

**Toward an Accessible Civics Curriculum:
Adapting *We the People* for High-Need Students**

Diana Owen
Professor
Director, Civic Education Research Lab
Georgetown University
owend@georgetown.edu

Donna P. Phillips
Vice President & Chief Program Officer
Center for Civic Education
phillips@civiced.org

Paper prepared for Presentation at the American Political Science Association Teaching and Learning Conference on the panel on Inclusive Curriculum and Institutional Change, February 11, 2023, Baltimore, MD.

ABSTRACT

The James Madison Legacy Project Extension (JMLPE) is a program of the Center for Civic Education that focuses on adapting the *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* (WTP) curriculum for students with disabilities, English language learners (ELLs), and students of color. The research questions addressed in the paper are: What are the priorities and needs of middle and high school civics teachers whose classes include significant numbers of ELLs, students with disabilities, and students of color? What are the barriers to successfully implementing civics curriculum interventions in their classrooms? What are the best practices for imparting civic and social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies to the three target student populations? And finally, how was the WTP curriculum adapted to meet the needs of teachers and ELLs, students with disabilities, and students of color? The Civic Education Research Lab (CERL) at Georgetown University surveyed teacher-experts working with these student populations to identify priorities, educational objectives, challenges, needs, and best practices. The Center worked with teacher-experts, consultants, and stakeholders to adapt the WTP curriculum to meet the needs of the target student groups. Teacher-experts identified providing civics content knowledge to teachers and students, making the curriculum accessible and relevant to the target populations, devising culturally appropriate and varied instructional approaches, and incorporating SEL competencies into the curriculum as priorities. These factors were considered when the WTP curriculum was adapted for use with the specified student groups. Lesson plans were devised for a pilot test of the curriculum to prepare for the next phase of the JMLPE where teachers will be provided with professional development to prepare them to teach using the adapted materials.

Civic education that takes an integrative and active learning approach to imparting knowledge, skills, and dispositions is a precursor to good citizenship and political engagement over the life course (Galston, 2004). It is well-documented that disparities in the quality of civic education contribute to civic achievement and opportunity gaps that disproportionately suppress the political agency of disadvantaged students (Kahne and Middaugh, 2008; Loewecke, 2016; Kuang, Zhu, and Kennedy, 2020; Owen and Irion-Groth-2022). These gaps are widening, as high-need students often attend schools that are poorly resourced and receive civics training that is substandard, if not lacking entirely (Levine, 2009; Levinson, 2012; Hansen, et al., 2018). Most extant civics curricula are not designed to effectively educate students from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds. Lesson plans, materials, and instructional resources mostly fail to make civic learning relevant to these students and are rarely adapted to meet their specialized needs. Further, teachers lack access to professional development dedicated to instructing high-need students.

The James Madison Legacy Project Expansion (JMLPE) is a three-year program of the Center for Civic Education (Center) that focuses on making accessible the *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* (WTP) curriculum intervention to English language learners (ELLs), students with disabilities, and students of color in middle and high school. The WTP curriculum bolsters students' knowledge acquisition with cooperative learning activities that also are designed to develop their civic dispositions and skills. The Civic Education Research Lab (CERL) at Georgetown University is responsible for the research component of the project.

This study has two major goals: 1) to identify priorities, educational objectives, challenges, needs, and best practices of civics teachers of ELLs, students with disabilities, and students of color, and 2) to describe the ways that the WTP curriculum was adapted to meet the needs of the three target student populations. The research questions addressed in the paper are: What are the priorities and needs of middle and high school civics teachers whose classes include significant numbers of ELLs, students with disabilities, and students of color? What are the barriers to successfully implementing civics curriculum interventions in their classrooms? What are the best practices for imparting civic and social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies to the three target student populations? And finally, how has the WTP curriculum been adapted to meet the needs of teachers and ELLs, students with disabilities, and students of color? To address these questions, CERL gathered data from teacher-experts on the pressing needs of civics teachers of the three target student populations, instructional strategies that work best, barriers to implementation of the WTP curriculum intervention, and the SEL competencies that should be emphasized during instruction. These insights informed the development of lesson plans and instructional materials designed for the target student groups by the Center's staff working with teacher-experts, stakeholders, and educational consultants.

Civic Education for Marginalized Students

Civic education offers an opportunity for members of marginalized groups to learn about government and politics, identify with the values and symbols of a nation, develop a sense of efficacy, and become engaged citizens. Research has shown that high-need students, including students of color, who receive high quality civic education that allows them to engage with

content relevant to their life experience have the same or greater civic gains than their more advantaged counterparts (Kahne and Middaugh, 2008; Clay and Rubin, 2020; Owen, Hartzell, and Sanchez, 2020; Winthrop, 2020; Hoskins, Huang, and Arensmeier, 2021; Weinberg, 2022). However, structural barriers to quality education persist, and have widened the gap in civic attainment and political empowerment (Banks, 2015). High-need students are more likely to attend poorly resourced schools, have limited access to civics classes, and be taught by civics instructors from outside the field than wealthy, White, native-born, and academically successful students (Kahne and Middaugh, 2008; Kuang, Zhu, and Kennedy, 2020). Educational disparities exacerbate the civic opportunity gap that simultaneously diminishes the power and potential of marginalized groups while augmenting the influence of more privileged citizens (Levinson, 2010, 2012).

Core Elements of Civic Education

Broadly defined, civic education encompasses all the processes—both formal and incidental—that affect people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions necessary for citizenship (Crittenden and Levine, 2018). We are more narrowly concerned with civic education as a deliberate process that is conveyed institutionally where schools “help students develop civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will prepare them for civic life” (Hamilton, Kaufman, and Hu, 2020: xiii). These three sets of civic competencies are essential for the development of responsible, productive, and participatory citizens.

Civic knowledge encompasses information pertinent to the historical foundations, documents and decisions, government institutions, political processes, laws, and public policies of the United States. The realm of civic knowledge extends beyond mere description to incorporate critical evaluation, analysis of a wide range of primary source documents, explorations of past and current political and societal issues, and civil discussions of difficult topics (Costello, 2017; Civics Renewal Network, 2023). Knowledgeable citizens understand their role in a democratic polity, know their rights and responsibilities in society, and are aware of America’s place in the world (Branson and Quigley, 1998; Van Camp and Baugh, 2016).

Civic skills are the proficiencies required for democratic engagement. They encompass behaviors beneficial to the development of personal agency that promotes civic engagement (Winthrop, 2020). Civic skills enable people to be informed and to participate actively and effectively in a democracy. Cognitive civic skills consist of the ability to describe, synthesize, and evaluate information pertinent to civic life, including information disseminated through media. Participatory civic skills are comprised of voting, following politics, expressing opinions, advocating for a cause, engaging in public events, and working collaboratively on community issues (Patrick, 2003; Kirlin, 2005). SEL competencies, such as critical thinking, communication, and collaboration, are integral to the development of civic skills (Ata, 2019; Owen and Irion-Groth, 2020).

Civic dispositions are attitudes and orientations that are essential for democratic character formation and can be precursors to engagement (Branson, 1998; Muetterties, DiGiacomo, and New, 2022). They can be described as “habits of the heart” that are conducive to behavior that leads to the healthy functioning and common good in the democratic system (Owen, 2015).

People with a robust democratic temperament are willing to compromise personal interests for the greater good (Stambler, 2011). Civic dispositions include respect for the rule of law, a commitment to justice, equality, and fairness, trust in government, civic duty, attentiveness to political matters, political efficacy, political tolerance, respect for human rights, concern for the welfare of others, civility, social responsibility, and community connectedness (Morgan and Streb, 2001; Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011). Civic dispositions are consistent with many SEL constructs.

