

# The Massachusetts Model:

What states can learn from the passage of  
*An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement.*



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## Introduction To S.2631



At 1:25 on the afternoon of Nov. 8, 2018, Massachusetts State Senator Harriette Chandler (Democrat - 1st Worcester) sent out a simple tweet: **“It’s been signed into law!”**

At 1:25 on the afternoon of Nov. 8, 2018, Massachusetts State Senator Harriette Chandler (Democrat - 1st Worcester) sent out a simple tweet: “It’s been signed into law!”

Those five words signaled that Governor Charlie Baker had just signed Senate Bill S.2631, *An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement*. But they indicated far more. It was the culmination of Sen. Chandler’s decade-long fight to pass legislation that would once and for all solidify civics as a centerpiece of K-12 education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

“ALL Massachusetts public school students will now learn about their own government and how to effect real change in their communities,” Chandler explained in her tweet. This is a long-term investment in our future leaders.”

S.2631 is a sweeping piece of legislation that cements the Commonwealth at the forefront of a burgeoning movement to revive civic education.

Among its central tenets, the bill calls for professional development to support teaching civics effectively; for middle schools and high schools to provide the opportunity for students to participate in civics-based projects; for civic education to be a priority for school districts across the state—and it establishes a trust fund to support all of these initiatives.

***The bill comes at a time when civics in the classroom is needed more than ever.***

The country is in the midst of a crisis in civil discourse—and multiple studies over the past half-decade have shown that young people are dangerously uninformed about the basics of our democracy. In 2014,

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just 23% of 8th grade students tested “proficient” on the Nation’s Report Card (NAEP). In 2019, only 39% of Americans could name all three branches of the US government, according to the Annenberg Public Policy Center; 22% couldn’t name any branch.

Unequal access to quality civic learning opportunities disproportionately affects students from lower income communities and students of color. Some 50% of Latinx 12th graders and over 60% of black 12th graders do not even have a “basic” understanding of government. And performance on the 8th grade NAEP reflects a persistent disparity based on income. Non-subsidized lunch students scored 15 points higher than subsidized lunch students, who scored 15 points higher than free lunch students on the NAEP.

Today’s youth will inherit complex societal problems, yet they do not have the knowledge to—nor do they feel invited to—engage with the institutions that they will need in order to fix those problems.

Those behind S.2631 hope that it will help the students of Massachusetts learn how to analyze issues such as climate change and the immigration crisis by teaching them how to do research, how to digest the media and distinguish what is accurate, and how to collaboratively work productively, even with people with whom they disagree.

The passing of S.2631 into law, however, is itself a lesson in civics.

The effort took buy-in and support from dozens of legislators from both sides of the aisle in both the Massachusetts House and Senate. They worked hand-in-hand with dozens of nonprofits and experts in civic education in the Commonwealth, and with

untold numbers of teachers, advocates, students, and concerned citizens. Together they mobilized a movement around the passing of the bill and the simultaneous revision of the state’s Framework for Social Sciences. In doing so, they worked through a labyrinth of challenges—including a last-second revision by the Governor—to usher the bill into being.

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This paper traces the history of how *An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement* became a Massachusetts law. Though the dynamics and challenges in pursuing civics legislation in other states will differ, the hope is that lawmakers, nonprofits, advocates, and educators outside of Massachusetts can learn from the story of S.2631.

### WHY WAS THE BILL NECESSARY NOW?

“To be clear, *An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement* is not a law that establishes civics as a mandate for K-12 schools in Massachusetts” That law was actually passed almost a century ago with the Acts of 1920, which spelled out the requirement for courses in American history and civics in

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public elementary and high schools. That law clearly states, “All pupils attending the said schools shall be required to take one or more of the courses herein specified at some time during their attendance at said schools.” It had been reinforced by additional laws in 1923, 1938, 1949 and others in the years that followed.

In fact, civics and physical education are the only two subjects actually mandated in the Commonwealth.

The problem is that the mandate for civics really had not been fulfilled, especially in recent years, according to Rep. Alice Hanlon Peisch (Democrat - 14th Norfolk), the current House Chairwoman of the Joint Committee on Education. And that was the impetus behind S.2631.

“People were dissatisfied with the way in which that requirement had been implemented, and the variation in which the requirement had been implemented from district to district,” she said. “You would have very robust civics in some districts, and something of a ‘check-the-box’ in other districts. A large part of this process was educating people and promoting it.”

Civics in Massachusetts, like in most every other state in the union, had fallen out of school curricula, first because it became a sensitive subject to teach during the turbulent era of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. Then it was all but pushed aside as the education reform movement forced teachers to spend more of their classroom time on STEM (Science/Technology/Engineering/Math) and English Language Arts.

### ★ A Note On Equity

The role of diversity is an important aspect in both the drafting of S.2631 the revision of the state's Social Sciences Framework.

#### » The Commonwealth underwent a rapid demographic shift:

- » Between 1990 and 2017, every one of the 147 cities and towns that researchers consider Greater Boston saw an increase in the percentage of people of color. (Boston Foundation, 2019).
- » For the Commonwealth as a whole, the non-Latinx white population has declined since 2000.
- » From 2000 to 2010, the state experienced only a 3.1% population growth compared to 9.7% nationwide (US Census, 2010).
- » However, its black, Asian-American, and Latinx populations grew during this time.

#### » The state also experienced an influx of immigrants:

- » Between 2000 and 2009, Massachusetts's foreign-born population increased by 22% (Center for American Progress, 2012).
- » In 2010, 6% of eligible voters in Massachusetts – 256,000 people – were Latinx (Pew Research Center, 2010).

This required special care to make sure that all of the different populations in the Commonwealth were represented. For those on the state board revising the Framework, that meant that the group working on the revision was designed to represent every population in the Commonwealth, and bring together an array of voices that presented a Framework that promoted inclusion.

“It was one of the most diverse in terms of cultural and racial groups that I have witnessed in 18 years at DESE,” David Buchanan said of his work in overseeing the revision of the Framework. “We wanted to gain the expertise of those who use this every day—and take advantage of that expertise.”

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In Massachusetts, this was translating into dangerously low levels of civic engagement among young adults. Only one in five Massachusetts young people voted in the 2014 midterm elections, and in 2016, only 39.9 percent of 18–24-year-olds in Massachusetts voted, according to the United States Census Bureau.

In addition, the state's demographics have been shifting dramatically, meaning that even if the subject of civics was being taught in schools, it would need an update.

The new law, S.2631, is designed to put the original civic education mandate into practice in a way that resonates with today's youth, and in a way that works

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## OVERVIEW OF THE BILL

Though only seven pages long, the S.2631 is among the most sweeping pieces of legislation that any state has ever passed on civic education. It includes calls to action for individual schools, the state board of education, and even the legislature itself, pre-

scribing an outline for educational requirements for schools as well as hands-on participation in both the democratic process and civic engagement opportunities for students.

**To promote civic knowledge, the law requires that every public school in the Commonwealth:**

- » Teach American history and civics education in order to promote civic service and civic knowledge—and to prepare students for the duties of citizenship. This includes such subjects as the history of the United States, the US Constitution and Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of Massachusetts, as well as the history, structure and functions of local, state, and federal government, and the roles and responsibilities of a citizen of a democracy.
- » Help students develop skills such as media literacy to access, analyze, and evaluate written and digital media as it relates to history and civics.
- » Help students understand diversity and equity when it comes to voter registration and participation in civic activities.
- » Give students the opportunity to debate issues of power, economic status, and the common good in a democracy.
- » Create a program on the importance of participation in the electoral process.
- » And teach the importance of the flag of the United States of America, including proper use and etiquette.

It does not require an assessment for civics, but leaves open the possibility of one in the future. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has already taken steps to design such an assessment, but the format is not yet determined. The law includes the possibility that the assessment could include civics projects.

The bill requires that all schools in the Commonwealth provide the opportunity for all eighth-grade students and every high school student to participate in a project that promotes each student's ability to make logical arguments based on valid evidence, and

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demonstrate an understanding of the connections between federal, state, and local policies, including the students' own communities. This includes establishing a civics challenge that will allow eighth graders to showcase their student-led projects. The projects may be completed individually, in small groups, or by an entire class together. (Schools must provide the support and structure for the projects, but completing the projects is not a graduation requirement for students.)

