

2006

Kellogg-funded Superintendent Youth council formed in Chicago with Mikva facilitating and help from CPS and CRFC.

2011

Mayor Rahm Emanuel and then-Superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard approved the Global Citizenship Initiative, supported by McCormick, Mikva, CRFC, and Facing History led the lobbying effort for this with support of CPS service learning.

2013

Illinois Task Force on Civic Education created.

2015

Then-Governor Bruce Rauner signs bill mandating one semester of civics coursework in Illinois high schools.

2015

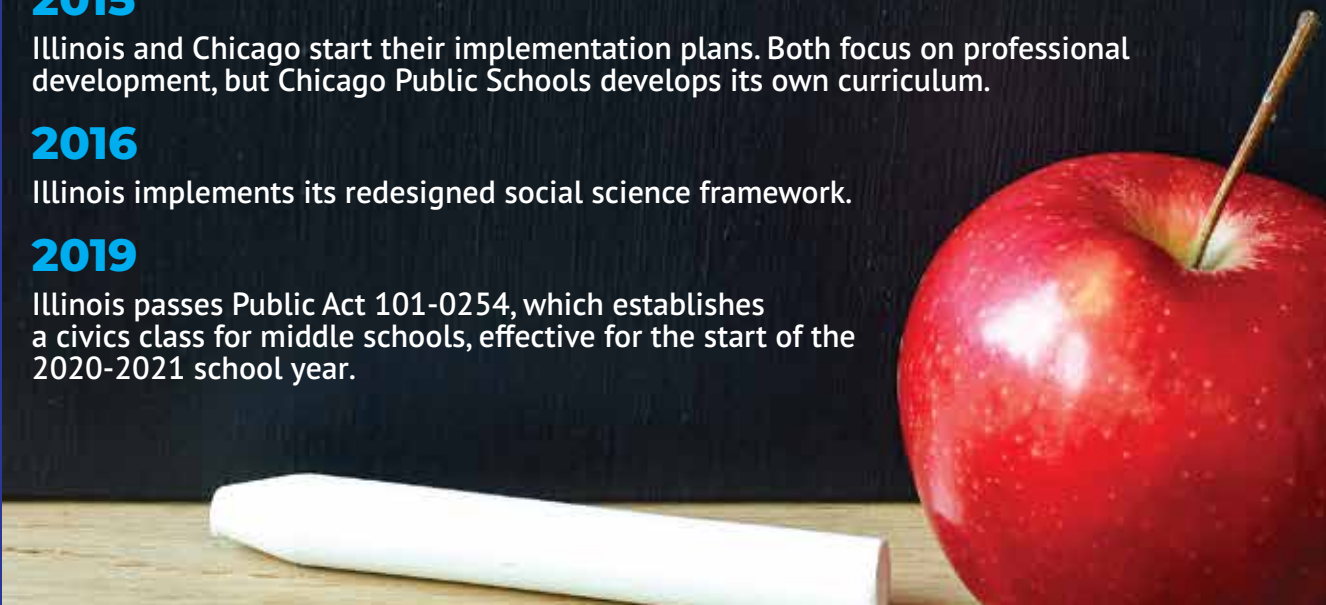
Illinois and Chicago start their implementation plans. Both focus on professional development, but Chicago Public Schools develops its own curriculum.

2016

Illinois implements its redesigned social science framework.

2019

Illinois passes Public Act 101-0254, which establishes a civics class for middle schools, effective for the start of the 2020-2021 school year.



The Chicago Public Schools Implementation

Chicago Public Schools Takes its Own Path

Similar to the rest of the state, the 2015 law and the new social science framework tasked the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) with the massive undertaking of preparing hundreds of teachers to adapt to a new way of approaching civics.

For CPS, the implementation plan—like the rest of the state—also included the creation of a professional development mechanism, one that was also centered on summer and in-year professional development (PD) institutes and a teacher-training-teacher model of PD.

But CPS took a step that might be difficult for other school districts across the country. It created its own curriculum, *Participate: A Civics Course for Chicago's Youth*.

The curriculum would not have been possible had Chicago not been an early statewide leader in innovative civic practices, and its creation is again a lesson in how a school district can lean upon outside partners to pursue what is an exceedingly difficult undertaking.

