

Working on Democracy: The State of Civics Education in Texas

A Survey of Texas Teachers

Report Prepared for the Center of Women in Politics and Public Policy, Texas
Woman's University and iCivics

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1 Executive Summary

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis deemed the states, “laboratories of democracy.” As the second most populous state of the union, the Texas “laboratory” has an outsized influence, not only on national-level education policymaking, but also on the developing civic attitudes of large numbers of students as well. In order for laboratories of democracy to work effectively, citizens need to be aware of when and how their participation may be required. Civics education, therefore, fulfills a crucial role in any state, and particularly in Texas, due to its size and influence.

With a goal of assessing the current state of civics education in Texas, we surveyed civics teachers across the state. They were asked about the methods they employ while teaching civics, as well as about the time, support, and training they receive from their employers, both at the school and district level.

1.1 Key findings

Based on the responses of the teachers responding to our survey we find the following:

1. **Considerable variety exists in the way civics is taught in schools across the state.**

Teachers report that in most schools, civics is taught as part of a standalone, required government course. In some schools, civics is also taught as part of

history, or as part of a combined social studies course. A small minority of schools has a standalone civics course.

2. Teachers are split on whether sufficient time is spent on the civics curriculum.

While a slim majority of teachers believe sufficient time is spent teaching civics, responding teachers also indicate that more time could be spent on teaching the intellectual skills that children require to fully participate in American government.

3. Teachers indicate that they have the resources necessary to effectively teach civics, but that their districts could do more in terms of providing materials and supporting civics education as a whole.

The surveyed teachers overwhelmingly indicate that they have sufficient resources and lesson plans at their disposal to effectively teach civics at their school. However, teachers also reported that there was little civics-related professional development support from their school districts and reported that they received very little district-level assistance in developing their civics curriculums.

4. Teachers experience barriers in their civics teaching that could be overcome with more resources and/or assistance.

Teachers find that the time spent focusing on required components from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) test substantially reduces the amount of time they are able to dedicate to civics teaching. Additionally, teachers cite a lack of resource support from their employers, and they feel burdened by having to create a civics curriculum while facing the risk of being perceived as biased in the current political climate.

5. Teachers overwhelmingly support state standardized testing.

While teachers report regularly using a variety of classroom assessment methods to evaluate students' civics readiness, our survey finds that they overwhelmingly support state standardized testing to assess students' civics competency.

Overall, the survey demonstrates that there is room for more centralized implementation of a consistent civics curriculum across the state of Texas so as to support teachers in providing a neutral, yet focused and informative civics curriculum. School districts are struggling to marshal sufficient resources for this due to a perceived lack of importance, which is evidenced further by the rarity of civics being taught as a standalone course.

A large number of our surveyed teachers expressed an interest in including more experiential components in their civics curriculum, though shy away from a focus on current events. Teachers favor a statewide assessment of civics education, though they are not unanimous on the form such an assessment should take. Teachers indicate that they would like the state to recognize the value of civics education by building it into the state's core curriculum and assessment, but that does not translate into broad support for state standardized testing.

2 Survey Information

2.1 Teacher Characteristics

This survey includes 226 teachers who either currently teach civics or report having done so within the last 3 years. Of these teachers, 72% (163) are high school teachers and 28% (63) are middle school teachers. 13% of the teachers surveyed reported 0-5 years of teaching experience; 19% reported 6-10 years of experience; 30% reported 11-20 years of teaching experience; and the remaining 38% reported 20 or more years of experience.

2.2 Teacher Education

The majority of teachers (61% or 138 respondents) reported having taken four or more undergraduate courses in civics, government, or political science. However, three teachers reported having taken zero courses; 14 teachers reported just one course; 22 teachers reported only two courses; and 38 teachers reported having taken three courses. Nearly 30% of teachers surveyed (66) reported having taken classes at the master's level.

3 Civics Instruction in Schools

We began our survey by asking teachers how civics instruction is taking place at their schools at this moment in time. We ask: in what context are civics knowledge and skills being disseminated to students, and do the teachers themselves feel like they are supported by their employers and have sufficient access to professional development and other resources in order to effectively help students acquire not just civics knowledge, but also civics skills?

3.1 Instructional Delivery Method

Teachers report some variety in how civics is administered or taught in their schools, and it is possible that some teachers are reporting incorrectly. What becomes clear from the responses, however, is that civics knowledge and skills are rarely taught as part of a free-standing civics course but are often part of either an established government or history course in the school. Teachers indicate that teaching civics is not always the primary component of their position, often splitting their duties between teaching civics and teaching other subjects.

(Figure on following page.)