### In addition, the bill:

- » Requires that the state Secretary of Education disseminate information to promote youth membership on municipal boards, committees and commissions in order to promote civic engagement.
- » Includes provisions to encourage voter registration and create opportunities for other vital forms of civic engagement.
- » Establishes a voluntary high school voter challenge program that will allow eligible students to participate in all municipal and state elections, and that allows students to register to vote on participating high school campuses, and to serve as voter outreach coordinators.
- » And it includes a requirement to provide professional development for teachers, and the creation of tools aligned with the state's History and Social Science Framework to support districts in implementing the new requirements.

But most importantly, according to those involved, the legislature gave the law teeth by writing in built-in funding for its implementation through the establishment of the Civics Project Trust Fund – and doing so as its first requirement. These monies, which come from the annual state budget and can be supplemented by private funds such as grants and donations, are being used to create a statewide civic infrastructure, to provide professional development for teachers, develop the state's history and social science curriculum, and collaborate with universities and other stakeholders such as nonprofits and

civic education providers – and it will support the evaluation of the student-led projects available to all eighth grade students. The fund stipulates that it place a priority on supporting underserved communities across Massachusetts.

*So how did this legislation come to pass?*





# The Massachusetts History And Social Science Curriculum Framework

In order to track just how *S.2631 An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement* became the law of the Commonwealth, one must trace the development of the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary and Education (DESE).

### ★ The History Of Revising The Framework

*A little history helps explain the effort around the social studies and civics movement.*

The Framework was first developed and implemented in 1997 as one of the key mandates in the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. In 2003, after a contentious debate among educators, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), and others—and a number of proposed revisions—BESE finally adopted a revised version of the document that ushered in new standards for history, geography, economics, and civics.

In addition to the Framework, in 2007, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) established the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) assessment in history and social studies, to be administered in grades 5 and 7, and grades 10 and 11. The new MCAS was designed to assess knowledge of North American Geography and American history in grade 5, World Geography and Ancient and Classical Civilizations for grade 7, and U.S. History I and II for high school.

The 2003 Framework included civics topics at many grade levels and a course dedicated to civics, a 12th grade American Government elective. But since it was merely an elective, only a limited number of students took the course. The new MCAS assessment did not focus on civics.

While civics was present in the Framework, it received little attention in practice.

On June 26, 2018—just a day after the House and Senate passed S.2631—the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE, which governs DESE) officially adopted a comprehensive revision of the state’s History and Social Science Curriculum Framework, which lays out for all Massachusetts public schools the standards and curriculum guidelines for history, civics, geography, and economics.

### The new Framework brought a renewed focus on civics as a central part of the social sciences by:

- » Establishing a new full-year course at grade 8 that provides a thorough study of civics.
- » Giving prominence to civics in its vision statements, guiding principles, and standards for History and Social Science Practice, Appendices, and other features.
- » Integrating media literacy.
- » Creating new content standards at each grade level that integrate PreK-12 civics content.

The process to revise the Framework was a critical moment for the Massachusetts civic education movement on several fronts.

It was during this process of revising the Framework that the need to focus on civics emerged.

## II. THE HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES FRAMEWORK

The Framework had first been introduced in 1997, as one of the key mandates of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. It then received a significant revision in 2003, which included the creation of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) assessment in history and the social studies.

By 2010, however, budget cuts derailed the implementation of the MCAS, and the Commonwealth's adoption of the Common Core State Standards, which emphasized STEM and English Language Arts, had all but sidelined Social Studies—and along with it, Civics.

In 2015, educators from around the state—alarmed that in some schools social studies instruction had been reduced to no more than 20 minutes per week—started advocating to revive the subject. DESE heard the call, and started a two-year process to revise the Framework.

David Buchanan, the Assistant Director of Literacy and Humanities and an 18-year veteran at DESE, led the revision of the Framework, working in close collaboration with Susan Whelittle, the former Director of that office.

Buchanan, who now serves as the Director of Massachusetts Programs for iCivics, engaged a panel of 43 PreK-12 educators, academics, nonprofits, and civic education content experts from across the state to review the 2003 Framework, make recommendations on how to change it, and provide guidance in drafting the new document.

At the outset of this process, DESE fielded a survey of educators and the general public from across the Commonwealth that asked respondents to comment on aspects of the 2003 Framework and to select

### ★ The Need To Revise The Framework

Following the decision to institute Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) testing in history and the social sciences, DESE proceeded with establishing the assessment as it does in other content areas, beginning with two years or more of test development and piloting. The history and social studies pilot tests were administered in 2007 and 2008 in grades 5, 7, and 10/11, and were slated to go fully operational in the fall of 2009, with the assessment at the high school level to become part of the state requirements for graduation.

However, like a number of initiatives at that time, the history and social studies MCAS fell victim to the Great Recession. In February of 2009, BESE suspended the assessment to preserve funding and allow school districts to focus on the considerable number of other major state initiatives at that time. History and social studies was further sidelined in 2010, when Massachusetts adopted a revised version of the Common Core State Standards, which placed more emphasis on Math and English language arts.

As a result, schools began limiting the time and attention that they gave to social studies altogether—and civics along with it. During the subject's decline, social studies teachers were passed over for jobs in favor of teachers trained in other subjects, and professional development for social studies all but ceased.

"The subject was no longer considered part of the competency determination that students had to pass in order to graduate high school," said Gorman Lee, the Immediate Past President of the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies. "The reality is that what is being tested will be taught."

## II. THE HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES FRAMEWORK

areas most in need of attention in the new revision. The survey, that garnered hundreds of responses, identified civics as a leading priority.

“It became clear in the course of this... [that we needed to] make sure there was a clearer emphasis on civics,” said Buchanan. “In part it was because of the current political climate, but we also saw a longstanding concern that the problems we’re facing now are a result of a long-term lack of attention to civics. Thanks to the work of educators, and the many others involved in the process, the new Framework addresses those concerns with civics clearly integrated across the grades.”

The revised Framework approaches civics differently as students advance through the grades, Buchanan said. “Students in the early grades first learn about civics through their experience in the classroom, participating in “classroom democracy” and learning about key civics concepts, then gain greater knowledge of civics content and skills as they proceed into the upper elementary, middle, and high school grades. The Framework also emphasizes the use of primary sources and provides a set of “standards for history and social science practice” that outline the research process and connect new learning to the current day to help students gain the literacy and thinking skills they need to engage in civic life.”

The centerpiece, however, was the creation of the 8th grade course in civics, one that those involved in the civic education effort in Massachusetts hope may be mirrored in other states.

But the Framework provided more than just academic guidelines. It gave the legislation roots, and a lattice around which it could grow.

It was a massive effort over several years that involved dozens of educators, education officials, state officials, academics, and civic education nonprofits and providers. The research and work put into the revision laid the groundwork for how legislators would ultimately craft S.2631 and created the momentum within the Commonwealth that legislators needed to push for a legislative mandate to improve civics curricula.

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The process mobilized key parties behind the legislation, as they were able to work together in advocating for the revision of the Framework and S.2631 that would support it.



## The Work Of A Legislature On A Bill

Passing legislation on civic education was a personal mission for Sen. Harriette Chandler. A decade ago, she first introduced a bill co-authored with the nonprofit UTEC: Breaking Barriers to Youth Success. That bill failed, as did others after it—some for lack of funding attached to the bill and some because their supporters could not move the bill to the top of the legislature’s priority list.

The biggest challenge, as Chandler’s General Counsel Bryan Barash put it, was a tendency toward the status quo and concern about the legislature mandating educational practice.

“It was inertia, and it was this sense that the legislature’s not supposed to get involved in legislating education topics,” Barash said. “There’s this idea that we don’t like passing bills that are too prescriptive on education. That’s for the professionals... Those were the kinds of conversations that were out there that were preventing this from moving forward” at the time.

The 2017–2018 legislative session, however, presented a new opportunity.

For one, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (DESE) work on revising the Framework meant that this time a bill could be presented in tandem with the work of the professionals.

But what made this legislative session truly different was the prevailing sense that the Commonwealth—and the country in general—needed to reach for a higher level of civil discourse after the turbulent 2016 election.

“There became a really strong feeling that we needed to do something,” Sen. Chandler said, reiterating a

sentiment that was repeated over and over in the research of this paper. “People were looking for an outlet for some of the anger that they had and frustration that they felt. This seemed to fill a need.”

The atmosphere had already made the matter of better civic education a front-burner topic within the House and the Senate. Massachusetts, unlike most states, has a biennial legislative session, and during the first part of the 2017–2018 session, legislators had filed some 16 bills on civic education.

“We decided, after talking with some of the other groups that are active in the civics space, that this was a good time to revisit the bill and to look at how we could create a more comprehensive piece on civics education,” Barash, the Senator’s General Counsel, said.