The work of outside nonprofits such as Mikva Challenge, Facing History and Ourselves, the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC), and others, as well as the previous work of Jon Schmidt within CPS—as well as philanthropic interest from foundations such as McCormick and the Chicago Community Trust—put Chicago ahead of most other school districts in the state by 10 to 15 years, according to Mikva Challenge's Brian Brady.

The writing of *Participate Civics*, as it is known, really started with the creation of the Global Citizenship Initiative (GCI) during the 2012-2013 school year—predating the 2015 law. Designed to increase civic learning opportunities throughout Chicago, GCI was developed by Mikva Challenge, which created the concept in tandem with the CRFC and Facing History and Ourselves. They then lobbied the offices of the Mayor and CPS Superintendent for approval, then procured funding from McCormick before handing the plan over to Jon Schmidt at CPS, Brady said. The project was championed by then Superintendent Jean Claude-Brizard and Mayor Emanuel's Educator Director, Beth Swanson.

As part of its work, GCI had incorporated a participatory curriculum—created in partnership among groups such as Mikva,

Facing History and Ourselves, the CRFC, and CPS. That would essentially become the first version of *Participate Civics*.

When the 2015 law was passed, CPS created a second, greatly improved version of the curriculum which has become a centerpiece of the implementation of the 2015 law.

Now in its third version, *Participate Civics* is focused on the lived experiences of students in Chicago, and it is designed specifically to meet the needs of Chicago's schools and students. Its goal is to engage students by helping them confront the civic issues they saw on

their own city blocks, according to Heather Van Benthuyzen, the CPS's Director of Social Science and Civic Engagement, who has overseen the district's work around meeting the new state civics law.

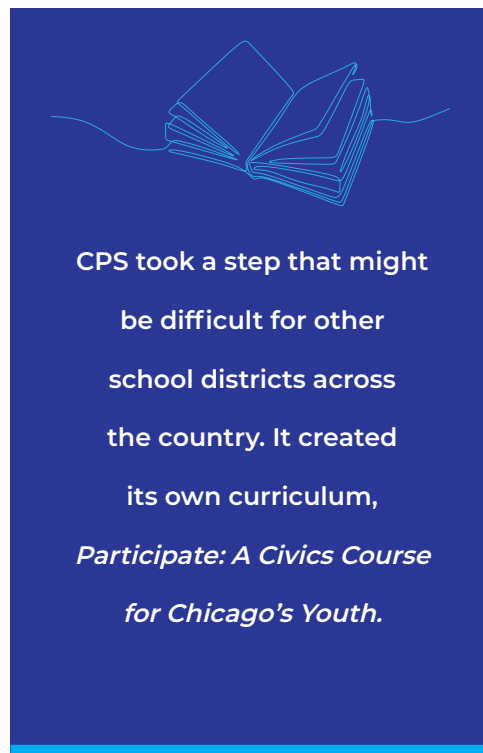
The idea that civics is local is vital to why CPS has created its own curriculum, Van Benthuyzen said.

"We wanted a curriculum that provides these foundational skills and knowledge, but that also gives teachers opportunities to develop in the powerful practices," Van Benthuyzen said. "We asked, 'How do we connect young people to elected officials and the city and demystify the government? It's an important part of civic education. It's not just learning or going and hearing from an alderman or city council representative—but about what we can do by engaging in

real conversations around civic life."

PD is still an incredibly important part of the implementation equation, but for Chicago, the creation of its own curriculum was necessary for several reasons, she said. Among them, it ensures equitable access to content across all of the city's schools.

Having teachers build off one curriculum ensures every student in CPS will have the same starting point. In addition, *Participate Civics* is designed to help teachers navigate how to engage the city's plethora of civic nonprofits. "In Chicago, we have a lot of great civic partners. They all do specific things really well," she said. "But how teachers bring those together is important. For CPS, the curriculum is meant to



solidify the change in teaching practice that the 2015 law and new standards prescribed. Research shows that if you want teachers to shift practice or shift strategy, they have to be able to apply it,” Van Benthuyzen said. “You want to see outcomes from professional development. But if you don’t have the curriculum to support it, it’s hard to do that.”