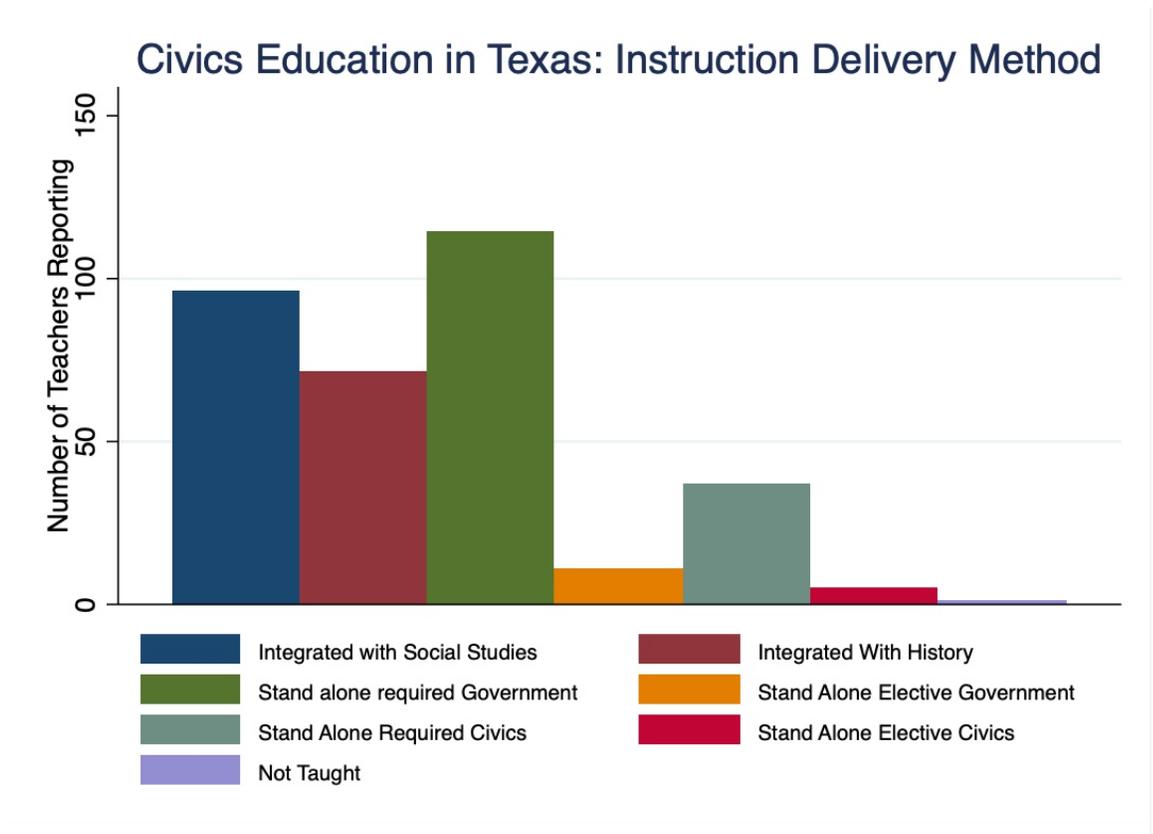


Figure 3.1 Civics Education in Texas: Instructional Delivery Methods

3.2 Time Spent Teaching Civics at Teachers' Own Schools

Generally speaking, teachers are split over whether or not sufficient time is spent on teaching civics in their own schools.

More than 60% of teachers agree or strongly agree that sufficient time is spent teaching civics knowledge, including knowledge of the founding documents, civic institutions, and political processes of the US, in their own schools. However, they are more evenly divided in their perceptions of whether or not sufficient time is spent teaching the intellectual skills that enable citizens to take informed positions on public issues. Of the surveyed respondents, 45% agree or strongly agree that sufficient time is spent on this in their own schools, while 41% of them disagree or

strongly disagree that sufficient time is spent. Over 53% of teachers also agreed or strongly agreed that, in their own schools, sufficient time was spent on the participatory skills that enable students to become active citizens in democracy, while 37% disagree with this statement. Similarly, 54% of teachers feel that sufficient time is spent in their schools teaching students a commitment to upholding the principals of democratic society, while around 32% disagreed with this statement.