### BUILDING A BROAD FOUNDATION

This time around, Sen. Chandler and her team made the strategic decision to build as broad a base as possible for this bill. Their mission started with gathering information from across the Commonwealth, so that they could craft a bill that had support built into it before it even hit the State House floor.

### III. THE WORK OF A LEGISLATURE ON A BILL

#### These groups included:

- » **Education officials:** They reached out to DESE and tried to find a way that the bill could be supportive and supplementary to the Framework: “We did not want to reinvent the wheel,” Barash said. “We said, ‘Let’s talk and make sure that these processes are moving in tandem.’”
- » **Leadership:** They reached out to then-Senate President, Stan Rosenberg, who dedicated a staffer to the project and became a major proponent of passing this legislation for Massachusetts.
- » **The administration:** They contacted those close to Governor Baker, such as the state’s Secretary of Education. “We brought them in early on because a bill that is written by a group of legislators, even if they’re bipartisan and bicameral, is not quite as good as a bill that is written with the administration working with you,” Chandler said.
- » **Other legislators:** They looked at the 2017–2018 bills on civics that had already been filed and invited their sponsors to join them in a combined effort. “We realized that very good bills had been filed along the way, and we went through all of the bills, and we determined how we could basically put them together and merge them into one comprehensive bill,” Barash said.

#### BUILDING BICAMERAL SUPPORT

In all of this work, Sen. Chandler found her most important ally in the state’s House of Representatives, Rep. Linda Dean Campbell (Democrat - 15th Essex). In January of 2017, during the legislative session’s first year, the two had teamed up to create a bill that would become the foundation of S.2631.

“In terms of the legislative process, it’s very helpful if you have legislation that is moving through both the Senate and the House at the same time and that you have collaboration with the Senate and the House as it’s moving forward,” Campbell said. “That just saves a whole bunch of time and potential problems.”

The project turned into a “fantastic collaboration” between the Senator and the Representative, according to Rep. Campbell. “We would meet all the

#### ★ A Bill For The Old And Young

The passage of bill S.2631 had supporters on both sides of the aisle, in both houses of the legislature—but it was also championed by both the eldest and the youngest members of the State House. When Sen. Chandler started enlisting support, she was the most senior member of the Senate at 80 years old. She’d first been elected to the House of Representatives in 1995—the year one of the most ardent supporters of her bill, Rep. Andres X. Vargas (Democrat - 3rd Essex) turned 2.

Rep. Vargas is a precocious politician to say the least. He won his first public office, a seat on the Haverhill City Council at 21. In 2017, he was elected to the House of Representatives at age 24, becoming not only the first Latino ever to represent the 3rd district, but at the time the youngest member of the legislature.

He quickly joined Sen. Chandler’s effort.

But it wasn’t the first time he’d been involved in trying to pass legislation on civic education. When Rep. Vargas was 16, he’d become involved in the nonprofit Teens Leading the Way (a member of the Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition), which helps teens from Gateway Cities in Massachusetts—many of them troubled, most all of them from immigrant families—become civically engaged. The program, according to Vargas, asked the teens to think about a piece of legislation they would want to see pass, and then try to pass it.

“We kicked around a whole bunch of ideas, from climate change to police-community relations to education reform. And we ultimately landed on civics because what we learned was: no matter how passionate we were about police-community relations or climate change or drug violence, if we didn’t know how to navigate democratic institutions and actually get something done, then we’d just be yelling into the wind on those issues,” Vargas said.

Vargas and his cohort travelled to the State House, met with members of the legislature—Sen. Chandler among them—and were actually able to build support for a bill S.00183. “I’ll never forget that, the original bill number,” he said.

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### III. THE WORK OF A LEGISLATURE ON A BILL

time to talk about strategy, but also talk about the specific content of the legislation... We decided early on that we were going to move in tandem,” she said.

The bill would come to have strong support from House Speaker Robert DeLeo (D-19th Suffolk) and Senate President Karen Spilka (D-Second Middlesex and Norfolk), as well as many other legislators, including Sen. Eric Lesser (D-First Hampden and Hampshire) and Rep. Andres Vargas (D-3rd Essex).

“The civics education community was fortunate to have such strong and thoughtful leadership from legislative leaders in the House and the Senate,” said Steven M. Rothstein, then Executive Director of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation. “Governor Baker and his educational officials were also very active and supportive during this process.”

But they wanted to avoid problems of the past by ensuring that they weren’t working in a vacuum, Rep. Campbell said—advice that she got early on from Rep. Peisch, the Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Education.

“She said, ‘You need to go outside this building, and you need to speak to teachers, and you need to speak to superintendents, and you need to make sure that at the implementation level there’s not going to be opposition to this, and iron out as many problems as you can,’” Rep. Campbell recalled. “She said ‘there needs to be a lot of work done with the administration to show that this bill was absolutely the best that it could be.’ If we hadn’t done that, then we wouldn’t be where we are... I spent a lot of time talking to superintendents about implementation.”

So they also spoke with as many educators as possible, especially those from lower income parts of the state.

The bill found 48 co-sponsors, bipartisan support, and Rep. Vargas and his group started to move the bill through committee. Before a hearing before the Education Committee, they even produced a hip-hop video explaining why civic education was important and why their bill needed to pass. “It was the first time that a hip-hop video had been shown during the testimony for a bill.”

The S.00183, however, ultimately died like so many civic education bills before it. “There wasn’t an appetite for the state to mandate civic education to the municipalities,” he said.

When Vargas was elected to the Legislature, he realized that many of the people he had met 8 years earlier were still in office. “I contacted Senator Chandler’s office, as well as Representative Campbell, and started attending and helping to organize coalition meetings with all the different coalition members and offering my support and my story and my advocacy,” he said.

On May 31, 2018, he even gave his maiden speech on the House floor urging support for the bill.

So what was it like for the youngest member of the legislature to work with its oldest member?

“It was great. This whole democracy is intergenerational, right? If we want to have a government that reflects the best interest of all the people, then we have to have elected representatives that reflect that electorate,” he said. “[Along with Rep. Campbell], we’ve made a great, holistic team that was able to ensure that the bill reflected the best interests of multiple generations.”

Seeing the bill pass this time around was “surreal,” Rep. Vargas said. But he hopes that it brings home a reality for the Commonwealth’s youth.

“My hope is that students of Massachusetts will start off in their local communities, realizing that they have power, that they can change things,” he said. “That is the biggest lesson here that civics can provide, that you as an individual, if you’re active in your community, if you’re able to mobilize and organize people behind a cause that is worthy, you have power, and that every single person has power. And so, my hope is that every young person can realize how to activate that power and understand their responsibility with that power in the years ahead.”



### III. THE WORK OF A LEGISLATURE ON A BILL

“Senator Chandler and myself met with teachers who were from Gateway Cities and lower-income school districts,” Rep. Campbell said. (Gateway Cities are mid-sized urban centers in Massachusetts that are predominantly working class and their economic and social success are seen as vital to the state’s regional economies and their residents’ realization of the American dream.)

Their input would allow for the crafting of legislation that has strong footing with educators in the classroom, according to iCivics’ David Buchanan.

“Sen. Chandler and Bryan Barash were very thoughtful about how to make this happen effectively—and engage educators in a meaningful way to get their advice and to consider what was really viable legislation,” he said.

#### FOLLOWING THE RESEARCH

Key among the meetings was work with academics, such as Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, the Director of The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University’s Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life.

During the fall of 2017, CIRCLE had received funding from the Fireman Family Foundation, to conduct the Massachusetts K-12 Civic Learning Survey, which assessed the status of civic learning in the Commonwealth.

That survey received responses from 257 people—among them 158 were classroom teachers or instructional coaches and 52 were superintendents and other district administrators representing all regions of the state.

It asked the questions that the legislation itself would have to answer: *“How is civics taught in the Commonwealth? What do our teachers need in order to strengthen teaching of civics in our schools? How do our educators and district leaders see the possibility of a statewide course requirement or civic competency assessment, and why?”*

The survey found that district leaders strongly support the idea of civic learning, but that they are challenged in making that happen because they have to prioritize other subjects—and that teachers do not often have access to professional development on this subject matter.

#### Among the key findings:

- » District leaders believed that certain barriers prevented them from teaching civics more thoroughly, including the lack of a civics course requirement, a lack of resources and funding for community-based projects, and the lack of a statewide assessment.
- » The majority, 70%, of the district leaders thought that their students’ parents would support a decision to strengthen civic education in their districts, and 64% thought that assessment of civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes would receive support from students’ parents.
- » There was a disconnect between district leaders and teachers when it came to civics: 40% of district leaders thought professional development in civics was available to teachers, yet only 25% of classroom teachers agreed. And 48% of district leaders believed that there were opportunities (time, space, and rewards) for teachers to develop civics lessons, but only 22% of classroom teachers agreed.
- » And it found strong support for using assessments other than standardized multiple choice testing, such as research on social issues and individual and group presentations.

