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CIVIC LEARNING
IMPACT AND
MEASUREMENT
C O N V E N I N G

REPORT

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Civic Learning Impact and Measurement Convening Report

THE CIVIC LEARNING IMPACT AND MEASUREMENT CONVENING BROUGHT TOGETHER OVER 160 PARTICIPANTS FOR TWO DAYS OF PANELS, COLLABORATION SESSIONS, AND DISCUSSIONS ON KEY ISSUES SURROUNDING THE GOALS, OUTCOMES, AND APPROACHES TO MEASUREMENT OF CIVIC LEARNING. With panels on topics that ranged from digital spaces and play experiences to measurement at scale, participants engaged with weighty questions for the field of civic education. Although much of the focus was on school-based efforts to envision, build, and measure the outcomes of civic education experiences, the convening also recognized the critical importance of out-of-school civic learning opportunities. Framing questions for the convening included:

- » *Can we measure the subtle but fundamentally important civic “capacities” needed for a thriving democracy?*
- » *What can we learn from what districts and states have done to measure that impact?*
- » *How are schools, districts, and states using measures of civic learning opportunities and outcomes to attend to equity?*
- » *Do we have the instruments we need for schools to evaluate civic learning well and efficiently? What are we missing?*

This report does not aim to be a full accounting of the two day event and thus does not include all the useful insights and perspectives shared. Rather, the report aims to outline some of the major takeaways from the convening, potential next steps, and big questions we have yet to tackle.

The Field of Civic Education Must Better Reflect Student Diversity

THE CONVENING DREW PARTICIPANTS FROM AN ARRAY OF ORGANIZATIONS, FIELDS, AND PERSPECTIVES. However, we need to purposefully expand our outreach to more diverse communities. This was a recurring theme throughout the meeting, perhaps best exemplified when Joe Rogers asked,¹ “Who believes that we all learn from experience?” Everyone raised their hand. He then asked attendees to raise their hands if they had ever been stopped and searched by police. As a few hands went up around the room, Rogers made two arguments: first, such experiences—even if we wish young people didn’t have

them—are nonetheless educative civic experiences, and civic education needs to recognize them as such. Advantaged students do not necessarily know more, or even as much, about social issues and processes as students who face injustice. As Cathy Cohen, Joe Kahne, and Jessica Marshall argued in their recent “Lived Civics” report, “civic educators and advocates must ensure that attention to race, identity, and the lived experiences of youth are central elements of civic education efforts.” Second, meeting attendees did not

necessarily have the same civic experiences as the young people we aim to reach through civic education. We need to work to resolve these contradictions by expanding the field, including expanding leadership in the field and of future civics convenings.

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we all learn from experience?”
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NEXT STEPS

- Identifying opportunities to shape an equity first focus in civic education, promoting the lived experiences of young people and engaging with new, diverse communities whose work should be viewed as forming civic actors [already under way]



BIG QUESTIONS

- What more can we do to actively work for a diverse and more inclusive field?
- What additional organizations that already do civic work should we reach out to?
- How can we ensure that civic outcomes and curricula do not err on the side of noncontroversial content in ways that fail to recognize and examine current and past injustices, young people’s lived experiences, and critical as well as laudatory perspectives on our society and system of government?

A Roadmap for Integrated Civic Education

WHILE WE DO NOT EXPECT (AND WOULD NOT WANT) TO ACHIEVE A SINGLE, UNIFIED VISION OF WHAT CIVIC EDUCATION SHOULD BE, WE RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR AN INTEGRATED CIVIC EDUCATION ROADMAP. Our expectations for civic education, including its outcomes, should be flexible and diverse. This premise was debated and affirmed at the May 2018 National Civics Convening held at Harvard University, a predecessor to this January convening. While some at the convening urged that the first task should be to settle on a single vision of the goals of civic education, most participants were quite comfortable with

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there being a range of views about that outcome. Moreover, the range is broad. For instance, Carlos Hipolito-Delgado² expressed a desire for the civic measures he presented to help “start a revolution” and Sam Wineburg³ argued that his goals were not to start a revolution but instead to ensure that students could knowledgeably participate in democratic life. The challenge is to pursue the shared infrastructure that the field needs while accepting a diversity of views about the best outcome of civic education. With regard to

the infrastructure the field needs, the discussion at the convening suggested that the field would benefit from a roadmap for what integrated civic education could look like in a school context. Such an integrated roadmap would include suggestions for horizontal alignment (across school disciplines) and suggestions for vertical alignment (from K to 12), be based in an argument about young people’s development as civic actors, and attend to facets of civic education including social-emotional learning, civic knowledge, civics in action, and lived civics. The framework would be flexible enough to maintain the vision of multiple possible outcomes of civic education.