These civic orientations do not convey easily to students generally. The civic mission of schools becomes more challenging when educating disadvantaged students. Data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) indicate that scores from ELLs, students with disabilities, students of color, and low income students are significantly lower than those of middle and upper income White students. This disparity often is referred to as an “achievement gap” reflecting academic performance (Hansen, et al., 2020). However, this characterization fails to recognize the conditions that underpin the scores. The civics instruction and accompanying curricular and supporting materials that students in these groups receive leaves out content that is most germane to them. Civic classes do not encourage high-need students to develop reasoning skills or dispositions for engagement, nor do they engender enthusiasm for the subject that they carry forward as participatory citizens.

***We the People* Curriculum Intervention**

A primary goal of the JMLPE is to adapt the *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* curriculum for ELL, students with disabilities, and students of color. The WTP program was developed in 1987 and adopted as the principal education program of the U.S. Constitution by the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution chaired by Chief U.S. Supreme Court Justice Warren E. Burger. Congress authorized WTP through the U.S. Department of Education from 1993 until 2011 under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Over 30 million students and 75,000 educators have participated in WTP since its inception (<https://civiced.org/pdfs/WethePeopleOverview.pdf>).

The WTP classroom curriculum provides upper elementary, middle, and high school students with instruction on the history and principals of U.S. constitutional democracy. The program is grounded in the foundations and institutions of American government, and is distinctive for its emphasis on Constitutional principles, the Bill of Rights, and Supreme Court cases, and their relevance to current issues and debates. The curriculum consists of six units:

- Unit 1: What Are the Philosophical and Historical Foundations of the American Political System?
- Unit 2: How Did the Framers Create the Constitution?
- Unit 3: How Has the Constitution Been Changed to Further the Ideals Contained in the Declaration of Independence?
- Unit 4: How Have the Values and Principles Embodied in the Constitution Shaped American Institutions and Practices?
- Unit 5: What Rights Does the Bill of Rights Protect?
- Unit 6: What Challenges Might Face American Constitutional Democracy in the Twenty-first Century?

Students take part in a range of learning activities, such as primary document analysis, group projects, debates, and student speeches. The culminating experience is a series of simulated congressional hearings where student teams “testify” before a panel of judges who are typically community leaders, government officials, including members of Congress and their staffs, academics, lawyers, judges, and distinguished civic educators. Students research and prepare sets of questions that allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of constitutional principles. They take and defend their positions on historical and contemporary issues. The simulated congressional hearings can be implemented in the classroom in a non-competitive environment. WTP middle and high school classes also can participate in district and statewide competitions based on the congressional hearings. States send middle school representatives to the National Invitational and high school students to the National Finals in Washington, D.C., held each spring.

The James Madison Legacy Project Expansion

The James Madison Legacy Project (JMLP) was a nationwide initiative of the Center that expanded the availability and effectiveness of civics instruction in elementary and secondary schools by providing PD to teachers of high-need students so that they could implement the WTP curriculum in their classrooms. The JMLP was instituted from 2015 through 2019 and was funded by a Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant from the U.S. Department of Education (ED). The program provided PD to over 2,200 teachers in 48 states and the District of Columbia who taught the WTP curriculum to 258,000 students. The JMLP successfully increased the number of highly effective teachers who taught the WTP curriculum, many of whom continue to use the curriculum. The PD program substantially improved teachers’ content knowledge and developed their pedagogic skills, which in turn significantly enhanced students’ achievement in attaining state standards in civics and government. Research conducted by CERL over the first three years of the program found that middle and high school students in the JMLP gained greater civic knowledge after taking a WTP class than students in a control group who took a standard civics, social studies, or American government class. The WTP students were more disposed to keep informed and follow government and politics in the media than the control group students. Over 70% of students in the JMLP program indicated that they had become more attentive to government affairs and felt more prepared to take part in their community after their WTP class. More than 90% of students believed that it is a citizen’s duty to vote in elections following the program.

The JMLP targeted high-need students broadly defined by ED as students at risk of educational failure or in need of special assistance and support, including students who are living in poverty, attend high-minority schools, are far below grade level, are homeless, are in foster care, are incarcerated, have disabilities, or are ELLs. The CERL study found that the achievement of students in the JMLP was not uniform across high-need categories. The improvements in learning for ELLs, students with disabilities, and students of color, while statistically significant, were not as robust as for some other high-need students. The Center determined that the WTP materials and curriculum could be adapted to better accommodate the instructional needs of these students. ELLs are a diverse group of students who have different language abilities and backgrounds. Among their ranks are refugees, migrants, students with interrupted education, internationally adopted students, and unaccompanied minors (Colorin

Colorado, 2019). Students with disabilities have unique learning needs and require specially designed instruction. The range of disabilities that can affect students’ learning ability includes intellectual disabilities, speech or language impairment, hearing impairment, visual impairment, serious emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury, orthopedic impairments, autism spectrum disorder, and developmental delay (Barrington, 2022). The JMLPE is funded by an Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant from ED.

The first year of the JMLPE was initiated in 2022. Twenty-eight teachers with expertise in instructing high numbers of students in at least one of the three target populations were recruited for participation in the first phase of the project. CERL conducted a survey of these teacher-experts to get their input on the needs, challenges, and best practices that would inform the development of WTP lesson plans and materials. The results of that study are reported here. In addition, a pilot study was conducted employing a quasi-experimental pretest/posttest design where teachers, including many of the teacher-experts, implemented the adapted materials in their classes. The pilot study included classroom observations. The result of the pilot study will be used to inform the subsequent phase of the JMLPE where teachers of students in the target populations will receive PD and implement the adapted WTP curriculum. Two cohorts of teachers and students will participate in this next phase of the JMLPE.

Teacher-Expert Characteristics

CERL collected data from teacher-experts with experience designing civics curricula and instructing ELLs, students with disabilities, and students of color. They responded to a survey designed to elicit their insights on the PD needs of educators working with these student populations, best practices for civic instruction, barriers to implementing the WTP program in the classroom, and the SEL competencies that should be emphasized with these students. The survey was administered online in May of 2022 to 33 teacher-experts from fourteen states, all of whom responded. The survey combined closed and open-ended items.

Teachers were recruited for their expertise in working with the JMLPE’s target student populations. All of the teacher-experts had at least some experience teaching students in two or three of the student groups. Seven teachers focused primarily on English learners and 23 had experience teaching these students. Nine teachers had expertise in teaching students with disabilities and 27 teachers had taught students in this population. Seventeen teachers were specialists in teaching students of color and 30 had experience teaching these students. (See Table 1.)

Table 1
Teachers’ Experience Teaching Student Populations

	Primary Population		Experience Teaching	
English Learners	7	21%	23	70%
Students with Disabilities	9	27%	27	82%
Students of Color	17	52%	30	91%

All but one of the teacher-experts worked in public schools; the exception was not affiliated with a school at the time of the survey. Two teachers were affiliated with magnet schools and one with a charter school. Nineteen of the participants (58%) worked in Title I schools which receive federal funds to assist with educating high concentrations of students living in poverty. The majority of teachers held positions in schools located in suburban areas (22) followed by urban (9) and rural (2) areas. All but five teachers worked in schools having a high percentage (30% or more) of students in high-need populations as defined by the U.S. Department of Education. These included teachers working in schools with a high percentage of minority students (25), students provided with free or reduced cost lunches (23), students far below grade level (17), students living in poverty (16), ELLs (16), students with disabilities (10), students who are homeless or in foster care (6), disconnected or migrant youth (2), students served by rural local educational agencies (1), and students who are incarcerated (1). (See Table 2.)