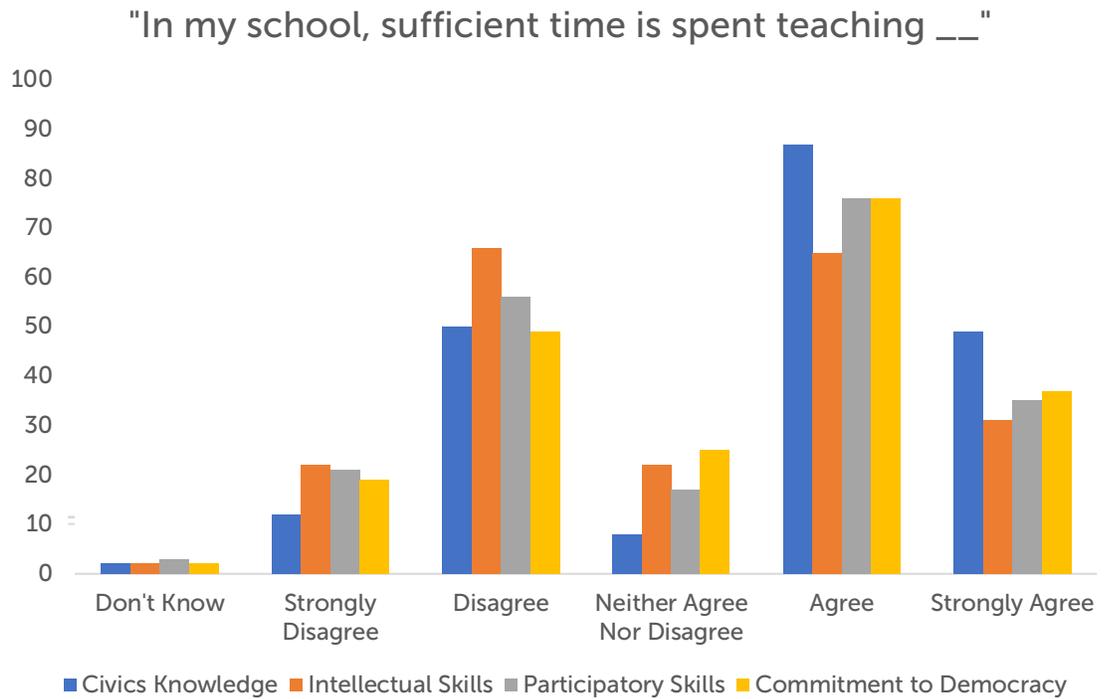


Figure 3.2 Time spent teaching civics knowledge and skills in teachers' own school

3.3 Perceived Time Spent Teaching Civics in the State of Texas

Teachers surveyed are generally less confident about the state of civics education in the state more broadly speaking. Around 42% of teachers say that they disagree or strongly disagree that sufficient time is spent on civics knowledge, statewide, while 49% agree or strongly agree that sufficient time is being spent. 54% disagree or strongly disagree that sufficient time is spent teaching intellectual skills that enable

citizens to take informed positions on public issues, while just 23% agree or strongly agree that sufficient time is spent teaching these intellectual skills in Texas. Around 52% of teachers disagree or strongly disagree that participatory skills are sufficiently taught in Texas, while around 28% believe that sufficient time is spent on this. Finally, 45% of responding teachers disagree that statewide sufficient time is spent teaching a commitment to upholding the principals of democratic society, while 29% agree.