A roadmap would provide a common reference for the numerous organizations working in the civic education space and help us all understand how our work fits in, contributes to, or expands the field of civic education. It would help us advocate for civic education and build capacity and support across grade levels and school subject areas. At the same time, it may help us maintain a spotlight on civic education. As Louise Dubé⁴ said, “We need to make [civics] everybody’s problem. But in doing so, we can’t let [civics] be no one’s problem.”

Finally, a roadmap would help us articulate how the goals of civic education overlap with and also advance the goals of education reform in the last few decades. Although a great deal of focus has been placed on literacy and math skills, the actual goal of education is to prepare students for civic life and develop civic dispositions that are increasingly required for success in college and career. Although there still may be tension with educators and policymakers who advocate for a continued focus on basic math and literacy skills, a roadmap may encourage and support education reform organizations and schools themselves to incorporate civic education into the work they already do.



NEXT STEPS

- Consider the research that already exists on young people's development of civic knowledge and skills that could inform a developmental story of students' civic learning, as well as what we still need to know
- Build a team and proposal for the process of drafting a roadmap



BIG QUESTIONS

- How do we ensure that, even amidst conversations about vertical alignment and measurement, that we continue to emphasize that there are a diversity of visions for the outcomes of civic education?
- How might such a roadmap anticipate or leave room for technological changes that will expand or shift opportunities for what to teach in civics and how to teach it, as well as possibilities for assessing civic outcomes?

How Best to Secure a Seat at the Table?

A TENSION THAT AROSE IN SEVERAL PANELS WAS HOW BEST TO GUARANTEE CIVIC EDUCATORS A “SEAT AT THE TABLE” OF EDUCATIONAL DECISION MAKING AT THE FEDERAL, STATE, AND DISTRICT LEVEL.

Some argued that accountability measures could help guarantee civic educators a role in state- and district-level decision making and help ensure that civic education (of some kind) is more broadly supported in schools. Bob Brazofsky⁵ stated that the Florida state requirement for an end-of-civics course assessment brought renewed interest in civic education (including from community members and

school administration) and more funding for professional development in civic education to Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Brazofsky said that while this policy helped provide resources and a starting point for civic education, it should not be the full extent of civic learning measures or allowed to singularly dictate civic education goals.

Others cautioned against a rush to embrace large-scale, (likely multiple choice), measures of civic outcomes. We risk narrowing the focus of measurement and, in doing so, diluting what civic education is ultimately about— informed, authentic and active citizenship. Further, there was concern that such an effort would not necessarily result in more support for broader civic education efforts or in a focus on fostering equity. For example, Jessica Marshall⁶ argued we should carefully consider the consequences (intended and unintended) of standardized, large-scale measures that may not measure all of the civic outcomes we care about. This is of particular concern if such tests

could be used to penalize and negatively impact students and schools that have historically been under-resourced, instead of to promoting and expanding access to meaningful civic learning. Some participants argued that it is possible to build support and capacity for civic education through means other than high stakes accountability measures. Renewed interest in civic education and diverse groups of people working in the space creates new possibilities for developing new, innovative measures.

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BIG QUESTIONS

- Is it possible for a civics accountability measures to give civic educators a “seat at the table” *and* move us closer to a more expansive assessment system?
- Where they exist, how can we ensure that such measures are used by districts to improve teaching and work toward equity instead of simply to grade or inadvertently punish schools?
- How can we ensure that states and districts maintain a focus on developing more complex goals and assessments for civic education?
- How can we leverage technology to create innovative measures?

A Bank of Civic Measures

SEVERAL PANELISTS OFFERED EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENTS OF CIVIC KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, DISPOSITIONS, AND BEHAVIORS ALREADY IN EXISTENCE.