Table 2
School Characteristics

	Number	Percentage
Public School	32	97%
Title I School	19	58%
Rural School	2	6%
Urban School	9	27%
Suburban School	22	67%
Minority Students	25	76%
Students provided with free or reduced cost lunches	23	70%
Students far below grade level	17	52%
Students living in poverty	16	49%
English Learners	14	42%
Students with Disabilities	10	30%
Students who are homeless or in foster care	6	18%
Disconnected or migrant youth	2	6%
Students served by rural local educational agencies	1	3%
Students who are incarcerated	1	3%

The teacher-experts consisted of 24 women and nine men. The average age of the participants was 43 years; seven teachers were between the ages of 28 and 35, 15 were between the ages of 36 and 45, and 11 were over age 45. Six of the teachers were Black or African American, one was Hispanic/Latino, 24 were White, and two identified with multiple races. Seven of the teachers held a Bachelor's degree, 25 had Master's degrees, including MA degrees in Education and Education Administration, and one had a Doctorate in Education. (See Table 3.)

Table 3
Teacher Demographic Characteristics

	Number	Percentage
Female	24	73%
Male	9	27%
Age		
28 to 35	7	21%
36 to 45	15	45%
Over 45	11	33%
Black or African American	6	18%
Hispanic or Latino	1	3%
White/Caucasian	24	73%
Multiple Races	2	6%
Highest Degree		
Bachelor's Degree	7	21%
Master's Degree	25	76%
Doctorate in Education	1	3%

Teacher-experts instructed middle school (15) and high school (17) students; one teacher had experience with both grades. On average, they had taught history, civics, social studies, or American government for twelve years. Five of the teacher-experts had taught civics for between one and five years, ten for between six and ten years, nine for between eleven and fifteen years, and nine for more than fifteen years. All of the respondents had experience implementing the WTP curriculum intervention in their classrooms. Nineteen teachers had taught WTP one to five times, eleven had taught the curriculum six to ten times, and three had taught WTP more than ten times. Twenty-eight of the teachers (85%) had taken part in one or more of the Center's PD programs. (See Table 4.)

Table 4
Teacher's Professional Background

	Number	Percentage
Middle School	15	46%
High School	17	51%
Middle and High School	1	3%
Years teaching history, civics, social studies, or American govt.		
1 to 5	5	15%
6 to 10	10	30%
11 to 15	9	27%
More than 15	9	27%
Times taught We the People		
1 to 5	19	58%
6 to 10	11	33%
11 to 15	2	6%
More than 15	1	3%
Taken part in a PD program of the Center for Civic Education	28	85%

Teacher-Expert Input

The teacher-experts were asked to share their knowledge by responding to the following questions:

- What are the most pressing professional development needs for teachers instructing *We the People*?
- What instructional strategies for adapting and successfully instructing the *We the People* curriculum should be covered in the JMLPE professional development program?
- What barriers to the implementation of the *We the People* curriculum with the target student populations do you feel teachers will likely encounter?
- What social emotional learning competencies should be emphasized in the *We the People* curriculum intervention with this student population?

A central objective of the JMLPE is to provide teachers with specialized strategies and materials for instructing the three student populations. The teacher-experts identified five major challenges for teachers and areas where PD would be most beneficial: 1) providing content knowledge to teachers and students; 2) making curriculum content accessible and relevant to the target student groups; 3) teaching practices and protocols; 4) implementing the WPT curriculum intervention in the classroom, and 5) incorporating SEL competencies in the curriculum. They offered suggestions for instructional approaches and best practices. They also provided guidance for how to best teach the WTP curriculum to ELLs, students with disabilities, and students of color.

Providing Civics Content Knowledge to Teachers and Students

High-need students, including ELLs who have migrated to the U.S., tend to have limited background knowledge of civics and history. Difficulties in conveying basic civic knowledge were exacerbated during the pandemic. While there are myriad resources for students in accelerated and Advanced Placement (AP) civics, social studies, and American government courses, few curricular materials and resources are designed for students in the target populations. As a practical consideration, textbooks need to be modified for students who are not reading at grade level and supplemented with materials that will make texts more accessible.

A teacher-expert noted that content knowledge is as much an issue with teachers as students, especially in civics and history where the knowledge base is constantly expanding. “Content knowledge never ends. I always want to know more. I need to know more so that I can be as prepared as possible.” Teachers must have sufficient knowledge about the U.S. Constitution, American government, political processes, and civic engagement to not only be able to teach the basics, but also to tie students’ experiences to the content. There also is a need for civics content that is historically and culturally relevant to students of color.

Language comprehension is an obstacle to implementing civics curricula. A survey participant noted, “Reading the Federalist Papers is a challenge for the average student; it would be far more challenging for an ELL or a student with a disability.” Cultural literacy also is an issue for students in the three target student groups as they have little context for understanding the material. Thus, teachers need to adapt materials so that content is conveyed successfully to

students with weaknesses in their reading, writing, and comprehension skills. Vocabulary is a hurdle for all three student populations that continues throughout the curriculum.

The teacher-experts suggested strategies for enhancing content knowledge efficiently. Visual instructional materials are vital for working with the target student populations, especially ELLs and students with disabilities. Content knowledge can be conveyed and reinforced through physical and virtual posters for each of the WTP units. Quick references that provide basic facts can be readily accessed by teachers and students and provide a foundation for acquiring high-level knowledge. Developing resources that present current events so that they appeal to students at all ability levels is imperative.

The resources available for teaching civics, U.S. government, and American history to ELLs is limited. Developing materials specifically for these students should be a priority. The teacher-experts indicated that bilingual materials are especially vital. Texts and supplemental materials should accommodate a range of reading levels. These materials can take the form of prepared bilingual vocabulary, such as social studies bilingual dictionaries and word walls. Graphic organizers and sentence frames in basic, content appropriate English can enhance ELL's civic learning. Peer teaching activities, small group discussions, and repetition using bilingual resources allow ELLs to access the concepts in their own language while building the necessary vocabulary to express themselves in English. However, providing these materials, especially in multiple languages, is challenging. While 70% speak Spanish, ELLs as a group speak nearly 150 languages (Breiseth, 2015). In some cases, teachers are instructing ELLs who speak different languages in the same classroom. One solution is to provide access to online text materials that have translation ability. Visual aids, premade presentations, recorded lectures, virtual tours, the Center's Actively Learn interactive platform, Nearpod, Readwords, Kami, and other online learning materials can help ELLs grasp more content and obtain a better understanding of civics and our government. These tools also can help teachers track their students' progress.

The current highly charged political climate can make classroom discussions difficult. The teacher-experts expressed concern about the amount of misinformation proliferating around civics and government. Elementary, middle, and high school civics instructors routinely confront misinformation in their classrooms from news media, social media, and students themselves. Many teachers have a strong sense of responsibility to educate students about misinformation and adopt instructional strategies to counter the problem. However, they are concerned about potential backlash if community members object to how these issues are handled in the classroom. Teachers expressed a need for PD that provides them with the content knowledge and tools to successfully navigate the abundance of misinformation (Owen, et al., 2022).