“One of the things that was striking was that teachers really got the spirit of civic education,” Kawashima-Ginsberg said. “They weren’t just teaching social studies, but they wanted to do the kind of teaching

### III. THE WORK OF A LEGISLATURE ON A BILL

and learning that really inspires the students and prepares them for engagement. And they felt passionate about that.”

CIRCLE’s survey was just one of a number of reports and special commissions that would inform S.2631.

Sen. Chandler and Rep. Campbell, sought input far and wide.

“We worked with the professional organizations, educational organizations, like the social studies teachers, the National Association of Social Studies Teachers, the Mass. Association of Superintendents of Schools, principals, heads of school committees,” Sen. Chandler’s General Counsel Barash said. “In other words, we worked with people who worked with DESE because we wanted to make sure that all of these forces came together and worked together on this. And everybody had some skin in the game.”

These groups would become integral to the ultimate passage of the bill, as they would form a powerful coalition that helped build the support needed to guide the bill through the legislative process.



#### ★ A Flurry Of Special Reports And Commissions

*The effort to revise civics was spurred by the formation of a plethora of special commissions and the publication of several reports, both national and Massachusetts-focused, that ultimately helped both inform the crafting of the law and the framework—and helped build a movement around civic learning:*

- » In 2003, the CIRCLE and the Carnegie Corporation of New York released the seminal report, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, which outlined the need for civic education and led to the formation of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools.
- » In 2011, the civics movement gained additional national prominence with the publication of the Carnegie Foundation’s *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*, which further highlighted the critical role of civics in preparing students for citizenship, college, and career, and defined the multiple dimensions of civics learning.
- » In 2012, spurred by legislation, the Massachusetts legislature formed a Special Commission on Civic Engagement and Learning that published *Renewing the Social Compact: A Report of the Special Commission on Civic Engagement and Learning* that brought a renewed call for better civic education in the state.
- » This led the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education to form a working group to investigate further the status of civic education, a project that culminated in the *Preparing Citizens: Report on Civic Learning and Engagement* in March of 2014.
- » In March 2017, DESE published the *Civic Learning and Engagement Strategic Plan*, which outlined a strategy for promoting civic education K-12 in the Commonwealth.



## The Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition

The story of S.2631 is not just the story of legislators coming together, or of legislation melding with new educational standards. It's also the story of the broad-based collaboration of experts in civics education that became the Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition (MCLC).

Before the push for S.2631 started, a number of organizations such as CIRCLE, Generation Citizen, and iCivics were already active in making the case for civic education on the national level. Dozens of other groups and individuals were working on the local level to implement civic education programs in one form or another.

"We had an enormous amount of talent in the civics field in Massachusetts," Barash said. "We've got a ton of civics institutions that really care about this."

The problem?

"There was no advocacy infrastructure at all," Barash said. "When I started talking to all these folks and bringing them in and getting them involved in writing the bill, I kept saying to them, 'You guys need to figure out how to pull yourselves together and actually create an advocacy network in the state.'"

The conversations between the groups that would form the MCLC started in 2017 between Steven M. Rothstein, then Executive Director of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, and Louise Dubé, the executive director of iCivics, the Cambridge-based nonprofit founded by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor that is the country's largest provider of civic education material—two organizations founded by national icons that have civics at the core of their missions.

iCivics, known for creating free digital games and content that reach millions of K-12 students every year, was starting to add another dimension to its work, advocacy for the field of civic education. In September of 2017, it convened nearly 200 people for a meeting on the topic in Washington, DC to discuss the need for better civic education. And by the fall of 2017, it had started CivXNow, a national coalition of now more than 115 organizations, all working to improve civic education and pushing for more legislation like S.2631.

Similarly, civic education is central to the legacy of President Kennedy, whose iconic quote "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" still resounds as a call for greater civic engagement. "President Kennedy believed strongly in people getting involved in society, making a difference, whether it be volunteering in your neighborhood, voting, signing up for the Peace Corps. But fundamentally people aren't going to get involved if they don't understand what's happening," Rothstein said.

Both Dubé and Rothstein saw what Barash saw: "It was clear that there are lots of great people doing projects in Massachusetts, but it was happening more in silos," Rothstein said. So he asked Dubé: "What would happen if we pulled everybody together and tried to make that happen? Do you think that would work?"

#### IV. THE MASSACHUSETTS CIVIC LEARNING COALITION

MCLC's first meeting happened in September of 2017 at the JFK Library's offices. In addition to Rothstein and Dubé, it included Arielle Jennings, the Executive Director of the Massachusetts arm of Generation Citizen, a national organization devoted to student voice and civic action.

The three agreed that they would be willing to put in time to work on building support around potential legislation, and agreed to co-found and co-lead the MCLC. A second meeting was planned, this time at the offices of The Boston Foundation, and with a few more interested parties.

"We started with a small group and then just reached out to more and more groups, mostly nonprofits, to see if they would join us," Rothstein said.

Ultimately, MCLC would enlist some 30 civic education nonprofits, school districts, research institutions, and others deeply invested in civic learning, a cohort of not just able, but willing organizations that could mobilize a movement around the legislation.

"We got a critical mass of groups together, and then set our priorities on getting legislation through and to supporting the new civic and social studies Framework," Rothstein said.

#### BUILDING A COALITION

Over the next year, the coalition would help do the work that normally would have taken two years, according to Rothstein. And they did it on virtually no budget.

The three co-founding organizations of the coalition split tasks. Rothstein oversaw communications with the members of the legislature. iCivics oversaw most

of the administrative coordination, and input on the Framework. Generation Citizen took the lead in organizing lobby days to help make teacher and student voices heard. All three agreed to a consensus decision-making structure and spoke about strategy multiple times every week.

"We kept spreadsheets about who was going to do what, we sent out letters, we sent out communications to the larger group," Dubé said. "Steven really kept everybody engaged at all times. We were on the phone on a regular basis, the three of us—me, Arielle, and Steven— sometimes two or three times a day because there was constant communication around what was happening and why, and who needed to do what."

They leveraged the network's strengths, and divided tasks among the coalition members accordingly.

The key was aligning the broader group around the central idea of improving civic education in the Commonwealth and behind a common message.

This meant first making sure that everyone in the coalition was working with the same talking points and information—creating fact sheets, memos, and tactics. In essence, they were building an advocacy operation out of a group that was not made up of professional advocates, and who all had different agendas when it came to their individual nonprofits.

The early meetings of the coalition were not always easy.

With so many different groups involved came differing views on what to include in the legislation. There were questions over whether the Commonwealth should mandate what districts should do, about how

#### IV. THE MASSACHUSETTS CIVIC LEARNING COALITION

exactly to define civics, and about whether standardized tests or high-stakes tests should be included in legislation.

“But everyone could agree that civics was important, that civics projects were important, that students needed to have a solid grounding in content, and that we needed to have a broad, comprehensive program,” Dubé said.

Chief among those concerns was the question over what role action civics—a model of civic education that takes students into the field for experiential learning—should play in legislation, and whether a bill that called for a mandated civic project—not just to graduate from middle school, but also high school—could ever get through the legislature. It’s a question that would be asked repeatedly as S.2631 progressed.

“But everyone could agree that civics was important, that civics projects were important, that students needed to have a solid grounding in content, and that we needed to have a broad, comprehensive program,” Dubé said.

“President Kennedy once said, ‘Government is the right kind of business if you compromise your ideas, but it’s the wrong kind of business if you compromise your ideals,’” Rothstein said. “So the coalition had to decide

what our big goals were and how to figure out how to agree on the principles, if not the language.”

**The primary message that MCLC wanted its members to impart to legislators was that:**

- » All students, in all public school districts, should have the support they need to develop the civic skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to be informed, engaged citizens of the Commonwealth.
- » Education should include community engagement, which research finds improves interpersonal and problem-solving skills and contributes to college and career readiness.
- » When young people are exposed to high-quality civic education, they are more likely to be informed voters and lifelong participants in political and civic life.

“I would say that everyone that was working on this understood that civic education had not seen the light of day and the opportunity to be given a front-row seat—or given the opportunity to be where it needs to be in PreK-12,” said Roger Desrosiers, the President of the Massachusetts Center for Civic Education, and a member of MCLC. “So our role was to recognize the importance of civic education, to look at the ultimate goal of promoting civic education, and to subsume our individual part in that goal.”