Panelists presented on performance assessments in use in New Hampshire, surveys on civic learning opportunities and outcomes in Chicago, rubrics to assess civic writing, assessments embedded in civic games, and potential modifications to NAEP to deepen the capacities assessed, among many other projects. Yet even among meeting attendees, it was clear that not everyone was familiar with the measures that were shared. With so many efforts already underway, we need a way to make these measures more widely known and commonly available. In conjunction with the development of a roadmap for integrated civic education, we can organize the assessments and measures already available and share these resources on a common platform.

There was also support for a way to share best practices and practical experiences with using the measures that already exist, including how to use data from the assessments that are already in use.



NEXT STEPS:

- Begin search for existing measures of civic knowledge, values, skills, dispositions, and actions (including and beyond those shared at the convening)
- Consider whether it is possible to share best practices for using data from these measures on the same platform, or whether a different tool is better suited for this task



BIG QUESTIONS

- How can we design and use this platform to ensure that it not only disseminates assessments already in existence but also helps us identify and prioritize measures that we still need to create?
- There were calls to conceptualize a cross-disciplinary research agenda for civic education, and David Campbell⁷ put forward the idea of creating a national longitudinal data set that links micro (school), meso (district and community) and macro (state and nation) contexts and that could bring scholars together in long-term, collective data collection and analyses projects and provide a platform or common data sources that enable us to explore questions across different contexts.

Building with Communities, Teachers, and School Leadership

CIVIC LEARNING IS EMBEDDED IN THE LOCAL CIVIC CONTEXTS IN WHICH STUDENTS LEAD THEIR LIVES, AND MUCH OF THE CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT DEVELOPMENT WE WANT TO EMBARK ON NEEDS TO HAPPEN AT THE DISTRICT AND COMMUNITY LEVEL.

This theme echoed throughout the convening. Student participants noted that many of their powerful civic learning experiences dealt with community issues. Participants argued that opportunities, ideals, and constraints on civic action vary across communities. Curriculum and assessment development must be flexible enough for this context-specific work. We need

to ensure that teachers, school and district leaders, community members, and youth play a central role in the development of learning standards, curricula and assessments.

These priorities place an emphasis on measuring civic opportunities and outcomes at the district and school level. A focus on measurement in this way helps ensure that assessment data informs the work of educators and schools. Teachers should be able to use assessment data to reflect on and adjust their teaching in order to better support all students—and they should have support and resources to do this work from their administration and district.

Working with teachers, school leaders, and community members to develop curriculum and assessments builds capacity and support for civic education at a local level. We recognize that many teachers (even social studies teachers) need explicit support and professional development in order to become more effective civic educators. Engaging teachers in the process of curriculum development is one way we can begin to build this capacity and create a network of teachers who can serve as models and coaches for their colleagues. Educator leaders will need to be involved to help ensure that all teachers (not just those part of the curriculum/assessment development processes) are expected and supported to teach civics and that data is used to improve instruction and work toward equity.



BIG QUESTIONS

- What can we do to ensure that we involve teachers and community members on a deep, meaningful level—not just inviting them to be extras on committees or part of the conversation, but to really engage in the work? How can we do this while respecting the incredible demands on time that already confront teachers?
- How do we ensure that assessments tied to civic priorities attend both to student outcomes and to the degree to which schools and other institutions are providing needed supports and valuable learning opportunities?

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Toward Informed and Authentic Citizens

A GREAT DEAL OF THE FOCUS IN THE CONVENING WAS ON MEASURES OF CIVIC DISPOSITIONS, VALUES, AND ACTIONS. With less focus was on civic knowledge, perhaps because there already are many measures of civic knowledge. Still, a roadmap for civic education needs to address knowledge, values and dispositions, efficacy, skills, and action. Ideally, we would have integrated assessments or multiple measures used in conjunction with one another to understand and better support all students' development as informed and authentic civic actors.

Conclusion

IN A COUNTRY WHERE POPULAR BOOKS HAVE TITLES SUCH AS “HOW DEMOCRACIES DIE” AND “HOW DEMOCRACY ENDS,” WHAT ROLE CAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS PLAY TO SUSTAIN OUR AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AND THE CORE AMERICAN VALUES OF EQUALITY, FREEDOM AND PLURALISM?