Making the Curriculum Accessible and Relevant

Making the curriculum relevant to students in the target populations is the substantial barrier to successfully teaching civics identified by the teacher-experts. Lesson plans may lack inclusivity and fail to address topics that students find compelling. The emphasis on testing and rote learning curbs opportunities for critical thinking that engage students. The lack of diversity in textbooks can be a barrier to students relating to the materials (Ward, 2022). The key questions students who do not feel included in the idea of American democracy ask are: Why should I care? Why is this important? Why do I need to learn about dead white guys? Teachers

need to establish how students in the target groups play a role in modern U.S. government and how they personally can have an impact.

The history of the U.S. contains many narratives. A pressing challenge for teachers of high-need students is to make the content interesting and relevant to overcome apathy. Teachers need to facilitate discussions in ways that honor the diverse backgrounds and interests of their students. They should make real-world connections to show how the Constitution applies to their students, how government and politics impact their daily lives, and how the course content relates to current events. A teacher-expert stated, “I try to be cognizant of the fact that many of my students may not connect with the stories and themes that we explore in Government class because they are routinely excluded from the story. Most of my students do not have the language to express these sentiments, so it shows up as avoidance and boredom.” It is helpful for ELLs to see alignments between the history and politics of the U.S. and their native countries. While lessons focus on how America established its government, there are many ways to incorporate experiences from other countries and communities that will make the information more relatable.

The teacher-experts noted that WTP is sufficiently flexible to be adapted to meet the needs of diverse students. Study participants called for tools that allow educators to successfully integrate difficult topics that students care about into their classrooms, including social justice, equality, fear of law enforcement, and distrust of the government. Supplemental materials should be selected based on their historical and cultural relevance to the target student groups. The Bill of Rights Institute’s “The Plainest Demands of Justice: Documents for Dialogue on the African American Experience,” ([The Plainest Demands of Justice: Documents for Dialogue on the African American Experience - Bill of Rights Institute](#)) is a good example. Study participants endorsed strategies for encouraging students to be socialized into citizens who can engage and address societal changes. Active learning approaches, such as WPT’s emphasis on group work, research, and discussion, as well as the simulated congressional hearings, support that goal. They suggested that teachers in schools connect with one another to develop strategies for covering controversial topics to create a more inclusive environment both within and outside the classroom.

Teaching Practices and Protocols

Teachers need to employ varied, innovative approaches and teaching aids to work with students in the target populations. The pandemic and two years of virtual and hybrid learning has increased the need for student-centered learning that emphasizes active, hands-on approaches, networking, and collaboration. Students’ ability to conduct research and make an argument using evidence has been diminished. After months of taking classes online, they have difficulty making presentations in front of their teachers and student colleagues.

Having students work on and acquire vocabulary is an essential instructional element for all three student populations. Lesson plans and chapter content should be designed to reach students who are well below grade level. Students often struggle with reading and interpreting founding documents, the U.S. Constitution, and Supreme Court cases which are fundamental to

basic civics classes and WTP. Tools for enhancing vocabulary include creating graphic organizers and using videos.

Scaffolding and modifying materials for different student populations is a priority. The teacher-experts suggested that lesson plans be accompanied by step-by-step teaching and pacing guides that are realistic for class periods. Grade-level content should be broken down into simpler concepts that are comprehensible to all students. Teachers should consider “chunking” information by breaking it down into manageable segments aimed at the bottom 30% of the class. Teachers can use oral and visual activities that are diverse and engaging. Writing, presentation, and editing skills should be incorporated into the curriculum. Students can engage in peer critiquing, cooperative learning, and conducting social scientific research, such as short surveys. Project-based learning lessons can be integrated into the WTP curriculum.

Providing teachers with PD that emphasizes culturally responsive teaching and restorative practices is a cornerstone of the JMLPE. Teachers must be able to institute classroom practices that foster diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) specifically as they related to the target student populations. They should be culturally responsive when delivering instruction, and adopt practices for front-loading communication norms and classroom norms that promote DEI of lived experience and perspective. They should be cognizant of students coming to class with their own unique experiences that drive their understanding when presented with information about government and their role as citizens.

Implementing the WTP Curriculum

The teacher-experts selected for participation in the JMLPE pilot program had experience teaching WTP to at least one of the three target student populations. They identified several barriers to implementation of the WTP curriculum. Lack of administrative, teacher, and community buy-in coupled with a paucity of resources were among the top responses. Some teacher-experts offered that the current political climate could make it difficult to hold discussions about issues. Other barriers to implementation were associated with the curriculum itself.

The survey respondents admitted that implementing the WTP curriculum can be overwhelming when working the target student populations. Teachers often must impart basic knowledge and skills before they can begin to use curriculum. The teacher-experts suggested that teachers be realistic and decide how much of the curriculum and which units they will cover. They can even ask students to help select the topics. At the same time, they overwhelmingly expressed that the JMLPE program and the adaptations of the WTP curriculum would help high-need students to understand their history, civic life, and how they are a part of it.

Teachers of students with disabilities were especially appreciative of the opportunity to adapt the WTP curriculum to meet the needs of their students who often have been left out of civics instruction. There is a pressing need for adapted civics materials for special needs learners. Teachers must employ strategies for conveying knowledge to students with disabilities who can understand the content but learn differently. The teacher-experts advocated for PD for all teachers, regardless of whether they regularly instruct students with disabilities, so that they are

aware of and can provide for students who need accommodations or adaptations when learning civics material.

Teachers need to build bridges for students of color to ensure that diverse identities are represented in the WTP curriculum.

Respect, trust, and self-awareness are hallmarks of a class that is open to addressing many of the challenging themes in the *We the People* course. One of the other elements that is critical is to design professional development that empowers teachers with techniques that will encourage students to bring their own life experiences into the classroom discussions. The *We the People* text offers many opportunities to do simulations and cooperative group and collaborative activities, and we must find a way to engage students in conversations about race and racism and other relevant themes that help to provide context to the world we are living in today. This will help students to fully understand how and why our political structures have evolved over time and the work that still needs to be done to ensure that our nation lives up to its ideals as expressed in the pledge's "freedom and justice for all" mantra.

The simulated congressional hearings—WTP's culminating activity—pose unique challenges for teachers and target group students. It may be difficult for students to develop the necessary higher-order skills, such as working collaboratively in small groups, public speaking, and conducting research, when they are acquiring core content. In addition, students may not be motivated to answer hearing questions that address issues that are not relevant to them. One teacher-expert shared some of the challenges associated with the using the hearings with high-need students that were echoed by others:

There is a large focus in the WTP series on holding the Mock Congressional Hearings. However, I found that with my student this is too big a leap. For middle school students, the idea of speaking in such a formal way is terrifying for many. This is coupled with the following factors: 1) Most students do not receive much in the way of Social Studies instruction until 6th grade due to the focus on state testing. 2) Many of my students are "English Learners." 3) My "normal-average" student reads approximately 3-4 grades below level. 4) Students who are completely monolingual. 5) Due to large class sizes, 8th grade students have not had the opportunity to do large amounts of "critical thinking."

The teacher-experts suggested more manageable alternatives to the full-blown congressional hearings. Teachers, especially those new to WTP, could hold informal discussions and introduce Socratic seminars. They could create a hands-on activities bank of current events articles that support a connection to real world issues related to the curriculum that could facilitate a scaled-down version of the hearings. The hearing questions should not shy away from themes that would center ELLs, students with disabilities, and studies of color in the experience. One teacher-expert noted that making the hearing questions more inclusive would be transformative.

Incorporating SEL Competencies into the Curriculum

Social and emotional learning is “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, n.d.). The teacher-experts prioritized seven SEL competencies that should be conveyed in the civics classroom and emphasized in the JMLPE PD program: 1) civil discourse, 2) respectful engagement, 3) self-care, 4) self-management, 5) self-awareness, 6) social-awareness, and 7) relationship skills.