#### ADVOCACY 101

Armed with their message, the coalition managed advocacy for both the legislation and the revision of the Framework.

“When they finally did form the civics coalition and really sort of built out that infrastructure, that was a huge, huge shift, and was critical to getting the bill done,” Sen. Chandler’s General Counsel Barash said.

“A lot of these groups had already been working with us and weighing in. But once they jelled, it gave them

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a platform from which they could create advocacy items that they could get out to their members.”

Tactically, MCLC launched a website to house access to its core messaging, as well as a social media account to voice that message. It held monthly virtual meetings among its members to discuss proposed tactics, build consensus, and plan trajectories of action, as well as an annual in-person coalition meeting.

MCLC testified before BESE to support the Framework, and it testified at the State House Joint Committee on Education hearing in support of S.2631. Those closer to the inside workings of the legislature, such as Rothstein, Jennings, and Dubé, met personally with those members of the legislature, providing both counsel and guidance, and—when needed—pressure.

“I probably had, Lord, 40 meetings,” with different legislators, Rothstein recalled. Collectively, he estimates that the coalition had meetings or phone calls with more than two thirds of the House and Senate.

The many organizations that made up MCLC made it possible to apply grassroots pressure on legislators.

“We formed a coalition that was pretty noisy for not having any money and everyone volunteering,” Jennings said. “From the perspective of a staffer in a legislative office, they were getting, five to 15 calls every time they did something.”

MCLC also created entry points for everyone to engage in the process. Over the course of the 2017–2018 legislative session, it organized lobby days at the State House, coordinated email and phone calls to legislators to gain their support and have them co-sponsor legislation and budget amendments related to civic education.

And along the way, MCLC drafted and distributed press releases and op-eds tied to every stage of the process, such as the passing of the bill through the Senate and the House, the finalizing of the new Framework, and the ultimate signing of the bill into law by Governor Baker.

“That was hugely helpful to us because we have limited staff here,” Barash said. “It’s a hard thing for us to fit in. Having people on the outside that can organize around a bill is really, really critical. There are very few bills that we pass without that.”

But more importantly, MCLC united all of these individual organizations with a single front and gave everyone a voice in the fight—and this was the voice of those that the legislation would affect.

“It was important to have an animated legislature. We wanted to ensure that our representatives understood that this issue mattered. We did not rely on lobbyists, because there were no [professional] lobbyists involved at all.” Dubé said. “We made sure that the legislators heard directly from students, teachers, and coalition members. It was important to have a large coalition, even if not every member was active, to continue to keep this issue prominent with elected officials.”



#### IV. THE MASSACHUSETTS CIVIC LEARNING COALITION

##### ★ The Teacher's P.O.V.: Casey Cullen

Engaging teachers in the process of crafting S.2631 was key to coming up with a piece of legislation that wasn't just a top-down mandate. The bill needed to take into account the needs of the teachers who would ultimately be tasked with implementing it in the classroom. They needed advocates who could get behind what they drafted.

Early on, Sen. Chandler, Rep. Campbell, and MCLC met with dozens of Social Studies educators throughout the Commonwealth. Among them was Casey Cullen, a teacher at Westborough High School and the then Vice President of the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies (MCSS).

In their first meeting with Chandler and her team, members of the MCSS laid out what exactly they were looking for in legislation. Cullen recalled: "One is to stop the marginalization of social studies. We wanted to see the same financial and professional development support given STEM classes also given to history and civics." And they wanted professional development, to get teachers "up-to-snuff" on civics.

Here's what they didn't want: "Another MCAS. Assessment was kind of a dividing line for some folks. People did not want a paper fill-in-the-bubble assessment. We wanted something innovative," Cullen said. "We want kids to get out there and engage with the community. Students today are never going to go for a bubble test. What we were pushing for was something that asked students, 'Why are we doing this? Why are you doing going forward? What's going on in the community that you are being raised to take over, run, and change? What does that look like? And how do you interact with it and how do you make this work?'"

MCSS joined the Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition, and "I took the ball with the advocacy legislative piece and kind of ran that," Cullen said.

For Cullen, that meant mobilizing teachers through email and face-to-face conversations. It meant establishing a list of department heads and teachers throughout the state, a task complicated by teachers frequently switching jobs. (Any list they make is usually obsolete after only three years, he said.)

"You have to find the people who have strong advocacy skills, and then plug into other networks."

While he tried social media efforts, those often fell flat. Cullen spent time talking about the legislation through any format he could. "You can do the blanket emails, the Facebook blast, to make some folks aware of the effort, but to really identify some of those key folks, it is critical to go to a lot of meetings and have a lot of conversations."

By the end of the process, Cullen said he felt like a megaphone for the cause.

"I talked to everybody," he said. "I spoke with a publication called The Blow, The Boston Globe, Seacoast—something in the southern Massachusetts newspapers Telegram publishes. In Worcester, I went on a radio show at midnight last August. Probably eight people heard me. But wherever I was, I tried to spread the message, because it's important."

And that included talking with legislators.

"Those personal interactions, the one-on-one connections and really making contact with representatives and senators are so important, but I would see people at various functions, and I would have those conversations all the time," he said. "They would come to know who I am, and as I'm walking up to them, they would say 'Here's Casey. I know he's gonna talk about the civics bill. Oh, my God. Let's get away.'"

## The Crafting Of The Bill

The crafting of what would become S.2631 was something of a Stone Soup of legislative authoring. Like in the ancient folk story, everyone contributed their own ingredients.

As mentioned previously, some 16 pieces of legislation around civic education had been introduced in the first part of the 2017–2018 legislative session—11 in the House and five in the Senate. The bills came from both Democrats and Republicans and

covered everything from a civics course requirement for graduation, mandatory media literacy training in public schools, to awarding seals of excellence for learning about government in high school.

### ★ The Bills That Had Been Filed In 2017

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#### *Among the bills that had been submitted in the House:*

- » **H.222:** *An Act directing the Department of Education to include a course in civics as a high school graduation requirement*, by F. Jay Barrows (Republican - 1st Bristol)
- » **H.237:** *An Act relative to civic test requirements for graduation*, by Shawn Dooley (Republican - 9th Norfolk)
- » **H.280:** *Resolve to promote better citizenship, civics education and civic engagement*, by Jay R. Kaufman (Democrat - 15th Middlesex)
- » **H.306:** *An Act relative to the incorporation of civics in the high school curriculum*, by Elizabeth A. Poirier (Republican - 14th Bristol)
- » **H315:** *An Act to involve youth in civic engagement*, by Jeffrey Roy, (Democrat - 10th Norfolk)
- » **H2016:** *An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement*, Linda Dean Campbell (Democrat - 15th Essex)
- » **H2022:** *An Act relative to civic education in public schools*, by Diana DiZoglio (Democrat - 14th Essex) and Sean Garballey (Democrat - 23rd Middlesex)
- » **H2039:** *An Act requiring public school districts to add civics to their curriculum*, by Sheila C. Harrington (Republican - 1st Middlesex)
- » **H2043:** *An Act relative to high school civic education requirements*, by Bradley H. Jones, Jr. (Republican - 20th Middlesex)
- » **H2855:** *An Act relative to high school civics requirement*, by Daniel J. Hunt (Democrat - 13th Suffolk)
- » **H3556:** *An Act relating to digital citizenship and media literacy in public schools*, by David M. Rogers (Democrat - 24th Middlesex)

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#### *Among those in the Senate:*

- » **S215:** *An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement*, by Harriette L. Chandler (Democrat - First Worcester)
- » **S244:** *Resolve to promote better citizenship civics education and civic engagement*, by Kenneth J. Donnelly (Democrat - Fourth Middlesex)
- » **S248:** *An Act promoting civics education*, by Eileen M. Donoghue (Democrat - First Middlesex)
- » **S278:** *An Act relative to civics and new media literacy education in schools*, by Eric P. Lesser (Democrat - First Hampden and Hampshire)
- » **S307:** *An Act to involve youth in civic engagement*, by Michael F. Rush (Democrat - Norfolk and Suffolk)

## V. THE CRAFTING OF THE BILL

Among them were the identical bills submitted by Sen. Chandler and Rep. Campbell, S.215 and H.2016, both titled *An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement*.

Sen. Chandler and Rep. Campbell knew the interest in civics was there, but their teams had to bring together all of the other bills under one umbrella. “We probably invited 10 or 15 people to the table, and ended up with a solid group of nine that really committed to be part of this,” Barash said.