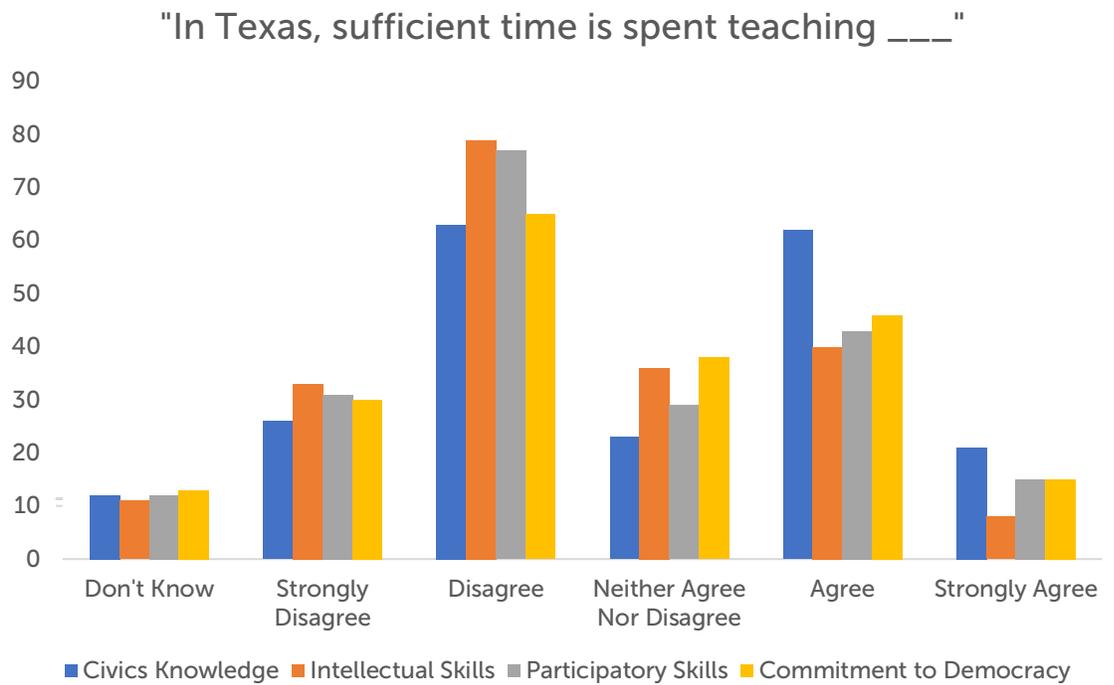


Figure 3.3 Time spent teaching civics knowledge in skills in the state of Texas

3.4 Access to Resources

While teachers are divided on whether or not they have the time to sufficient teach civics skills and knowledge, they generally do feel that they have the resources and lesson plans necessary. Of the surveyed teachers, 77% felt that they had the resources necessary to teach civics knowledge; 67% agreed or strongly agreed that

they had the resources to teach intellectual skills; 69% felt that they had the resources and lesson plans that they needed to teach participatory skills; and 68% felt that they had the resources and lesson plans they needed to teach a commitment to upholding the principals of a democratic society. This finding, however, is at odds with responses recorded to later questions, in which teachers indicate a desire for additional support in specific areas of training and curriculum development.

3.5 Perceived Value of Civics Education by Employers

In spite of reporting that they had sufficient access to lesson plans and resources; teachers were quite negative regarding the extent to which civics education and teaching is valued in their schools and districts. In response to the question “would you agree or disagree that the importance of civic learning is emphasized to all teachers across subjects and disciplines at my school,” more than 75% of teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed, 22% of teachers were neutral, and just 2% agreed (no teachers strongly agreed).

4 Availability of Professional Development and Other Resources to Teachers

Though teachers indicated sufficient access to lesson plans and other resources, teachers indicated insufficient interest on behalf of their school districts in integrating civics skills and knowledge throughout the entirety of the schools' curriculums. Further questions queried teachers about the availability of professional development resources and the role that their employers' choose to play in that regard.

We find that teachers believe that their school districts could offer more in terms of professional development, but also that teachers are motivated to compensate for this lack of resources by seeking out their own opportunities for professional development.

4.1 Access to Professional Development Resources

When asked if professional development was available to help teachers learn or improve teaching practices designed to promote civic learning at their school, 56% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 37% were neutral, and just 5.5% agreed with the statement; no teachers strongly agreed. Similarly 63% of teachers agreed with the statement, "at my school, there are opportunities (including space, time, and incentives) for teachers to plan and reflect together and develop a strong civic education curriculum." 31% of teachers responding were neutral, and around 6% of teachers agreed; no teachers strongly agreed with this statement.

"At my workplace, I have access to professional development resources"

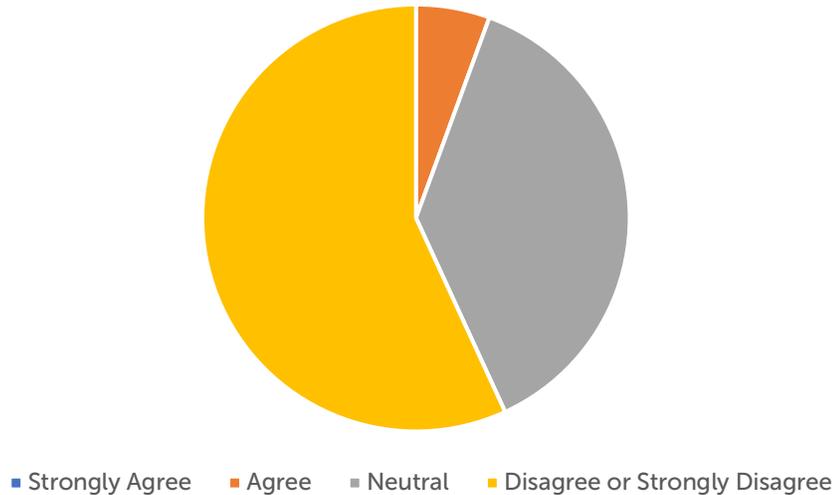


Figure 4.1 Access to Professional Development Resources

4.2 School Partnerships with Community Organizations

There were similar results for the statement, "my school provides materials, curricula, trainings, etc. that support civic learning within social studies." Teachers even more overwhelmingly disagreed with the statement "my school provides materials, curricula, trainings, etc. that support civic learning outside of social studies," with 73% of teachers disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Finally, in response to the question "would you agree or disagree with the statement: my school builds strong partnerships with community groups that support civic learning," 65% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed; 30% were neutral; and just 5% agreed with the statement.