SEL competencies are especially relevant for ELLs, students with disabilities, and students of color. When working in an inclusive classroom, social awareness and relationship skills are key to the success of most activities. Students from diverse backgrounds should be made aware of different worldviews as well as their own biases and perspectives when examining controversial issues to create a more comfortable classroom environment. There needs to be greater emphasis on the proclamation that “all people are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence as it relates to society today. Students need to focus more on respect for different cultures and outlooks, the understanding that opinions can differ, and that all people should be treated respectfully. Students in the target populations are likely to encounter micro and macro aggressions, discriminatory words and actions that can be unintentional or overt attacks (Miller and Miskimon, 2021). Teacher-expertss suggested that instructors promote understanding of micro and macro aggressions among students, and use affirming strategies consistent with SEL approaches that foster inclusion and support.

Civil discourse--teaching students how to act and react when they with disagree with others—should be a top SEL priority. Teachers should focus on developing students’ ability to base their viewpoints in reason and factual evidence, rather than making emotional arguments. Civil discourse goes hand-in-hand with respectful engagement. Students should understand how to engage in respectful communication and disagreement. Instructional techniques should emphasize multiple perspective-taking, active and empathetic listening, respectful dialogue, and tolerance of diverse groups and ideas. A teacher-expert provided the following insights about civil discourse and respectful engagement:

It should be emphasized that words have power. English provides an infinite number of synonyms, analogies, and palatable vocabulary to use to avoid words that are hurtful or triggering to others. While we cannot predict what verbiage will be triggering to each individual, students can be taught to search for language that is forgiving, unassuming, and authentic. It's important to note that sometimes it is not the words we use but how we use them. Sometimes, there is more contained in the words we DON'T say. I have heard the phrase, "It is hard to hate someone up close." Allowing students to have the opportunity to express their ideas authentically, to breathe through triggering messages from others, and to respectfully challenge or correct someone else will be effective only if there is an opportunity to lay a foundation of love and connectedness.

Self-care encompasses the actions students take to improve their physical, mental, and emotional health. It is important for students to practice self-care to manage stress, boost their confidence, and maintain healthy relationships with those around them (Center for Responsive Schools, 2021). Teacher-experts noted that educators must be increasingly vigilant about students' self-care since the COVID-19 pandemic. Students continue to deal with the effects of the pandemic on their physical wellbeing, sense of isolation, mental health, and academic achievement (Kuhfeld, Soland, Lewis, and Morton, 2022).

Self-management reflects students' ability to control and manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It includes responsible decision-making in school and personal life, such as time-management skills and completing tasks, common courtesy, and self-advocacy, like asking for help or clarification. Issues with self-management can be manifested in talking at inappropriate times, getting emotionally upset, playing games or other types of distraction during class, and not keeping up (Dees, 2023). A teacher-expert noted that "self-management is a priority for civics students who are asked to understand and speak on complex ideas that may seem opposed to previously learned content or their own beliefs. Managing one's emotions during group work and debate will foster the best skills."

Self-awareness, social-awareness, and relationships skills are interrelated SEL constructs. Self-awareness is "the ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values, and how they influence behavior" (CASEL, n.d.). Students should be able to assess their own strengths and limitations and display a realistic sense of confidence and optimism. Self-management reflects students' capacity to regulate their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations (CASEL, n.d.). The SEL competency of relationship skills reflects students' ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships in diverse settings through communication, self-advocacy, demonstrating gratitude and cultural humility, engaging in collaborative problem-solving, resisting negative social pressure, and standing up for the rights of others (CASEL, 2020).

These SEL competencies can be developed using the WTP curriculum through class discussion, collaboration, and hands-on activities that emphasize responsible decision-making. Respectful disagreement with peers is integral to WTP, especially when students work in groups to develop responses to the questions accompanying each unit and participate in the simulated congressional hearings. A teacher-expert provided guidance for integrating SEL into the WTP experience:

The social emotional learning competencies that should be emphasized in the We the People curriculum intervention with this student population are self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Recognition and acknowledgment that one is a citizen of a home, a school, a city, a state, and a country, being aware of this is simply the beginning. Being a citizen comes with rights and responsibilities. Those need to be spelled out and explained so that the rights can be enjoyed and protected, and the responsibilities known and accomplished. Social awareness is a part of this. Being a citizen means that one is part of something that contains other people. That changes how one acts, reacts, and looks at life. Next up is relationship skills. The pandemic has crippled the relationship skills of far too many students. Learning how to interact with people and to do so in a civil fashion is important.

Students must be taught civil discourse and that it is ok, and honestly a good thing, for us to disagree on issues. Agreeing to disagree and still be able to be civil with one another is a part of life in America. Finally, responsible decision-making must be addressed. To do this, students must be educated as to the structure of our system of government. Knowing what it is, where it comes from, and how it operates enables them to become responsible decisions makers. All of these are needed, now more than ever.

SEL is necessary to help students with disabilities understand their importance. Building relationships with others is one area that should be emphasized. Often, students with disabilities are treated differently from other students, whether it is being taught in a separate location, being pulled out for tests, or being given different materials than other students. These students may not be used to working cooperatively in groups or with other students. The WTP curriculum provides opportunities for these types of interactions.

Adapting the WTP Curriculum

Adapting the curriculum proved to be an exciting, formidable challenge due to the sheer number of possible approaches to meeting the needs of students with disabilities, ELLs, and students of color and their teachers. The process the Center used to decide on and create the adaptations included stakeholder engagement with our state partners and teacher-experts. The process involved 1) meeting with experts in the field in SEL, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), ELL, and culturally responsive pedagogy, 2) creating a draft template that incorporated integrated and wraparound supports aligned to best practices from the field, 3) creating an exemplar lesson using the template, and 4) reengaging with stakeholders for more feedback. Stakeholder engagements with experts from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), district leaders and specialists in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and ELL strategies, gave feedback and ideas for fortification to the lesson template. Data collected from teachers and the pilot study of students will be consulted to help guide an iterative process of curriculum adaptation. In addition to the lessons being anchored in inquiry, there are other notable components that are most essential to supporting teachers and their students in this project.

Inquiry

The decision to design the adapted lessons through an inquiry approach was not a difficult one. Inquiry-based learning is a “student-centered teaching method that encourages students to ask questions and investigate real-world problems” (Scholl, 2023). Just as a UDL approach allows for student voice and choice in their learning, so too does inquiry. Thus, creating the lessons and adaptations through an inquiry-based pedagogical approach is in line with the equity goals of this project. Because the WTP program is a textbook based program, it is even more vital that inquiry as the instructional approach be leveraged, so that students understand that, in addition to what they read in the textbook, they have agency and can explore other primary and secondary sources, ask and answer their questions in collaboration with their classmates, and bring their own perspectives, as well as evaluate other perspectives on, and within the context of what they are learning within the WTP program.

The popularity of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework and its use of compelling questions was a strong guidepost. The lesson template design stayed away from

explicitly calling for compelling questions as across the nation not all schools or school districts embrace and or use the C3 framework. Although not identical, the use of essential, focus, or guiding questions is sometimes used to spark inquiry, though, arguably, not in the same way, compelling question would. For the purposes of this research project, we wanted to ensure that there were no barriers to accessing and implementing the lessons, so while compelling questions and the language of such is used, it is not required to successfully anchor the teaching in inquiry as reflected in the template and teacher guiding language.