To do so, they worked to get buy-in from both sides of the aisle before the bill was introduced, as having strong support from legislative leaders in both legislative chambers would make the process move more smoothly. But, importantly, every member of the group had to check their ego at the door and truly work as a unified legislative team.

“We always knew we had to have cross-partisan support, and we realized early on that if this would be ‘my bill’ by itself it wouldn’t work,” Sen. Chandler said. “We realized that it would be so much stronger if everyone was involved. If you don’t care who gets credit for something, you can get a lot of things done, and I really didn’t care if I had the credit, I just wanted it done. So we looked at all the bills that had been drafted, pulled them all together, to see what was missing—and that would be the base of our support, all those sponsors who were both Republicans and Democrats.”

Members of the group divvied up sections according to the bills each had worked on previously until they had a cohesive and comprehensive bill that went above and beyond any before it. They did this before the Committee on Education would have combined the bills on their own, and made sure it was a bill the legislators wanted.

MCLC members were instrumental in helping Sen. Chandler and her team create a cohesive draft bill out of the bills that had already been drafted.

Sen. Chandler, for instance, enlisted Jennings and her team at Generation Citizen to help draft a section on action civics—in this case, the student-led project.

“Senator Chandler created this internal coalition of legislators to coalesce around her bill,” Arielle Jennings recalled. “And it was sort of becoming like an omnibus bill in a way, [as legislators said] ‘Oh, my bill has something about school committees. Let’s put that in,’ or ‘My bill has something about voter registration in high schools. Let’s put that in.’ So it became this mashup of a lot of the different bills.”

Getting all of those legislators involved and incorporating suggestions from MCLC was not an easy process, but ultimately incorporating all of these different stakeholders - and having active engagement from the House and Senate Ways and Means Committees - helped build momentum to craft legislation that would pass.

Again, the question of action civics, and whether the Commonwealth could mandate a civics project, was a hotly contested item.

In general, action civics is something of a political lightning rod. Some feared that not every school would be able to afford to administer and oversee such projects—putting students from lower-income districts at a disadvantage. Some had concerns over making this a graduation requirement. Others were concerned that the project could lead to partisan politics creeping into the classroom, especially around issues that had partisan undertones. Some feared that teachers might influence students to



## V. THE CRAFTING OF THE BILL

work on politically-charged projects, and others were concerned that students would feel uncomfortable with the projects suggested by their peers.

“Every action civics project can be construed as political, even recycling projects,” Jennings said. “So that was really scary to some because they felt that teachers might not feel safe doing their projects in school, whether it was recycling or, issues like gun violence or trans rights, things that are more controversial nationally.

The debate got very specific. As Louise Dubé from iCivics explained, the tussle hinged on what a useful civics project is—a community organizing effort or a research project that ended with an experiential real-world learning component.

“I think everybody agreed that project-based learning and experiential learning is important and necessary for civic education. So there’s no debate about that. The problem comes when you have very controversial issues that students take up—and the level of control that adults have, teachers in particular, as to what the students should think,” Dubé said. “Everybody believes that adults should follow the kids’ leads, and should teach skills. But everybody acknowledges there is a danger in that. In the end, the legislation’s definition of a civics project is a research project that ends with an action piece in the real world.”

The bill states explicitly that the projects should be “student-led.” Instead of having teachers assign projects, schools and teachers would provide guidance and support.

For the bill’s supporters, the projects piece of the bill then became one of its most critical elements.

“The legislators see firsthand every day how much of a difference it makes when people actually interact with government and advocate for themselves versus just learning how the three branches of government work in a classroom. They [understood] very viscerally that you can’t learn this stuff without experiencing it,” Chandler said.

**In the end, they devised a draft of a bill that looked at civic education in three parts, Sen. Chandler said:**

- » This first was a foundation in U.S. history, the history of Massachusetts, and the great documents upon which the country is founded.
- » The second was critical thinking skills—including media literacy and discussion of controversial subjects.
- » The third was experiential learning, as the draft bill contained language that made the completion of two student-led civics projects mandatory, one in order to graduate from 8th grade, and one to graduate from high school. It came with provisions to address everyone’s concerns and would become a central part of the bill.

These components map very directly to the commonly accepted definitions of civic education (civic knowledge, civic skills, civic dispositions, and action) outlined in the Civic Mission of Schools report and updated in *The Republic is Still at Risk*, two major reports in the civic education sphere.

The bill would be tied to the Framework and aligned with DESE’s work. It would take special care to include provisions to support disadvantaged schools and students. It would include a voter registration challenge for high schools, and a statewide challenge available for those who wanted to showcase their grade 8 student-led projects.

The most important piece, however, was the addition of a built-in funding mechanism, as the bill called for the creation of what the first draft called, “The Civics



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Project Fund.” Other bills in other states had been passed before, but ended up meaningless because they had no money attached to them, and unfunded mandates are nearly impossible to enforce, especially when it comes to education where budgets and resources are already in short supply.

The Civics Project Fund was designed to pay for both professional development for teachers to implement the new civics requirements, as well as curriculum development.

### HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

The circuitous travel of a bill through the legislature is not as simple as the 1970s cartoon might make it seem. The process of S.2631 is a case in point:

Sen. Chandler and Rep. Campbell’s original bills, S.215 and H.2016, were filed at the beginning of the legislative session in January 2017. Their bills were assigned to the Joint Committee on Education and received a public hearing on June 13, 2017. Over a year after they were initially filed, the consensus bill emerged from the Joint Committee on Education on February 15, 2018 as S.2306. In March, S.2306 went through the Senate Ways and Means Committee. When it reached the Senate floor, it received 13 amendments, was submitted as a new draft, S.2355 – and was then reprinted as S.2375 on March 22, 2018 where it finally passed the Senate by a vote of 32 to 4.

S.2375 was then sent to the House where, in May, it was referred to the House Ways and Means Committee, which made its own changes—among them solidifying the language around the funding and renaming the provisions that would fund the bill “The Civics Project Trust Fund.” The House Ways and

Means Committee resubmitted the bill as H.4545 and referred it to the House Committee on Steering, Policy, and Scheduling. When the bill reached the House floor, it received 13 amendments, and on May 30, the bill passed through the House 151–0.

*Got that?*

A number of legislative bipartisan sponsors in both the House and the Senate played vital roles as the bill worked through the many steps towards becoming a law, and throughout this process, members of MCLC played their part.

They gave testimonies when necessary. The coalition carried out their letter writing and phone campaigns, and throughout, MCLC members would comment on new versions of the bill as they emerged and helped with wordsmithing and re-drafting.

On April 3, 2018, MCLC brought hundreds of their constituents to the State House to advocate for the passage of the bill and to deliver the message prescribed in the handout that it provided to everyone who took part: “There is insufficient civics education for Massachusetts’ students. As a result, our public schools are not fulfilling their purpose of preparing students for citizenship... K-12 civics education is most effective when it is widespread, engaging, age-appropriate and linked to real-world challenges in our own communities. This type of civics education is needed for all of Massachusetts’ students.”

This was incredibly important, according to Rep. Peisch, the Joint Committee on Education Chairwoman. The Education Committee can see up to 300 bills filed every year. From them, only about 50 are reported out to the legislature for consideration. And out of those, only a few get passed into law.

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“Those that are given a high priority are given so because of a perception of a high level of interest,” she said. “In the past, there wasn’t the same level of interest expressed as during the [2017–2018 legislative] session. When I start hearing from a number of colleagues about a topic and from a broad range of people, then momentum starts to build, and it starts to separate itself from the mass of other bills we see.”

On May 30, MCLC was able to finally issue a press release thanking the Legislature “for its leadership in passing the bill, which will help ensure that students across the Commonwealth will be able to access a civic education curriculum that covers media literacy, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and conventional forms of political knowledge such as the electoral process—and that teachers will receive support to implement and teach the curriculum and facilitate civics projects to prepare students for civic service.”

### ★ Some More Fortuitous, If Unfortunate, Timing

Much of the passage of S.2631: *An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement* hinged on fortuitous timing. Just as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s revision of the Social Sciences Framework laid the groundwork, the political climate and faltering civil discourse in the country made the matter more urgent.

The bill also received another boost that no one could have foreseen.

From the outset, Massachusetts Senate President, Stan Rosenberg, was a proponent of the bill. When Sen. Chandler and her staff started gathering support for a bill, Rosenberg asked for a meeting in his office. “He dedicated a staffer to the project, and even included a significant piece on passing a civics education bill in his 2018 State of the State address,” Barash said.