While the convening focused on issues of measurement in civic learning, we cannot ignore the urgency of restoring the central civic mission of schools.

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At this time of generational transfer, some young people are leading the way. Yet, many are left behind. Today, the opportunities to engage in civic life in and around schools are insufficient and not available equitably. The goal is then to ensure that the institutions tasked with promoting civic outcomes must attend to youth interests and their lived experiences while also developing their civic knowledge, skills, and commitments. Because young people exposed to high quality civic learning

are significantly more likely to contribute to civic life and vote, we must resolve to expand opportunities for all of them.

How it is best to do that and how will we know that we are making progress? Those are the essential questions our convening wrestled with. The convening successfully curated a set of projects, initiatives and government policies that are advancing the role of young people in our democracy. Taken together, these projects paint the picture of a field that is generating substantial innovation and interest, and has yet to fully attend to issues of equity, including fielding diverse leadership.

In conclusion, the convening suggested the following avenues for progress:

>> Attend to Equity and Diversity:

- The field of civic education must focus more intentionally on responding to the diversity that characterizes the country. This will require diversifying the field, building bridges to related educational fields, and ensuring that civic education efforts attend to the diverse realities of the students our schools serve.

>> Develop A Roadmap for Integrated Civic Education:

- Given the multidisciplinary nature of civic education, opportunities for civic education should expand beyond the civics class and span across disciplines. An integrated roadmap for high quality civic education would paint a picture of how districts could tackle youth civic engagement across disciplines and grade based on young people's development as civic actors.

>> Build on existing efforts:

- The convening highlighted new and innovative options for impact and measurement. Meanwhile, schools are implementing civic education in many forms today. Those efforts, in Illinois and in Florida among other places, have transformed schools and student's lives. We hope other districts and states follow suit because as a nation, this is a priority.
- Research about the impact of the existing state policy initiatives in Illinois as well as Massachusetts should be fielded to provide guidance to states that might want to adopt similar policies, as well as to inform practice in schools and districts.
- Schools would benefit from an effort to coalesce existing civic learning impact measures so that schools, districts, and states can begin with a base of existing high-quality materials. While the existing measures of progress may not be perfect, NAEP scores if available at the state level would be helpful in comparing outcomes.

>> Address the Impact of Tech on Democracy:

- The digital revolution is transforming civic and political life as well as opportunities for scaling impactful practices and methods of assessment. Schools should adopt practices to better prepare students for the new opportunities and challenges of online engagement as well as to tap the potential of these new technologies for both educational practice and assessment.

>> Foster Innovation:

- Because the field includes the development of skills and behaviors that have proved more challenging to measure effectively across all disciplines, further innovation in civic learning assessments should be encouraged, particularly assessments that are co-created with educators and/or developed with the needs and realities of schools in mind.

Notes

- 1 Joe Rogers, Director of Public Engagement and Government Affairs, Center for Educational Equity at Teachers College, Columbia University
 - 2 Carlos Hipolito-Delgado, Associate Professor, University of Colorado Denver
 - 3 Sam Wineburg, Founder and Executive Director of the Stanford History Education Group, Stanford University
 - 4 Louise Dubé, Executive Director, iCivics
 - 5 Robert C. Brazofsky, Executive Director, Department of Social Sciences, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Florida
 - 6 Jessica Marshall, Former Director of Social Science and Civic Engagement and PhD Student, Chicago Public Schools and Northwestern University
 - 7 David Campbell, Professor, University of Notre Dame
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Sarah McGrew, "Civic Learning Impact and Measurement Convening Report," Medford, MA
CivXNow A Project of iCivics, 2019

“I made a commitment to myself, my family, and my country that I would use whatever years I had left to advance civic learning and engagement. . . It is my great hope that our nation will commit to educating our youth about civics, and to helping young people understand their crucial role as informed, active citizens in our nation. To achieve this, I hope that private citizens, counties, states, and the federal government will work together to create and fund a nationwide civics education initiative. Many wonderful people already are working towards this goal, but they need real help and public commitment.”

–Sandra Day O’Connor
Retired Supreme Court Justice
October 23, 2018

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