The second aspect of inquiry integrated into the template is the implementation of the lesson itself. The 5E approach (Bybee, et al., 2006) was used to support an inquiry approach in the lesson planning itself. Adaptions of the science inquiry model have been used in Texas and Washington, D.C. public schools in social studies. Although not every teacher was expert in inquiry, the template allowed them to consider ways to *engage*, opportunities for students to *explore* different resources, media, texts, and images, and then share out and *explain* their learning. The *elaborate* section calls for students to apply their learning in new ways, and or add to their learning with potential expansions. *Evaluate* is the formative assessment piece that allows for the collection of student data to drive instructional planning. Teachers wrote their lesson guidance within the format, anchored by compelling (or essential or guiding) questions.

While inquiry was the driving force for the organization of the lesson template itself, an intentional approach to integrate SEL, UDL, and ELL adaptations and options was also supported by the template. These teacher options were included in-line with the lesson itself in a right column and labeled respectively. This allows teachers to anticipate options and opportunities to adapt their instruction for their students and anticipate ways to prepare ahead of time in relation to the different step of the lesson. They could also access hyperlinked student resources for each section including differentiated versions of the graphic organizers or texts, digital interactive tools, and vocabulary resources.

Objectives that Drive the Adaptations

In consultation with the expert educators, the template includes objectives in the lesson overview. (The template is in the Appendix.) In addition to a civic content objective, each lesson contains a language objective and a cultural objective. As explained in the template, each objective serves a unique purpose in targeting teacher instruction and student learning.

- **Content:** The correlated social studies content. What are students expected to learn by the end of the lesson?
- **Language:** How will students show mastery of the social studies content? How will students think about the language domains related to this lesson (e.g., speaking, listening, reading, and/or writing)?
- **Cultural:** The relevance of why the social studies content matters and how it applies to students' lives.

These three distinct objectives helped the developers focus on the purpose and impact of the lesson adaptations. Often, this is where many edits and revisions were made as lessons were finalized for the pilot study.

Social Emotional Learning

The Center team's experience in incorporating CASEL's SEL competencies into social studies instruction allowed for a jumpstart in considering how to foreground SEL competencies in the WTP curriculum and instruction. Rather than a stand-alone focus on a related competency, the competencies have been integrated into the instructional practices themselves. Drawing on resources from CASEL's website and on-demand free resources, as well as district-level SEL integrations, SEL is noted in two distinct places in the lesson template. First, in the lesson overview, teacher developers called out the main SEL competency reinforced through the lesson experience. In addition to this notation, they also articulated *how* the SEL competency would develop. The following examples illustrate this approach:

- Students will develop their **relationship skills** by working in groups to arrive at consensus.
- Students will develop their **relationship skills** by working as a unit team toward the mutual goal of addressing all relevant parts of the simulated congressional hearing questions in the WTP program by discussing, and jig sawing the questions in order to address them in their evidence-based collaborative responses.

It is important to move beyond the general description of the SEL competency so teachers can read and understand how the impact of their pedagogical choices related to SEL. For example, if social-awareness is reinforced while students work in groups and share different perspectives on the constitutional conventions based on historical documents, and the teacher chooses not to have students work in groups, or skips the share-out and discussion, they miss the opportunity to support this SEL competency.

Secondly, SEL competencies were noted in the right column margin of the lesson serving as a second cue for teachers to consider SEL implications when making instructional decisions and adaptations. This inline notation keeps SEL intentions front and center in teacher planning and implementation. The following is an example:

- SEL: Students practice social awareness by considering different perspectives about the unit question (in line with EXPLAIN step for students to share out their ideas on the unit question).

Universal Design for Learning

In a similar vein, in addressing the needs of students with disabilities, curriculum design needs to be general and adaptable for teachers to meet the distinct needs of their students. The popular misuse of terms like accommodations and modifications in instruction and assessment delivery can lead to misunderstandings of how at a curricular level, resources can be designed to support students with disabilities. The UDL approach allows for accessibility by design as well as options in engagement, representation, and action and expression. In addition to the multiple versions of student resources and teacher directions specific to these options, UDL suggestions and aligned resources are also called out in the right column of the lesson plan. Teachers can make planning and instructional decisions in time for the different step of the lesson. In some cases, general UDL suggestions accompany the lesson:

UDL: Invite students to respond verbally or in writing.

In other cases, very specific UDL adaptations are presented as options.

UDL: For the discussion, the teacher may call on individual students, have students move to different sides of the room and then call on students, or use technology like a Jamboard to have students place their name on a sticky note on a slide of the prompt.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Working with Realized Solutions, LLC, strategies to promote culturally relevant pedagogy were embedded throughout the lesson overview and lesson plan format. The **cultural objective** calls out how the content can be made relevant to students' lives. Often this is developed further in the ENGAGE section of the 5E inquiry format. EVALUATE (assessment) also gives rise to opportunities for students to connect their learning in WTP with their own lives. Here are examples of how these culturally relevant pedagogies can be used.

- **Cultural Objective:** Students will connect key roles of Congress to examples from the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protections, Product Safety and Data Security investigation of social media companies' practices.
- **ENGAGE:** Initiate a discussion for the following question: At what age should kids be allowed to create their own social media accounts? Why?
- **EVALUATE:** The formative assessment piece that allows for the collection of student data to drive instructional planning. Should Congress regulate social media for teens? As the assessment for this lesson, ask students to present their policy proposal to the class for comments and questions. While this is not a perfect simulation for the procedures of Congress, it does highlight the fact that committees do a deep dive into policy areas and can draft new bills according to that expertise. The role of presenting to the class can serve as practice for the simulated congressional hearing.

Bringing the cultural relevance of social media to the role of Congress gives students a way to feel part of the larger system and a reason to buy in to the larger learning objectives related to Congressional power. The cultural relevance is woven throughout the lesson as exemplified above.

Curriculum Development: More is More

The 28 teacher-experts were given the charge of delivering two full lessons using the template. They provided all necessary teacher-facing resources and all student facing resources, for example, readings and excerpts, graphic organizers, formative assessments, rubrics, and leveled and adapted versions.

Teacher-experts were surveyed for their preferred lesson content and type (WTP content or simulated hearing preparation) as well as level two (middle school) or level three (high school). Based on the survey results, teachers were sorted into "Home Groups" where each teacher would work with 4-5 other teachers on the same two units or hearing preparation. These home groups served as natural thought partners for the teachers as they were immersed in their preferred units or hearing preparation processes.

Within the home groups, teachers had the freedom to choose their two lesson topics of hearing preparation topics. As a home group they had to monitor the distribution of lesson topic choices across the units, so as not to repeat, and within the two levels, to ensure they were covered as equally as possible. The reasoning behind this great amount of autonomy and flexibility was to support these veteran teachers and encourage them to bring their best and most effective ideas and methods forward as an onramp to the JMLPE lesson development. This would allow for more time and effort to be spent on creating the leveled resources and writing the SEL, UDL, ELL, and culturally relevant pedagogical steps into lessons they were already comfortable with and effective at delivering.

As a result of this process, the teacher-experts developed a total of 50 lessons which were edited and made available to teachers for the pilot. The lessons varied in length, scope, and abundance of resources. Some lessons closely aligned to a WTP lesson and unit and provided supporting graphic organizers, vocabulary and language strategies, and leveled versions of student resources. Others added in related primary and secondary sources with UDL adaptations. As noted earlier, feedback from pilot teachers including in-class observations, descriptive feedback and analysis of pre and posttest student data will guide the iterative process for the continued development of these lessons for year two of the study. The pilot study was fielded in the fall semester of 2022.