As an aside, Chicago’s curriculum begs the question: Why did the state as a whole not pursue a curriculum? The answer is twofold. For one, according to Mikva’s Brady, the CPS curriculum has a social justice frame that would be difficult in more conservative parts of the state. And practically speaking, according to McCormick’s Lead Teacher Mentor, Mary Ellen Daneels, creating a statewide curriculum would have been difficult because curriculum falls under local control in the state of Illinois, so mandating one curriculum was not an option. CPS, she said, is also relatively homogeneous, whereas the needs in different districts, from urban to suburban to rural, are all different and would make creating one curriculum that suits all of their needs exceedingly difficult. “That is why our route is to make sure all of the different districts understand the requirements of the law,” Daneels said.

A Flexible Curriculum

In its current form, *Participate: A Civics Course for Chicago’s Youth* is not a textbook. Rather, it is a flexible curriculum teachers can use to engage students. The curriculum is designed to get students to answer two central questions: “Who has power in our democracy? (Why do they have it, and how do they use it?)” and “How can I exercise power by participating in our democracy?”

It covers four units: The Power of Democracy, The Power of Elections, The Power of Public Policy, and The Power of Activism.

For each unit, the curriculum asks a series of essential questions, and has a series of “Enduring Understandings” that it wants students to grasp.

For instance, the unit on The Power of Democracy asks questions such as “What is power?” and “What is democracy?”



“We wanted a curriculum that provides these foundational skills and knowledge, but that also gives teachers opportunities to develop in the powerful practices,” the CPS’s Van Benthuyzen said.

“Why does power matter in a democracy” and “How can my participation in democracy impact the issues I care about?”

It wants students to come away with “Enduring Understandings” such as: “In representative democracy, people delegate some of their power to the government” and “People’s varying ideas about what is important in a democracy affect their participation.”

To get there, each unit starts with a “Launch Lesson” that introduces the core questions and gives background knowledge on the topic. It then provides “Explorations” that allow teachers to follow any number of techniques to promote an understanding of the topic: Use of primary sources, historical case studies, learning about the government, controversial issues

discussions, simulations, and skill-building activities that allow students to develop and practice skills essential to being a civic participant.

And each unit ends with a “Civic Inquiry and Participation” prompt that allows the teacher to guide student inquiry or civic action projects directly tied to what the students have just learned.

Training Teachers

Chicago’s implementation plan is rooted in a robust professional development program designed to teach teachers a new way of civic instruction.

“We knew that the training had to be cohesive, so we developed a cohort model in which we train teachers very deeply, over the course of the year,” the CPS’s Van Benthuyzen said. That includes a four-day-long civics seminar—The Participate Civics Institute—for participant teachers, who then come back for three full days of professional development throughout the year. This is coupled with classroom visits as well as one-on-one coaching.

The CPS conducts all of its training in house—though it does collaborate with Mary Ellen Daneels at The McCormick Foundation—but much of its program is geared toward helping teachers relate specifically with the demographics of Chicago’s student population.

"When your district is predominantly students of color and students [who] are living in poverty, that has to be something that you take into account in how you prepare educators to teach civics. It has to be central," Van Benthuyzen said. "So our curriculum and our training is designed specifically for Chicago youth, and the curriculum and the training is specifically designed to leverage Chicago-based partners."

In addition to this, the CPS created Professional Learning Communities (PLC) around civics. The PLCs bring together a group of teachers, often partnered with a nonprofit, to tackle a problem of practice within schools over the course of several meetings during a year.

"The Professional Learning Communities are focused on a specific proven practice such as discussion deliberation, professional community, or student voice and actions," Van Benthuyzen said. "So a partner like the News Literacy Project or Pulitzer Center would take a PLC of 20 to 30 teachers and work with them over the course of the year to go see a specific disciplinary aspect of the civics course... They have really provided a lot of room for us to learn more about teachers and what they're doing, what they struggle with, but also who has an affinity and feel a passion for the kind of civic learning that we're trying to do."

Getting Buy-in

The social sciences have seen other mandates in the past in areas such as financial literacy, African-American history, and Latino history, Van Benthuyzen said. But those were unfunded, unsupported, and became essentially electives for schools to implement.

The 2015 law was different.

"When this mandate came out, we needed to make sure that we got ahead of the communication piece, so that schools understood that there were very high expectations for the implementation of this mandate and that it wasn't gonna be whatever they decided to do," she said.

The training programs are volunteer, but participation in the cohorts has grown steadily throughout the first three years of implementation. The first year's cohort had 26 teachers. The second: 45. And the third: 97.