“That sort of put down a marker that they were serious about getting it done that year, too, which was a huge deal for us,” Barash said. “When the Senate President says, ‘I want a plan for this. You’re the person to get this done. Figure out what the process is and get me a bill,’ that usually gives you a really good shot. It doesn’t always happen, but it gives you a shot to get something in the limelight.”

But it was an unexpected series of events that really helped push the bill through.

On May 3, 2018, Stan Rosenberg, the 31-year lawmaker stepped down from his position prematurely—which opened the door for Sen. Chandler to take his place as Senate President. That allowed her to push the civic education bill to the top of the agenda of a State House that can see more than 6,000 proposed bills in any given session.

“It was sort of serendipitous because she stepped into a position where she had much greater say over the priorities of the legislature,” Barash said. “In that role, she would meet all the time with the head of the House of Representatives here, her counterpart.”

“From a macro perspective, I think about how lucky—well, I don’t know if lucky is the right word—but how stars aligned for the actual work we were doing to push forward this legislation,” Jennings said. “We had a big issue in our state with civics really being absent from the curriculum, and then these sort of larger things nationally and then in our state were also happening.”

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### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TWO DIFFERENT BILLS EMERGE?

But, perhaps the praise was a touch premature. There was a problem.

In order for a bill to become a law in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the House and the Senate have to pass identical versions of that law. And while they had both passed the Act to promote and enhance civic engagement, through the revision process, they had actually ended up with slightly different versions of the bill.

“When you have a bill like this, you’re going to have some differences,” Sen. Chandler said, especially with 160 members of the House and 40 of the Senate weighing in. “Everyone was very interested in this initiative. And so there was a lot of input from a lot of members.”

On June 11, 2018, the bill went before a joint Conference Committee appointed by the House and the Senate that included Senators Sonia Chang-Diaz (Democrat - 2nd Suffolk), Cindy F. Friedman (Democrat - 4th Middlesex), and Dean A. Tran (Republican - Worcester and Middlesex) from the Senate, and Representatives Paul F. Tucker (Democrat - 7th Essex), William L. Crocker, Jr. (Republican - 2nd Barnstable), and Peisch on the House side.

The most significant discrepancy between the two bills was that the Senate version mandated the student-led project as a requirement for graduation, while the House version did not, according to House Chairwoman of the Joint Committee on Education, Rep. Peisch. She cannot comment on how exactly this was reconciled because of Committee rules. The bill was reworded so that it required only that the projects had to be “offered.”

“There was some concern that some kids might struggle with the requirement,” she said. “At the end of the day, the bill now provides more support for civics and incentivizes more civics, as opposed to mandating it.”

Finally, on June 25, 2018, the bill was amended with the suggestions of the Committee, and given a new (and final) bill number, S. 2631.

That day, it passed the Senate unanimously 37–0, and then the House 151–0, and once again MCLC issued a press release lauding the state legislators for their work.

In order for a bill to become a law in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the House and the Senate have to pass identical versions of that law. And while they had both passed the Act to promote and enhance civic engagement, through the revision process, they had actually ended up with slightly different versions of the bill.

## V. THE CRAFTING OF THE BILL

### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE GOVERNOR OBJECTS?

The students of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will learn in their classrooms from here on out, the governor has a 10-day window to either sign a bill into law or veto it. If he does neither, the bill automatically becomes law. But if no action is taken by the governor and the session expires before the 10-day window closes, the bill is vetoed by default in what is known as a “pocket veto”. Those working on the bill would get that lesson first-hand.

Despite the massive cross-partisan, bicameral, professional, and grassroots support for S.2631, Governor Charlie Baker had his concerns, and he would not sign the bill into law as drafted.

On August 3, 2018, the Senate and House had first passed their bill, Gov. Baker returned the bill to the Senate with amendments. In it, he praised the work of BESE for revising the Framework. But he remained concerned that the bill would introduce partisanship to the classroom.

“While I welcome efforts to facilitate student participation in our electoral processes, we must make certain that such efforts are conducted in our public schools on a nonpartisan basis,” the Governor wrote.

He went on to express his concern about the student-led projects. “We must be thoughtful as to how we approach the instruction of civics, always ensuring in our classrooms that differing points of view are afforded impartial consideration,” he wrote. “When opposing positions are raised, our students should be expected to engage in a civil discourse that is both appropriate and respectful. Furthermore, while we want to encourage the development of critical

reasoning skills, we would never want students to feel forced to engage in student-led civic projects in the public sphere that advance positions contrary to their personal convictions. Schools, therefore, must make alternative opportunities readily available.”

To ameliorate those concerns, he suggested that the legislators specify that the establishment of the civics projects be “non-partisan.”

The second change, he suggested: Make the offering of student-led projects optional. While schools should offer the opportunity to engage in projects, “Students choosing not to participate in any particular project shall be offered alternative opportunities to develop the civic abilities described in this section,” he suggested.

For many who had spent the year working on this—and for those who had spent the better part of a decade, it was a dagger to the heart of the legislation they had crafted and passed.

The advocacy effort continued both behind closed doors in the House and Senate, with meetings between legislators and the Governor and his staff, and MCLC kept up its pressure as well, in its communications urging Gov. Baker to sign the bill.

On October 25, 2018, Sen. Chandler submitted an amendment to the Governor’s version of the bill. S.2631 would now include the word “nonpartisan.” But she would not relent on the Governor’s other suggested change on the student-led projects. “That essentially would have gutted the bill,” Generation Citizen’s Jennings said. “Basically, there’d be no requirement, and therefore, no incentive to actually do any of it.” That amended version was approved by

## V. THE CRAFTING OF THE BILL

the Senate and House on October 29, and the bill was sent back to Gov. Baker.

What happened next was a high-stakes stare down between the legislature and the Governor. “It was very unclear what would happen during this period,” iCivics’ Dubé said.

The legislative session was set to end on Nov. 8, 2018. Everyone had much to lose if the session ended before Gov. Baker signed the bill. The bill would have ended up in a pocket veto by default. All of the work that had been done would have been lost. The prospect of starting over again in the next session was a nightmare.

The Governor, on the other hand, was in the midst of an election year. The optics for a Governor letting die a bill that everyone wanted, that would help students, and help democracy, are—in a word—risky.

How, exactly, was the Governor swayed to finally sign? No one will say.

But in the last hour, Governor Baker finally did put his signature on the bill. It became law, and Sen. Chandler sent out her tweet: “It’s been signed into law!”

For Chandler, it was a satisfying capstone to one of the defining battles of her career.

“In the beginning, I don’t think that anyone, including me, saw this as something bigger than a simple bill,” she said. “But this became much bigger than a simple bill. This was an organizing effort. It brought together all these different groups to put pressure to get this bill done.”



## The Work Ahead

When the 2018 Civics Education Law: *An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement* was signed into law in Massachusetts in November 2018, those who worked so hard to get it passed should have been able to breathe easy. But in truth, the hard work was about to begin. The law now needed to be implemented.

“Right now, we’re in the unpacking stage and wrapping our heads around it,” said Gorman Lee, immediate past President of the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies. This includes the creation of the 8th grade course mandated by the new Framework, the creation of professional development standards, practices, and application—and the creation of centralized resources to help implement the new law regionally and locally.

How well this is done will rely on the other challenge, however: paying for implementation of the new law.

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According to the new law, the Civics Project Trust Fund will support the infrastructure, curricular resources, and teacher training needed to implement and integrate civic learning in all Massachusetts schools. This includes paying for the professional development needed to train teachers to re-focus on civics and help students as they pursue their civics projects. It will pay for the 8th grade civic challenge. And it is stipulated that the Trust Fund will allocate funding to low-income schools in order to close the civic education gap that exists among schools in low- and high-income communities. The fund will be administered by DESE, which each year will have to report on the fund’s progress.

But this also means that the proponents of the bill and MCLC will have to make the case to keep the Civics Project Trust Fund as an item in the state budget every year.

This reality keeps everyone’s feet to the fire. DESE must ensure that the districts, schools, and teachers in the state are implementing the law. They must show that it is having a positive effect.

And it means that the work of MCLC is not done either.

The lobbying effort will continue in perpetuity. The process started in 2018, almost immediately after the law was signed. MCLC members kept the pressure on legislators and the House and Senate budget

## VI. THE WORK AHEAD

coordinators to allocate money. It lobbied the Ways and Means Committees to support allocation of funds. It held another lobby day on April 2, 2018 to bring grassroots advocates to the State House, and on May 22, the Senate approved the allocation of \$1.5 million for FY20.