Conclusion

Students in the three target JMLPE groups comprise a majority of students in American middle and high schools. Students of color constitute 53% of the public school population (Schaeffer, 2021). There are nearly seven million students with disabilities in schools across the nation (Barrington, 2022). Five million students—one out of every ten—is learning to speak English (National Center for Education Sciences, 2022). These students will make up a majority of eligible voters, form the ranks of community activists, and provide a pool of government leaders. The need for quality civic education that is relevant, engages them, and prepares them for citizenship and service is imperative.

Studies, including research on the JMLP (Owen, Hartzell, and Sanchez, 2020), indicate that high-need students can match or exceed gains in civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills if they receive quality instruction. The teacher-experts in the present study identified characteristics of excellent civic education for ELLs, students with disabilities, and students of color. Providing professional development to teachers so that they can not only acquire factual content knowledge, but also have the high-order skills to make the information relatable and compelling to students is essential. The curriculum must be made accessible to students both in practical terms, such as designing materials for learning vocabulary, and in substantive ways by providing students with a context for understanding the materials consistent with their personal experience. The civics classroom is an optimum environment for building SEL skills that are universally applicable. In essence, civics instruction can extend an invitation to engage to students who might otherwise feel that they have no place in American government and political life.

References

- Ata, Atakan. 2019. "Fostering Students' Civic Skills: Education for Sustainable Democracy," *Georgia Educational Researcher*, vol. 16, no. 1: 72-91. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1206054.pdf>
- Banks, James A. 2017. "Failed Citizenship and Transformative Civic Education," *Educational Researcher*, vol. 46, no. 7: 366-377.
- Banks, James A. 2015. "Failed Citizenship, Civic Engagement, and Education," *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, vol. 51: 151-154. [Record Oct-Dec15.pdf \(uw.edu\)](#)
- Barrington, Kate. 2022. "The Current State of Special Education in the U.S.," *Public School Review*, May 27. [The Current State of Special Education in the U.S. \(publicschoolreview.com\)](#)
- Branson, Margaret Stimmann. 1998. *The Role of Civic Education: An Education Policy Task Force Position Paper with Policy Recommendations*. Research Report. Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education. <https://www.civiced.org/campaign-to-promote-civic-education/resources/the-role-of-civic-education-an-education-policy-task-force-position-paper-with-policy-recommendations-september-1998>
- Branson, Margaret Stimmann, and Charles N. Quigley. 1998. "The Role of Civic Education." Washington, D.C.: *The Communitarian Network*. http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps/pop_civ.html
- Breisetz, Lydia. 2015. "What You Need to Know About ELLs: Fast Facts," WETA, Colorin Colorado. [What You Need to Know About ELLs: Fast Facts | Colorin Colorado \(colorincolorado.org\)](#)
- Rodger W. Bybee, Joseph A. Taylor, April Gardner, Pamela Van Scotter, Janet Carlson Powell, Anne Westbrook, and Nancy Landes. 2006. *The BSCS 5E Instructional Model: Origins and Effectiveness*. Colorado Springs, CO: BSCS. https://bscs.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/bscs_5e_full_report-1.pdf
- Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools. 2011. *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*. Leonore Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. [ccny_grantee_2011_guardian.pdf \(production-carnegie.s3.amazonaws.com\)](#)
- CASEL, n.d. "Fundamental of SEL," Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, Chicago, IL. [Fundamentals of SEL - CASEL](#)
- CASEL, 2020. "Advancing Social and Emotional Learning," Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, Chicago, IL. <https://casel.org/>
- Center for Responsive Schools. 2021. "Self-Care is an SEL Strategy," *Journal of Social and Emotional Learning*, January: 34-40. [Two Sides of the Same Coin - Center for Responsive Schools \(crslearn.org\)](#)

Civics Renewal Network. 2023. “How to Teach Controversial Topics and Civil Debate,” *The Annenberg Public Policy Center*. [How to Teach Controversial Topics and Civil Debate - CIVICS RENEWAL NETWORK](#)

Clay, Kevin L., and Beth C. Rubin. 2020. “I Look Deep Into This Stuff Because It’s a Part of Me”: Toward a Critically Relevant Civics Education,” *Theory and Research in Social Education*, vol. 48, no. 2: 161-181. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00933104.2019.1680466>

Colorin Colorado. 2019. “ELL Basics,” WETA. [English Language Learners \(ELL\) Basics | Colorin Colorado \(colorincolorado.org\)](#)

Costello, Maureen B. 2017. *The Trump Effect: The Impact of the Presidential Campaign on Our Nation’s Schools*. Southern Poverty Law Center. [splc_the_trump_effect.pdf \(splcenter.org\)](#)

Crittenden, Jack, and Peter Levine. 2019. “Civic Education.” In Edward N. Zalta, ed. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2018 Edition. [Civic Education \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#)

Dees, Becky. 2023. “Teaching Self-Management for Student Independence,” n2y. [Teaching Self-Management for Student Independence | n2y Blog](#)

Fitzgerald, Jason C., Alison K. Cohen, Elena Maker Castro, and Alexander Pope. 2021. “A Systematic Review of the Last Decade of Civic Education Research in the United States,” *Peabody Journal of Education*, vol. 96, no. 3: 235-246.

Gallo, Maria, and Diana Owen. 2021. “Closing the Civic Empowerment Gap: Professional Development for Teachers of High-Need Students,” *The Journal of the Middle States Council for the Social Studies*, no. 3: 17-23.

Galston, William A. 2004. “Civic Education and Political Participation,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, vol. 37, no. 2: 263-266.

Hamilton, Laura S., Julia H. Kaufman, and Lynn Hu. 2020. *Preparing Children and Youth for Civic Life in the Era of Truth Decay: Insights from the American Teacher Panel*. Rand Corporation. [Preparing Children and Youth for Civic Life in the Era of Truth Decay: Insights from the American Teacher Panel | RAND](#)

Hansen, Michael, Elizabeth Mann Levesque, Jon Valant, and Diana Quintero. 2018. “The 2018 Brown Center Report on American Education,” Brookings, Washington, D.C., June 27. <https://www.brookings.edu/multi-chapter-report/the-2018-brown-center-report-on-american-education/>

Hansen, Michael, Diana Quintero, and Alejandro Vazquez-Martinez. 2020. “Latest NAEP Results Show American Students Continue to Underperform on Civics,” Brown Center Chalkboard, Brookings, Washington, D.C., April 27. [Latest NAEP results show American students continue to underperform on civics \(brookings.edu\)](#)

