

# Civic Mission of Schools Self-Assessment Guide

*A tool to help schools understand, identify and assess needs to implement  
the Six Promising Approaches to Civic Education  
of the Civic Mission of Schools Report*

**The Civic Mission of Schools Report was developed by  
the Carnegie Corporation of New York and  
The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)  
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Self-Assessment Guide  
*Developed by*

Michelle M. Herczog, Ed.D.  
Consultant, History-Social Science  
Los Angeles County Office of Education

*in consultation with*  
Marshall Croddy  
Director of Programs and Materials Development  
Constitutional Rights Foundation

*and*  
Carol Hatcher  
Consultant  
Center for Civic Education



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District: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Directions:* Please identify the Civic Mission of Schools *best practices* that are currently in place in your district, needs that may exist, and possible next steps.

	<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Emerging</b>	<b>So...</b>
<b>#1: Classroom instruction in government, history, law, and democracy</b>				
<b>#2: Discussion of current issues</b>				
<b>#3: Service-learning linked to formal curriculum and classroom instruction</b>				
<b>#4: Extracurricular activities</b>				
<b>#5: Student voice in school governance</b>				
<b>#6: Student simulations of democratic processes and procedures</b>				

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**#1: Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy.** Formal instruction in U.S. government, history, and democracy increases civic knowledge. This is a valuable goal in itself and may also contribute to young people’s tendency to engage in civic and political activities over the long term. However, schools should avoid teaching only rote facts about dry procedures, which is unlikely to benefit students and may actually alienate them from politics.

<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>What we have...</b>	<b>What we need...</b>
<p>Content of instruction includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The fundamental principles of our democracy and Constitution</li> <li>▪ The tensions among fundamental goods and rights</li> <li>▪ The major themes in the history of the United States</li> <li>▪ The structure of our government, the powers and limitations of its various branches and levels</li> <li>▪ The diverse groups, and political parties</li> <li>▪ The relationship between government and the other sectors of society</li> </ul> <p>Delivery of instruction does not consist of “rote learning” but be intellectually challenging and beneficial. It may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Biographies of political and civic heroes</li> <li>▪ Narrative histories of dramatic events</li> </ul> <p>Teachers make explicit connections between academic material and concrete actions of today (i.e. the importance of voting in the past and present).</p> <p>Opportunities are available for immigrant students to understand the naturalization process (i.e. typical questions in a naturalization exam, completing naturalization forms).</p> <p>Instruction includes active discussion, debate and connections to current issues that affect students’ lives.</p> <p>Instruction in government, history, law, and democracy are evident at all school levels (elementary, middle, and high school).</p>		

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**#2: Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events into the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.** When young people have opportunities to discuss current issues in a classroom setting, they tend to have greater interest in politics, improved critical thinking and communication skills, more civic knowledge, and more interest in discussing public affairs out of school. Conversations, however, should be carefully moderated so that students feel welcome to speak from a variety of perspectives. Teachers need support in broaching controversial issues in classrooms since they may risk criticism or sanctions if they do so.

Exemplary	What we have...	What we need...
<p>Conversations are carefully moderated so that students feel welcome to speak from a variety of perspectives, with mutual respect and civility.</p> <p>Teachers use discussions as an opportunity to stimulate students to read and to address distinctions among facts, opinion, and values.</p> <p>Teachers are careful not to indoctrinate students into particular ideologies.</p> <p>Teachers receive support in broaching controversial issues in classrooms, to help avoid risk, criticism, or sanctions.</p> <p>Teachers utilize newspapers and other high-quality news media to inform and address current issues.</p> <p>Opportunities to discuss current issues are available at all school levels (elementary, middle, and high school).</p>		

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**#3: Design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.** Service programs are now common in K-12 schools. The ones that best develop engaged citizens are linked to the curriculum; consciously pursue civic outcomes, rather than seek only to improve a role in choosing and designing their projects; provide students with opportunities to reflect on the service work; allow students – especially older ones – to pursue political responses to problems consistent with laws that require public schools to be nonpartisan; and see service-learning as part of a broader philosophy toward education, not just a program that is adopted for a finite period in a particular course.

<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>What we have...</b>	<b>What we need...</b>
<p>Service-learning is utilized as a methodology to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improve academic achievement</li> <li>▪ Meet academic content standards</li> <li>▪ Meet <i>real</i> community needs as defined by the community</li> <li>▪ Pursue political responses to serious public issues</li> <li>▪ Improve self-esteem</li> </ul> <p>Students have an active role in choosing and designing projects and strategies.</p> <p>Students have opportunities to reflect on the service work.</p> <p>Opportunities to participate in service-learning are available at all school levels (elementary, middle, and high school).</p>		

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**#4: Offer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities.** Long term studies of Americans show that those who participate in extracurricular activities in high school remain more civically engaged than their contemporaries even decades later. Thus, everyone should have opportunities to join high school groups, and such participation should be valued.

Exemplary	What we have...	What we need...
<p>Opportunities to join high school extracurricular groups, particularly student government and journalism are made available to everyone.</p> <p>Participation in extracurricular activities is valued.</p> <p>Athletic programs promote confidence, fair play, and teamwork over competition.</p>		

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**#5: Encourage student participation in school governance.** A long tradition of research suggests that giving students more opportunities to participate in the management of their own classrooms and schools builds their civic skills and attitudes. Thus, giving students a voice in school governance is a promising way to encourage all young people to engage civically.

Exemplary	What we have...	What we need...
<p>Students are provided opportunities to discuss school policies, be heard respectfully, and to work with others to address school problems.</p> <p>Students understand that ultimate educational authority rests with teachers, school boards, and administrators. Teachers and administrators may intervene to encourage peaceful deliberation and to prevent violence, bullying, social ostracism, and other behaviors that undermine democratic norms.</p> <p>Examples of student participation in school governance may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work in small schools or academies within a large school to discuss specific school issues and policies</li> <li>▪ Intensive work on collaborative projects</li> <li>▪ Representation on administrative committees and school boards</li> <li>▪ Enacting school constitutions</li> </ul> <p>Opportunities to participate in school governance are available at all school levels (elementary, middle, and high school).</p>		

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**#6: Encourage students’ participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.** Recent evidence indicates that simulations of voting, trials, legislative deliberation, and diplomacy in schools can lead to heightened political knowledge and interest. The data are not conclusive, but these approaches show promise and should be considered when developing programs and curriculum.

<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>What we have...</b>	<b>What we need...</b>
<p>All students are provided opportunities to participate in simulations of democratic process and procedures including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Voting</li> <li>▪ Mock trials</li> <li>▪ Legislative deliberation</li> <li>▪ Diplomacy</li> </ul> <p>Opportunities to participate in simulations of democratic processes and procedures are available at all school levels (elementary, middle, and high school).</p>		