"We knew that the training had to be cohesive, so we developed a cohort model in which we train teachers very deeply, over the course of the year," the CPS's Van Benthuyzen said.

"By the year three, we had almost 200 teachers who had completed training and about 60% of all CPS high schools in the district adapting the curriculum. It was much faster than we anticipated, because what we were doing was landing so well," Van Benthuyzen said. "And now we're at 100% of our schools are meeting the policy. They all have a civics course, they're all offering the curriculum, and they all have at least one teacher trained in it."

Getting that buy-in was a challenge, especially early on, in part because after a fairly unsuccessful attempt by the CPS to build a financial literacy curriculum, many teachers held a heavy dose of skepticism around whether the PD CPS offered was any good.

"We knew the best communication [we] could have is word of mouth, so we did a lot of storytelling. We made sure that we showed people what was happening in these courses, so they understood that this civics course is different than your normal civics course," Van Benthuyzen said. "The first two years [were] really hard. I faced a lot of scrutiny, criticism, doubt. I had to really be a salesman, but by year three, people got wind of what we were trying to do. Now, we don't have any problems recruiting, because the teachers do it for us. Where they talk about the work our department is doing and how powerful it is and how important it is."

The CPS faced another challenge in that union contracts prohibited the CPS from mandating the curriculum and the professional development, so the implementation figured out a couple of workarounds.

For one, in order to inspire teachers to join a training cohort, CPS made the *Participate Civics* curriculum free online—but with a caveat. In order to get access to it, teachers had to join a cohort.

Some teachers also had thoughts about creating their own curricula, and in fact two schools in the district are creating their own, Van Benthuyzen said. Using *Participate Civics* is not mandatory, but the simple fact is that while teachers are welcome to create their own curricula, most teachers are not trained to do so. *Participate Civics* ensures all students in the

district have equitable access to content, no matter their school's budget.

"We said, 'You're more than welcome to do the curriculum yourself. We just will audit it, make sure it's standards aligned,'" Van Benthuyzen said. "That was enough for most teachers to [pass on creating their own curricula.]"

Building Partnerships

The implementation of the new curriculum helped formalize many of the partnerships that CPS built with both nonprofits and other city agencies over the years, and it opened the door for schools and the district to form new partnerships that create learning opportunities aligned with the new curriculum.

For example:

- ✧ The CPS Social Science Department created a partnership with the CPS's Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, which works with elected officials who will allow every classroom using the *Participate Civics* course to meet with and have access to its local city Aldermen.
- ✧ When the curriculum was first piloted in 2014, racial tension heightened after a white police officer, Jason Van Dyke, shot a black 17-year-old, Laquan McDonald. The CPS partnered with the Chicago Police Department and Black Lives Matters activists to provide training for predominantly white teachers on how to talk with predominantly students of color about the matter.
- ✧ The district brought in companies such as Data Made—a firm that collects data and repurposes it for civic use (like the creation of www.chicagosmilliondollarblocks.com, which looks at how much public Illinois money is being used per individual city block on incarceration, and how it could be used better)—to conduct professional development and introduce teachers to new tools they can use in their classrooms.

The new civics program, said Van Benthuyzen, "is not just the



"We're really trying to enable the district to have a meaningful evidence base from which to monitor trends, assess progress, identify possible strategies. Often within a district, there just isn't that kind of data on what's actually happening."

CERG's Co-Director, Joseph Kahne said.

curriculum and the training, but we create space for partners."

Data-driven Revisions

In order to assess the implementation and fine-tune the effectiveness of the CPS's civics program, the district has engaged the Civic Engagement Research Group (CERG), at the University of California, Riverside to conduct both longitudinal and annual studies.

Each year during the first three years of implementation, CERG conducted pre- and post-year surveys of students in every school in the CPS. The surveys look at changes in dispositions, values, and perceptions around civic life among students—and specifically at access for students to high-quality civic education and opportunities.

Both studies inform CPS on where improvements might be needed system-wide, but CERG also produces individual reports for each school that show where they can make improvements.

"It lets them see how there's variation within the schools so that schools can

figure out what they need to work on," CERG's Co-Director, Joseph Kahne said. "We're really trying to enable the district to have a meaningful evidence base from which to monitor trends, assess progress, identify possible strategies. Often within a district, there just isn't that kind of data on what's actually happening."