"My school builds strong partnerships with community groups that support civic learning"

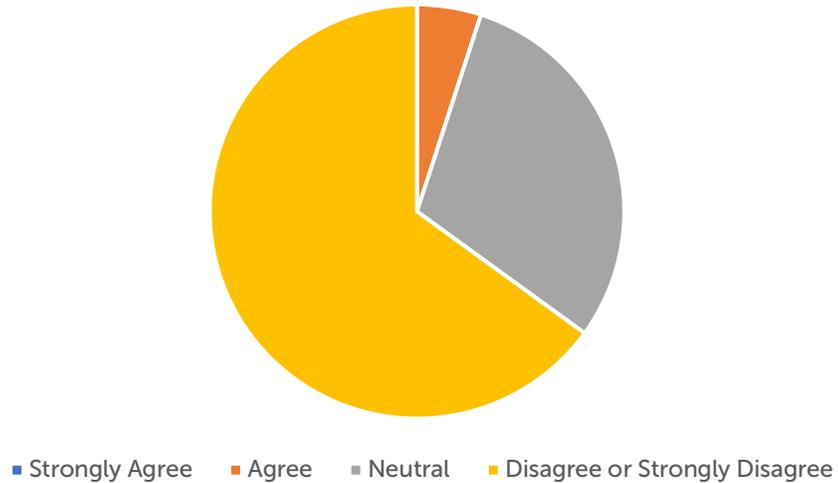


Figure 4.2 School Support for Strong Partnerships with Community Groups to Support Civic Learning

4.3 Selected Teacher Comments

We invited teachers who disagreed or strongly disagreed with any of the above statements to offer more information. Some selected comments are below:

- "My school currently ignores students lack of civics education and the administration is completely unwilling to change that. So anything would be a good start."
- "It just feels like there's not enough time for anything. I feel like most of the prep we receive is for testing and data analysis."
- "I think that content specific professional development can be much more beneficial than typical PD given that after 3-4 years in a classroom most teachers that stick with the profession know how to teach, but can always learn more about subject matter, especially when considering that high

school social studies teachers can go from teaching Economics, to World History, to US Government.”

- “Civics is only given time in social studies. Other subjects, especially ELA where it could easily be incorporated, do not teach it.”
- “It starts with the elementary schools. They take away from social studies to teach reading and math for the STAAR test. There should be opportunities at the elementary level where the teachers could use reading passages about history to help with teaching reading. At the middle and high school levels it should be emphasized in the English classes as well. Teachers could do cross curricular lessons to help teach the material. All social studies teachers should attend professional development yearly and use web sites like ICIVICS to help with their instruction.”
- “I don’t believe it’s a district problem more of a state testing issue. The federal government and state governments have made this area of content less important when compared to other subjects.”
- “Law Related Education is an excellent professional development from which I have gleaned many strategies and lesson plans. The problem is not having the PD or resources, it is fitting it into the MASSIVELY OUTRAGEOUS number of TEKS that 8th grade is expected to learn in time for the STAAR test.”
- “Since the state of Texas places so much emphasis on STAAR, we don't have the luxury of preparing our students to be thoughtful citizens, we get to spend all of our time teaching them to be good test takers.”
- “My school does provide resources but not enough. Direct civics instruction is dedicated to Constitution Week (state mandated) and a few days during the study of the Constitution. It’s not that they do not care, it’s the pressure from so many other areas and overt concern with STAAR curricula that civics gets left behind.”

- “I don't think that civics is commonly seen as the purpose of public education in Texas.”
- “To be completely honest, I will need much more than 1000 characters to give my complete answer. However, I will try to condense it. In short, the entire education system needs to be reorganized to focus on these areas of study: logical reasoning, reading and writing comprehension, civics, and artistic or creative expression. Mastery should be shown in these subjects not through tests and age-based advancement but through growth-based portfolios. A person will leave the system when a business, governmental or other type of opportunity presents itself or recognizes the student's talent and recruits them for their needs.”
- “My district is small, rural and poor. There are currently "0" PD hours or curricula provided within this subject area, so anything greater than "0" is desirable.”
- “As it stands there is limited opportunity beyond the Senior Government Class where civics can be covered. As far as transfer and cross curriculum goes it would take more leg work to offer additional electives available to High School students.”
- “The Bill of Rights Institute, Texas LRE, iCivics, there are lots of good sources for Texas Government Teachers. Now, if U.S. History teachers had the support with the new Citizenship questions on the U.S. History EOC, that is a different story.”