- Hoskins, Bryony, Lihong Huang, and Cecilia Arensmeier. 2021. "Socioeconomic Inequalities in Civic Learning in Nordic Schools: Identifying the Potential of In-School Civic Participation for Disadvantaged Students," in Heidi Biseth, Bryony Hoskins, and Lihong Huang, eds. *Northern Lights on Civic and Citizenship Education*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 93-122.
- Kahne, Joseph, and Ellen Middaugh. 2008. "Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School." CIRCLE Working Paper 59. College Park, MD: The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement.
- King, Gus. 2020. "The Importance of Education for Marginalized Students and Students of Color," *Medium*, July 29. [The Importance of a Civics Education for Marginalized Students and Students of Color | by Gus King | The Faculty | Medium](#)
- Kuang, Xiaoxue, Jinxin Zhu, and Kerry J. Kennedy. 2020. "Civic Learning for Alienated, Disaffected, and Disadvantaged Students: Measurement, Theory, and Practice," *Educational Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 2: 141-145.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epub/10.1080/01443410.2020.1710395?needAccess=true>
- Kuhfeld, Megan, Jim Soland, Karyn Lewis, and Emily Morton, 2022. "The Pandemic Has Had Devastating Impacts on Learning. What Will It Take to Help Students Catch Up?" *Brown Center Chalkboard*, Brookings, March 3. [The pandemic has had devastating impacts on learning. What will it take to help students catch up? \(brookings.edu\)](#)
- Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. 2013. "The Challenges Facing Civic Education," *Daedalus*, Spring: 65-83.
- Kirlin, Mary. 2005. "Understanding the Relationship Between Civic Skills and Civic Participation: Educating Future Public Managers," *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, vol. 11, no. 4: 305-314.
- Kuang, Xiaoxue, Jinxin Zhu, and Kerry J. Kennedy. 2020. "Civic Learning for Alienated, Disaffected, and Disadvantaged Students: Measurement, Theory, and Practice," *Educational Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 2: 141-145.
- Levine, Peter. 2009. "The Civic Opportunity Gap," *ASCD*, vol. 66, no. 8.
- Levinson, Meira. 2010. "The Civic Empowerment Gap: Defining the Problem and Locating Solutions." In *Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement*, ed. Lonnie Sherrod, Judith Torney-Purta, and Constance A. Flanagan. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons: 331-361.
- Levinson, Meira. 2012. *No Citizen Left Behind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Loewecke, Heather. 2016. "Civic Education: More Necessary than Ever," *Education Week*, November 7. [Civics Education: More Necessary than Ever \(Opinion\) \(edweek.org\)](#)
- Miller, Heather H., and Kayla Miskimon. 2021. "Microaggressions and Microinterventions in the Classroom," Florida State University, College of Education, March 4.
<https://education.fsu.edu/microaggressions-and-microinterventions-classroom#:~:text=Students%20who%20experience%20microaggressions%20are%20at%20risk%20for,levels%20of%20anger%2C%20stress%2C%20and%20anxiety%20%28Huynh%2C%202012%29.>

Scholl, Andrew. 2023. "What is Inquiry-Based Learning? Types, Benefits, Examples," *SplashLearn*, January 3. [What Is Inquiry-Based Learning? Types, Benefits, Examples \(splashlearn.com\)](https://www.splashlearn.com)

Stambler, Leah G. 2011. "What Do We Mean By Civic Engagement As It Relates to Teacher Education?," *Teacher Education and Practice*, 24 (3): 366-369.

Van Camp, Debbie, and Stacey-Ann Baugh. 2016. "Encouraging Civic Knowledge and Engagement: Exploring Current Events through a Psychological Lens," *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, vol. 16, no. 2: 14-28.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1100860.pdf>

Ward, Sydney. 2022. "Lack of Quality Civic Education in Public Schools in the United States." *Ballard Brief*, May 2022. www.ballardbrief.org.

Weinberg, James. 2022. "Civic Education as an Antidote to Inequalities in Political Participation? New Evidence from English Secondary Education," *British Politics*, vol. 17: 185-209. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8253685/pdf/41293_2021_Article_186.pdf

Winthrop, Rebecca. 2020. "The Need for Civic Education in 21st Century Schools," *Brookings*, June 4. [The need for civic education in 21st-century schools \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-need-for-civic-education-in-21st-century-schools/)

APPENDIX

NAME OF LESSON

PART 1 LESSON OVERVIEW	
Title:	<i>Consider using your essential/compelling question or speech question as a source for the title</i>
Level:	<i>Indicate what level of lesson, e.g., Level 2, middle school. A lesson could work for both middle and high or be adaptable for a different level. That can be indicated here as well.</i>
We the People Unit & Lesson Correlation:	<i>Unit, Lesson #, and Title:</i>
Hearing Preparation Correlation:	<i>What part of the Simulated Congressional Hearing process does this lesson support? It can be a direct connection, e.g., lesson on writing a rough draft for your speech, or a transferable skill or experience, e.g. dialogue model useful in working with your unit team.</i>
Purpose:	<i>Content from text or for procedural lessons how and why their new learning will help in their civic skills and application to preparing for simulated hearings</i>
Objectives:	<p><i>Content: The correlated social studies content. What are students expected to learn by the end of the lesson?</i></p> <p><i>Language: How will students show mastery of the social studies content? Think about the language domains related to this lesson (e.g., speaking, listening, reading, and/or writing)?</i></p> <p><i>Cultural: The relevance of why the social studies content matters and how it applies to students' lives.</i></p>
SEL Focus:	<p><i>Students will develop their (SEL competence is best developed during this lesson.) by (specific language identifying how the SEL competency will be addressed)</i></p> <p><i>*Note: This SEL focus will be further articulated in alignment to the lesson below*</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Awareness • Self-Regulation • Social Awareness • Relationship Skills

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible Decision-Making (delete these once you have chosen your aligned SEL competence)
Assessment:	<i>Can/should be adapted to meet the needs of targeted groups and reflect application of best practices from workshop.</i>
Preparation/ Materials:	<i>Include all student -facing materials by name and any intellectual preparation (background or context) for teachers.</i>
Time frame:	<i>e.g. one 45-minute class, two 90-minute classes, etc.</i>

PART 2 LESSON PROCEDURE		
Inquiry Question(s):	<i>List any questions to guide the inquiry. These can be compelling and supporting (C3 inquiry), Essential, questions from the We the People text, or speech questions as examples. Questions articulated here should be integrated throughout the inquiry and part of the assessment.</i>	
Inquiry Component:	Teacher Procedures and anticipated Student Outcomes:	SEL, UDL, ELL Alignment and Supports
ENGAGE - <i>Capture students' attention, honor and activate prior knowledge and experiences</i>	<i>Pique student interest and get them personally involved in the lesson by accessing prior knowledge, generating interest, setting parameters to the inquiry and incorporating cultural objective.</i>	<i>In each part of the lesson, use this space in alignment to specific lesson procedures to call out UDL, SEL, ELL</i>
EXPLORE - <i>Guided/open Inquiry of sources to investigate the question(s)</i>	<i>Students begin discovering the answer to inquiry questions for themselves, experiencing key concepts, engaging with new skills, probing experiences, and examining thinking while accessing sources such as documents, visuals, video, and other media. -This is not gradual release but rather students enter into inquiry as primary means of orienting to the questions.</i>	<i>adaptations, best practices and aligned resources related to teacher and student actions.</i>
EXPLAIN - <i>Clarify understandings through varied means of class conversation</i>	<i>Use questioning strategies to lead students' discussion of information discovered, connect prior knowledge and background to new discoveries, and communicate new understandings. Students should own the explanations during this phase.</i>	

ELABORATE -Apply new knowledge and skills and extend learning	<i>Students expand and solidify student thinking and/or apply it to a real-world situation. Students should communicate new understanding with formal academic language.</i>	
EVALUATE -Check for understanding and assess learning	<i>Students demonstrate their understanding of the concept and/or skills aligned to the objective(s) and inquiry questions and to engage in metacognitive reflection about the learning they participated in during the lesson.</i>	
Assessment:	<i>Restated from overview page</i>	

**PART 3
LESSON REFLECTION AND DATA INFORMED ACTION**

Considerations: *After you collect the data at the end of the lesson, what considerations do you need to make in order to best meet the needs of students for subsequent lessons?*

- Groupings (i.e., Interests, Skills, and/or Language Strengths)
- Supports (i.e., Remediation and/or Enrichment)
- Instructional Priorities (i.e., Reteach, Review, or Extend)
- Curriculum and Assessment Needs (i.e., Supplemental resources, accommodations, etc.)