### **Projects planned for these funds include:**

- » Grants to districts
- » Evaluation
- » “Baseline” civics education in Massachusetts
- » Evaluation of grant and program impact
- » Curating/recommending high-quality instructional materials for Grade 8
- » Curriculum materials for Grade 5
- » High School Voter Challenge
- » Resources for educator preparation programs
- » “Baseline” professional development resources on the DESE website

Half of the money will go to the grant program, with the rest distributed among the other line items.

And on July 31, 2019, Governor of Massachusetts Charlie Baker approved the fiscal year 2020 state budget that included the \$1.5 million for the Civics Project Trust Fund. In addition, MCLC has also raised \$100,000 from private funders in hopes of doing more.



## Takeaways For Those Pursuing Similar Legislation

The effort in Massachusetts around the passage of the Act to promote and enhance civic engagement certainly had some unique components, the revision of the Framework, some fortuitous timing, and a generally favorable political climate. Every state will face different challenges and circumstances should they pursue legislation for civic education, but there were some general principles at play in Massachusetts from which they may learn:



**Build A Coalition**



**Agree To Compromise**



**Keep People Involved And Motivated**



**Engage The Educators**



**Engage People Early In The Process**



**Try To Hire A Staff**



**Keep Partisanship Out Of The Process**



## VII. TAKEAWAYS FOR THOSE PURSUING SIMILAR LEGISLATION



### **BUILD A COALITION:**

By all accounts, S.2631 would not have passed were it not for the formation of the Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition. The coalition was instrumental in both informing the legislators who were crafting the bill, but also in bringing together a broad base of experts, academics, nonprofits, and other parties who could show the entire legislature just how important civic education is to the populous that put them in office. It also allowed all of these different member groups to pool their resources to create momentum.

“No one group has the resources, the time, the personnel, to address everything that it takes to work with the State House, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and to address other needs in the field,” Rothstein said. “We had to make sure that we worked together to share those responsibilities and to collectively have one voice.”

“Build a coalition. Then start signing members on. Create a model bill. Then bring that to legislators and try and get buy-in and get a very influential sponsor, and create momentum,” Barash said.

Legislation is almost impossible without that multitude of voices and talents, according to Sen. Chandler. “You have to involve other people, and they have to be fired up and excited about it, and understand why it’s necessary. This is not a one-person show. It really takes a village to make it happen,” she said. “This is just like running a political campaign. This is getting as many people involved as you possibly can.”

Within that coalition, figure out what everyone brings to the table, and work to everyone’s strengths.

“I think the key learning from me is identifying the resources that exist already on the ground. That needs to be assessed within the first three to four months,” Casey Cullen, the Vice President of the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies, said. “And then evaluate the growth that needs to happen. Have a clear and definitive mission statement. And then you’ve got to invite people on board and say, ‘Do you want to be part of this mission?’”

Key to this is finding the people who have influence and followings who can motivate others to act. “Identify your top 10 to 20 people that get in touch with others throughout your state. Those could be nonprofit leaders or teachers, those could be principals, those can be superintendents,” Cullen said.



### **AGREE TO COMPROMISE:**

The legislators, nonprofit leaders, and educators interviewed for this paper all agreed that they would not have been able to build passable legislation and a movement around that legislation had they not all united behind the greater cause of getting legislation passed—even if the specific legislation did not include every one of their pet projects.

The process included a plethora of important but competing agendas, so the challenge was finding a way to have a broader shared agenda. Some of the questions discussed were: What is the role of classroom work? What is the role of action civics? How should we address issues across the Commonwealth? How do we reach some of the poorer communities?

As Steven Rothstein noted, “When I was leading a lot of the meetings, I took off my institutional hat.

## VII. TAKEAWAYS FOR THOSE PURSUING SIMILAR LEGISLATION

In other words, there were some points that I could have promoted that would have been better, at least in the short term, for my own organization, but that I didn't push for because they didn't serve the whole coalition well. If you are going to lead a coalition, the priority has to be on that role and to bring people together. In any particular initiative, you may want a little more of something or a little less of something, but I think it is more important to have as broad a group as possible and to find common ground. You're not going to be able to have everything, but you can find that common ground."



### KEEP PEOPLE INVOLVED AND MOTIVATED:

Passing legislation is a long and twisted road, and it's important to keep people engaged throughout the entire process. This is not always easy, as roadblocks along the way may seem insurmountable and discouraging. To get through them, it's important to set some measurable goals—and to work toward them, goals such as seeing legislation through, getting a grant, publishing an article, so that people see success. Success begets success. When people see things happening, it energizes more people to get involved," Rothstein said. "And it's also important to be very transparent, very open so that everyone shares important information."

The trick is keeping hope alive, according to Dubé.

"It's the ability to have everyone believe that they're part of something that is important," she said. "Even if they're only coming on lobby days, it's important for them to feel like they're part of this effort."



### ENGAGE THE EDUCATORS:

Ultimately, it's the teachers in the classroom who are

going to implement whatever legislation is passed. Their objection can be a powerful dissuader for the legislators who have to vote on a bill. Find out what they want, what they need, and what is realistic.

Critical in doing this is engaging the teachers' union—and do it early on, because ultimately any additional responsibilities for teachers could potentially be problematic. "In retrospect, I would even say I would go out of my way to sit down with them," Bryan Barash, Sen. Harriette Chandler's Chief Counsel, said. "I would have gotten the head of the union involved much earlier and made sure that they completely understood what we were hoping to do."

Ultimately, it's the teachers in the classroom who are going to implement whatever legislation is passed. Their objection can be a powerful dissuader for the legislators who have to vote on a bill. Find out what they want, what they need, and what is realistic.



### ENGAGE PEOPLE EARLY IN THE PROCESS:

"You've got to get people involved from the beginning. This is always true with bills," Chandler said. "It's not something that's easy for a state to do. Some may think they can do this, 'one, two, three, thank you, ma'am.' But it's difficult to get all these parts

## VII. TAKEAWAYS FOR THOSE PURSUING SIMILAR LEGISLATION

moving and working together. You need a little bit of time, and you need people who really believe in it. And by the end, I think the people involved really believed in what we were doing.”



### TRY TO HIRE A STAFF:

All of the work of MCLC was done on a volunteer basis, and while the legislation was passed, it certainly taxed all of the groups involved, as they had to commit their already stretched personnel to the effort. If she could do this again, Arielle Jennings would hire staff to oversee the mechanics of this process.

“We would hire these short-term interns to help us run lobby days and do very basic advocacy, creating press releases and stuff. We put in \$1,000 here or there and committed our organizational resources to it,” she said. “If another state does this, they should fundraise a grant to pay for a coordinator. If they do that, they have the opportunity to go even further.”



### KEEP PARTISANSHIP OUT OF THE PROCESS:

“We wanted to make sure that this was not being viewed through a political lens,” Rep Campbell said. “We were concerned that this was going to be looked at as, ‘Massachusetts trying to convert the rest of the world,’ and looked at from a Democratic versus Republican partisan lens. That’s a very real concern. So we had to emphasize over and over again that we want students to learn...”

“We’re not talking about having them be Republican and Democratic ideas. We want them to learn about the rules of government and how we govern ourselves—and how we affect change and how difficult that is. We had to say it over and over, all the time, everywhere we went. Every discussion we had with teachers, with superintendents, with whoever, those were the first words out of my mouth. We are doing this because we face very big challenges in our country. We’re doing it because it’s been a concept that many people have worked on for over a decade. We just happen to be able to feel like we can now push it forward.”



## Interviews Conducted For This Paper

**Bryan Barash**

Chief Counsel for Senator  
Harriette Chandler

**David Buchanan**

Former Assistant Director of Literacy and Humanities for DESE,  
current Director of Massachusetts Programs for iCivics

**Rep. Linda Dean Campbell**

(Democrat - 15th Essex)

**Sen. Harriette Chandler**

(Democrat-1st Worcester)

**Casey Cullen**

Teacher at Westborough High School and former Vice President of  
the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies

**Roger Desrosiers**

President of the Massachusetts Center for Civic Education

**Louise Dubé,**

Executive Director of iCivics

**Arielle Jennings**

Executive Director for Massachusetts of Generation Citizen

**Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic  
Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University's Jonathan  
M. Tisch College of Civic Life

**Gorman Lee**

The immediate Past President of the Massachusetts Council for  
the Social Studies

**Karen Mazza**

Legislative Counsel for Education for the League of Women Voters  
of Massachusetts

**Rep. Alice Hanlon Peisch**

(Democrat - 14th Norfolk), House Chairwoman of the Joint  
Committee on Education

**Steven Rothstein**

Former Executive Director of the JFK Library Foundation

**Rep. Andres Vargas**

(Democrat - 3rd Essex)