5 Participation in Professional Development Activities

Even when the school and school district do not provide professional development resources, it remains possible for teachers to seek out these opportunities on their own. We were interested in knowing if they do and, if so, which opportunities teachers would seek out and participate in.

We find that a lack of resource availability has not deterred teachers from further developing their abilities as civics teachers—on the contrary. Teachers indicate participation in trainings, online courses, and use of coaching and mentoring, with only a minority of teachers reporting no professional development activity at all.

5.1 Supporting Civic Learning and Engagement Through Professional Development and Teacher Training Activities

When asked what professional development (or “teacher training”) activities they had participated in over the last 5 years to support civic learning and engagement, the results were as follows (teachers may select as many of the following answers as applicable):

Table 5.1 Participation in Professional Development Activities

Participating in a half or full day training	51.27%
Coaching or mentoring by another teacher	15.74%
Coaching or mentoring by a specialist, administrator, or expert (not a peer)	9.64%
Participating in a training program or institute lasting more than one day in total time	40.1%
Completing an online or self-paced course or program	20.3%
Training to help teachers effectively use technology in the classroom to improve instruction and learning	32.49%
I have not participated in any professional development activities	22.84%

In short, there was variation regarding the types of training and professional development opportunities teachers reported engaging in, but it is striking that nearly 23% of Texas teachers (who are engaged in teaching the subject) did not receive any professional development support for civics learning and engagement during the last 5 years.

5.2 What Types of Training Are Teachers Receiving?

In order to understand more clearly what kind of training teachers are, and are not, getting we can drill down into specific activities. Again, in answering this portion of the survey, teachers could check all answers that applied to them, given that it is possible that a teacher received more than one type of training in a particular area.

*Table 5.2 **Question:** For each of the instructional techniques and / or topic area, please check boxes that corresponds with the type of training you've received.*

	Pre-service	Formal training by school	Formal training not by school	Learned informally, without training	No training
Teaching basic concepts about politics and government	21.71%	16.57%	37.71%	45.14%	9.71%
Service-learning	7.43%	5.71%	16.57%	26.29%	49.14%
Discussing current and controversial issues	13.14%	14.29%	22.86%	54.86%	17.14%
Simulation of adult civic roles in-person or using games	7.43%	11.43%	22.86%	40.00%	30.86%
Use of action civics – student-led, action projects that involves researching and addressing local issues	8%	13.14%	18.86%	30.86%	38.86%
News and media literacy skills for informed citizenship	13.71%	12.00%	20.57%	47.43%	21.14%
Integrated social-emotional skills training in classroom	9.71%	34.29%	17.14%	25.71%	30.29%

The above responses indicate that Texas teachers are learning and incorporating many skills without ever receiving formal training from the school, district, or even an outside organization. Teachers report being particularly under-served in the the areas of service learning, simulations, action civics, and social-emotional skills.

5.3 Teachers Seek Professional Development

The following chart presents further evidence that Texas teachers currently feel underserved in their civics education efforts.