Though the longitudinal study is not yet available, the annual surveys help CPS fine-tune its work in regard to equity around racial and ethnic lines—and in particular with English Language Learners, according to CERG's other Co-Director Erica Hodgins.

Through the data, "they were able to think about the question, 'How does civic engagement, how does civic education, help to support all groups of students?'" Hodgins said. "So if we're talking about civic discussions and civic deliberation and building academic language, how are there ways to integrate issues that students really care about into discussions."

Illinois Civics Implementation: What's Next

The 2015 law had a watershed effect on the state, but the work in Illinois and Chicago is not done...

For the state of Illinois, the passage of the 2015 law, and the building of a successful implementation plan helped pave the way for the state to pass a second law, Public Act 101-0254 that will require a middle school civics class to be taught in either grades 6, 7, or 8. That law, a mirror of the law requiring the high school class, requires that Illinois schools start offering the class by the 2020-2021 school year.

The state is following the same plan for middle schools that it had for the implementation of the high school class.

The implementation plan also led to the McCormick Foundation, in partnership with the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship and the Lou Frey Institute (key players in implementing the 2010 Sandra Day O'Connor Civic Education Act, which requires a civic education class and test for Florida 8th graders) to begin building an online micro-credentialing course for teachers of civic education. That course, which the Lou Frey Institute will make available starting in 2020, will provide online professional development based on the learnings from both Illinois and Florida.

For CPS, the implementation of the *Participate Civics* curriculum has led to a massive undertaking to rewrite the district's entire educational framework.

CPS is going to ramp up its professional development efforts around *Participate Civics*, first by differentiating its professional development to meet the needs of new teachers as they enter the system, but also by building more advanced courses for teachers who have been through the introductory cohort phase. The district is also working toward building a pipeline for teacher leadership, launching a program that it calls the "Educating for Democracy Fellowship" in 2019. The CPS is now providing a stipend for five teacher fellows who are helping train other teachers in the district, and who are now also helping design curriculum and inform CPS strategy.

But the most significant effect has been the influence *Participate Civics* has had outside of the Social Science Department.

Because of its success, the CPS is now engaged in the construction of a new educational framework for the entire system, designed to implement action-oriented learning across every subject in every K-12 grade level.

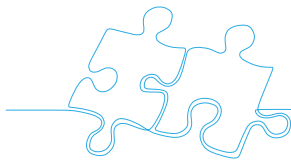
"It's a big, huge undertaking," Van Benthysen said. "We're completely changing the infrastructure of service learning in the district to be aligned to a more civic action-oriented framework... Now, every grade level and every content area is going to be doing civic action and service learning. And all of this has really come out of our experience of doing the service learning projects and *Participate Civics*. That's a powerful outcome."





**Knowing what capacity is, both for teachers
and for administrators, is really important to implementing this work well.**

Takeaways



Not every state or district will be able to replicate how Illinois and Chicago implemented the 2015 law that mandated a civics course for all of the state's high school students. But as other states look at similar legislation, there are some universal takeaways.

For Implementation:

- ✧ **Get ahead of the game:** Both Illinois and the CPS have been able to implement the new civics class quickly because they 1) knew that the legislation was coming, and 2) started planning for its implementation before it launched the mandated civics class. For broader Illinois, that started with years of development work by groups such as the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC) and the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition. For CPS that meant developing and piloting the *Participate Civics* curriculum before the legislation ever came into being. One of the most important steps Illinois took was the decision to set up evaluation and success metrics from the beginning of this process.
- ✧ **Assess what your state already has in place:** One of the keys to the Illinois implementation is that the state did not have to start from scratch in terms of building infrastructure. This also allows a state to know its needs and capacity—so it can build from there.
- ✧ **Determine a plan of action based on assessed needs:** There are many ways to implement change, but some will build upon existing conditions better than others and will have more leverage. These are state-by-state decisions. While Illinois chose to focus on professional development, that may not be the most effective tool in another state.
- ✧ **Utilize partnerships:** No one organization can do this on its own. Pooling resources and working together allow for increased capacity. “Partnerships have been really key for implementing this work,” said Sonia Mathew, the Program Officer for the McCormick Foundation’s Democracy Program. “Knowing what capacity is, both for teachers and for administrators, is really important to implementing this work well. We’ve been able to work with partners who also have limited capacity to then share some of their best practices.”
- ✧ **Treat teachers as partners:** Finding teachers committed to the idea of better civic education is critical. In Illinois, this began with the early work of the CRFC and the CPS. It became even more important after the law was passed, as they became the linchpins for the implementation. Also, buy-in from teachers is tantamount to adoption and implementation in schools, as an inspired teacher can inspire others. Teachers are simply where the rubber meets the road. “Teacher leadership was really critical,” the CPS’s Jon Schmidt said of his early work in building out the CPS’s Service Learning Initiative. “I saw schools where absolutely nothing was happening, not just disinterest but kind of hostility towards it. Then two years later, going to that school, there would be a new person who kind of took the reins of it, and totally transformed; everybody in the building’s doing it now. It was all teacher-driven. That was a point in time when principals, so much stuff, so many different kinds of mandates... If it was gonna take off in the schools, it was gonna take off because you had a real teacher champion, a set of champions in the school.”
- ✧ **Have serious coordination:** Implementing a civic education plan throughout a state is a massive undertaking. CIRCLE has now worked with both Florida and Illinois in studying their implementation of civic education mandates. Both have been successful, CIRCLE’s director, Kawashima-Ginsberg says, because the states were able to find a central clearinghouse or partner that could oversee all of the work. In the case of Illinois, that was the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition (ICMC) and the McCormick Foundation. “There needs to be a central coordinator. I have seen other states that have some funding, but nothing really happened because nobody really picked up the plan and ran with it. This really takes coordination, even when it comes to just gathering information about when training is available—even if they’re not the ones that are giving it. Regular communication with teachers across the state [was critical]. Illinois’ newsletter goes out to about 3,000 teachers

every month. Somebody is putting it together. So having staff to do that every month so that teachers know that there's a community out there from which they can seek resources was really, really important." This can be done in a number of ways, be it through a collective or through the state—but implementation must have a theory of action, and resources must be dedicated to coordination.

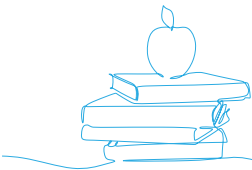
- ✧ **Institutional support is important:** Institutional support and recognition has been a common denominator of successful initiatives to implement civic education legislation, according to McCormick's Healy. "In Florida it was university-based, in California through the judiciary, and in Massachusetts a partnership between nonprofits and the state DOE.," he said. "Ours in Illinois is unique given its private locus, and we've been lucky that McCormick has stuck with it and seen it through across time. A better course is probably to get this work institutionalized.... However, given Illinois' fiscal crisis, I think private sources of funding will long be necessary to support implementation and sustainability."
- ✧ **Resources matter:** The McCormick Foundation has been working and funding around civic education for two decades. "Persistent, consistent funding is essential for this work to succeed," Mikva Challenge's Brady said. "Mikva is in its 17th year of receiving funding from McCormick. No other foundation has funded us as long. We would not have two-thirds of our programs and curricula without their consistent support and partnership. This is very rare in philanthropy as we know."
- ✧ **Seeing is believing for a community and its leaders:** Bringing community members into the civic learning process and youth voice process is critical for community buy-in and public official buy-in, according to Brady.



For Professional Development:

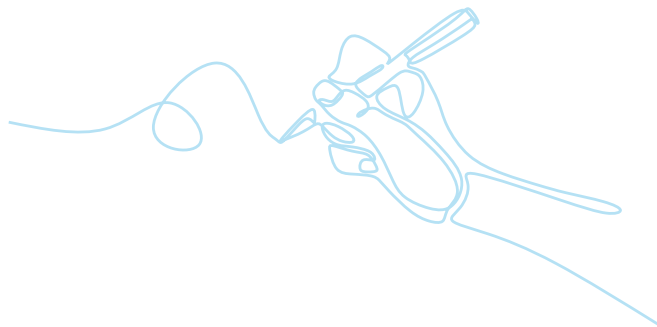
- ✧ **Customize the PD experience:** "First and foremost, you really need to think about how the people who are actually doing the work—and that's teachers and curriculum directors and local nonprofits—can be partners," said CIRCLE's Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg. "Think about what they bring to the table, what kind of expertise they already have in designing both the professional development programs." This is why the ICMC and Illinois tasked CIRCLE with surveying teachers shortly before they took part in PD workshops. "Mary Ellen Daneels would tailor the training so we could make sure that we were getting to where they needed to be, but also start where they already were in some cases," Kawashima-Ginsberg said.
- ✧ **Show don't tell:** The PD effort in Illinois has been so well-received by teachers because the ICMC and its partners have practiced what they're preaching. They want teachers in the state to move away from the "sage on the stage" technique. So they themselves have done so. PD workshops actually involve very little direct information giving. Rather they teach the methods of critical discussion of controversial topics, simulations, and service learning by engaging in those techniques with the teachers as students. "I think it's been all about actually experiencing what it's like to be in that classroom, to use that pedagogy or experience that pedagogy," Kawashima-Ginsberg said. "That's been a really engaging and exciting way to think about how the teachers, too, really need to see why that sort of a new pedagogy can be possible but also really useful in their classroom. And it's just with them experiencing how engaging those kinds of teaching techniques can be."
- ✧ **Be careful with language:** Instituting a new mandate can be a sensitive subject, especially for veteran teachers who are used to running a classroom in a certain way. The key is communicating new ideas and principles in a way that makes a new course feel like an opportunity to engage in an exciting new way of teaching, rather than an obligation. "There was ownership language that Illinois used that made it much easier to introduce new practices," Kawashima-Ginsberg said. "As opposed to saying, 'The state says we have to do this, so I'm just telling you how to do it,' there's different framing... There was a respect that was shown to local leaders throughout this initiative. There was really never a time that I observed that they were being told what to do."

- ✧ **Engage teachers in the process:** Illinois has been successful because its leaders have been able to give teachers a sense of ownership over their own training—and ultimately, it's the teachers who have become the greatest ambassadors for the process, McCormick's Mary Ellen Daneels said. This involved engaging them in strategy, and of course making sure that respect for teachers is clear, she said. But also, it's about inspiring them. "You really have to move teachers' hearts if you're going to have any impact on their practice or their habits," she said. "So give them data or research that really taps into their 'why they're teaching.' So much of professional development and school improvement focuses on the what... But really, you have to engage teachers with the 'Why?' and 'Why are we doing this?' and 'Why is this good for students?' The important thing is you really have to touch those hearts before you can move their practice at all."



Curriculum:

- ✧ **Make content local and relevant:** CPS's Van Benthuyzen said that the best thing that CPS ever did was create its own curriculum. While not every state or district will be able to do so, this was important for CPS because it allowed the district to create something that fit the specific needs and interests of its own students. "Vendors write curricula for mass production, but civics is personal, civics is community-based, civics is about *that* school, *that* community, and *that* region," Van Benthuyzen said. "Oftentimes, when people talk about civic engagement, they only think about it through the national or federal lens. But real civic engagement is community-based, even school-based. If you're trying to develop civic habits and dispositions and civic competencies that are long-lasting, you're not going to do that by having students only thinking about things that are happening in such a big scale. They need content they can make personal connections to... Curriculum in a civics course should be centered on the students' lived experiences and what's going on in their communities."
- ✧ **Be mindful of equity:** Civics can be a touchy subject—especially when discussing controversial issues and especially when teachers and students may come from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. "You need to make sure that you look at curriculum through an equity lens—and I would even go so far as to say through an anti-racist lens—because civic action and civic engagement, if you're not schooled and aware of whiteness or privilege, then civic courses can very quickly become oppressive to young people of color," Van Benthuyzen said. "Be very thoughtful about what we consider to be important civic knowledge, and how do we engage and respect and understand differences and different perspectives and different communities. Even if you're a predominantly white community, your knowledge and understanding and learning about other communities is so important in the civics class."
- ✧ **Politics matter:** The curricula must have the support of local leaders and the community, or it will be difficult to implement. "What's special about the Chicago story is the mix of high quality educational strategies with pretty sophisticated political strategies," Brady said.



Interviews Conducted

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Jean-Claude Brizzard

Senior Advisor and Deputy Director in the United States Program, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Mary Ellen Daneels

Lead Teacher Mentor, Robert R. McCormick Foundation

Shawn Healy

Director, Democracy Program, Robert R. McCormick Foundation

Kevin Gallick

Principal, George Washington High School, Chicago

Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg

Director, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University

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Finding teachers committed to the idea of better civic education is critical.



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