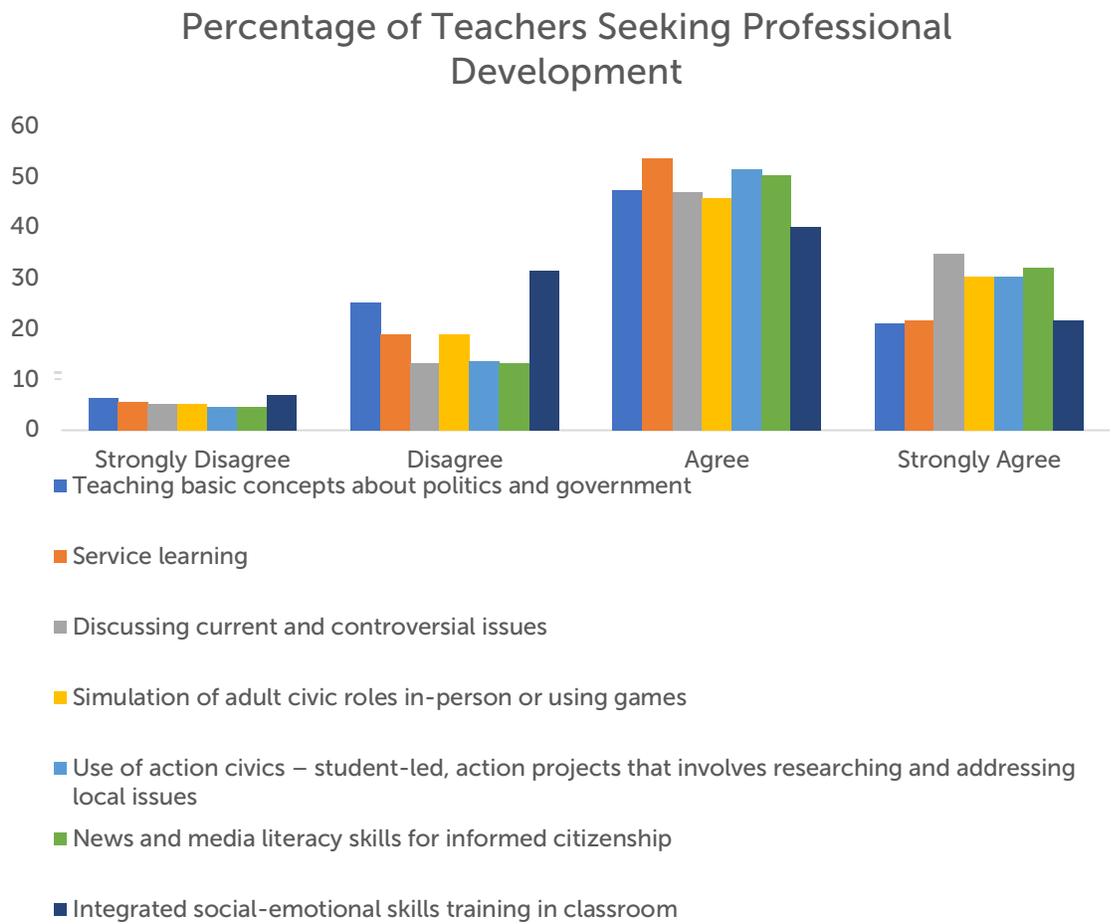


Figure 5.1 “I would like to receive additional professional development training on these topics...”

Overwhelmingly, teachers agree or strongly agree that they would like to receive additional professional development in almost every area of civics education we asked about. 74% of surveyed teachers wanted additional training in the area of service-learning; just over 80% agreed that they would like additional training to discuss current and controversial issues; 76% wanted training in the simulation of adult civic roles in person or using games; 81% wanted training in the use of action civics; and 82% wanted additional training on news and media literacy skills for informed citizenship.

Teachers were generally less interested in additional training on basic concepts and on social-emotional skills. Even so, 68% of teachers expressed interest in additional professional development to teach basic concepts about politics and government; and 61% desired training to integrate social-emotional skills training in the classroom.

5.4 Selected Teacher Comments

Some examples teachers gave regarding what types of resources and training they would find helpful include the following:

- “I love the idea of role playing and games.”
- “Sessions that go over what is already available online ie. I civics, and other online curriculum. That is curated and tested by someone So I do not waste my time.”
- “A database of lesson plans and ideas; Formal training with hands-on activities and resources.”
- “Professional Development with a combination of educators and civic leaders.”

- “Self-paced programs (online PD) focusing on current events and media literacy or PD on a whole school level for this, SEL skills coupled with action civics as a whole school, in-depth training specific to educators on teaching the Constitution.”
- “I wonder if any of this training would be useful because I feel like there is never time to do really interesting projects. In 8th grade US History, the curriculum was all about drilling trivia, and we didn't get to do any of the things listed above. The lack of training isn't the issue.”
- “I think simulation training would be ideal. I would love to do a moot court in my class and have some resources for it, but I've never been able to see how it works.”
- “Dedicated institutes or professional development on district days.”
- “Training that is cost efficient or free to me and training that I can complete online.”
- “How to counteract the effects of social media on young students.
- iCivics is awesome...I wish there was something more geared towards high school though.”
- “I use a wide variety of techniques from class discussions to Socratic Seminars. Any that would enhance my knowledge would be fine.”
- “I would like to teach and learn how to show my students how civics can work for them. How they have a voice and when it is used it can be effective. Show them how "all politics is local" and how to use this to their advantage.”
- “I think many teachers are afraid to touch on subjects like these because of community or parental disapproval. I think training on how to approach these subjects with neutrality would be helpful.”

- “How to bring current events into the class. How to increase civic participation.”
- “How to present government and controversial issues to students while maintaining a non bias stand point. I feel many teachers that do teach civics and government incorporate their own feelings and that is completely inappropriate. I never tell my students my political views.”
- “Workshops with hands-on activities. Speakers with different civic experiences. Workshops should be offered a minimum of twice a year. Summer workshops would be a wonderful idea too.”
- “Resources - lessons, simulations, projects, and other prepared sources would be appreciated. At this point, I create most of what I use. Trainings - Time to collaborate with other government teachers to share ideas and problem solve.”
- “I find that many of my colleagues are misinformed or uninformed about many civics-related issues so basic instruction would be useful before introducing teaching strategies. Face to face training would be best with a digital repository of teaching resources.”
- “One on one with local leaders would help tremendously. Also workshops dealing with the subjects mentioned above such as teaching basic concepts, service learning, ways to discuss current and controversial issues, etc.”
- “Trainings and curriculum for building relationships between history and modern day; particularly action projects and discussing current/ controversial issues.”

6 Obstacles Teaching Civics

In addition to developing a better understanding of teacher needs, we also asked about the obstacles teachers experience while teaching civics. Of course, teaching and learning may be impacted by students' backgrounds and readiness, but for this section of the survey we were specifically interested in the barriers teachers face on the institutional side, since those are factors that can be impacted by changes in institutional approach and policy.

6.1 Perceived Barriers in Offering High-Quality Civics Education

When asked: "what barriers do you face in offering high-quality civic learning opportunities to all students, regardless of their backgrounds or achievement levels?" some of the biggest concerns were a lack of time, that the issue was not a priority, and that students were generally not evaluated based on readiness or motivated to learn about the issue.

Table 6.1 Barriers Perceived By Teachers in Teaching Civics

	Yes	No
Not a district priority	51.24	48.76
Not a content area for which the district is held accountable by the state	42.4	57.6
Lack of funding	32.51	67.49
Lack of skills and knowledge on my part to use some of the strategies	18.37	81.63
Lack of professional development opportunities to learn about high quality practice	32.16	67.84
Valuations in students' readiness to engage in some types of civic learning pedagogies	56.54	43.46
Lack of time	63.6	36.4
Lack of student motivation	57.6	42.4

When asked to elaborate on what barriers teachers felt inhibited their ability to best teach civics, three main themes arose: the first was a lack of time due to focus on standardized testing and TEKS requirements; the second theme was a lack of resources; and the third theme was the challenge of the current political environment and fear that they would get into trouble or be perceived as biased or as somehow trying to indoctrinate students.

6.2 Key Challenges in Teachers' Own Words

Teachers report facing significant barriers to teaching civics in a way that fully prepares their students. They indicate that, broadly speaking, these barriers could be remedied with additional time, resources, and support from the state and from their districts.

Some of the key barriers and challenges to providing best civic learning experiences for students of all backgrounds:

- “We are required to teach (by the TEKS) some concepts that are not age appropriate. For example, some Supreme Court cases need to be taught after students have a better understanding of the way in which the court functions.”
- “The STAAR test takes up so much of our focus that it is hard to give enough time to civics!”
- “My school has limited financial resources.”
- “Time in the curriculum and detailed knowledge of subject.”
- “Time to teach the material (too many TEKS for 8th grade history to allow for time), opportunity for outside experiences is lacking in a rural district, students have little/no prior knowledge because too few parents are educated in civics.”

- “I think testing culture is the key barrier. If I'm being judged on how well my students do on a district benchmark or STAAR test, I'm more likely to drill that information than to do an interesting activity as listed above.”
- “Creating a setting of understanding and respect amongst all student backgrounds.”
- “The polarization of politics today makes it difficult to teach controversial subjects that are essential in understanding government.”
- “I teach a tested subject. There is no time for anything else. Unless civics is something tested over by the state, it doesn't (or rarely) gets covered.”
- “Our district is title one. Our funding relies greatly on test scores, so testing drives our curriculum, and subjects that are not tested do not receive much attention.”
- “It is difficult to keep current with what is going on in civics--Supreme Court decisions, changes in the law, etc. It is also difficult to find the time to research concrete examples and tie-ins to abstract ideas-- basically, finding the time to create case studies is difficult. It is the concrete examples that our students most latch on to, and find most memorable in understanding basic rights and laws. Part of this is a lack of time, as all available time is already taken up by grading and design coursework. Lack of access to websites such as lexis/nexus can be an issue also.”
- “Real life activities that demonstrate the importance of active civil involvement.”
- “At my school (a fine arts magnet school), we only offer AP U.S. Government and Dual Enrollment US and Texas government classes. I am tasked with preparing mostly students who have not passed the TSI

exam for the AP US Govt Exam. We also teach on the 9-week block schedule. Most of our students participate extensively in extracurricular activities and/or work after school. Consequently, most assignments are completed in class (where I can also help struggling learners try to master the AP learning objectives). I have to keep activities short since I cannot afford the time to assign for multiple day projects. I believe the state legislature should make the 12th grade government class a full credit and therefore require it to be taught for a full semester on the block schedule or a full year on the traditional. This is a must if our goal is to increase civic engagement and incorporate service. Honestly, I do not have time to completely cover the entire AP government curriculum in 9 weeks.”

- “The ability to teach civics without political party biases. Students come to class with incorrect ideas they received from uninformed family members. Teachers have to overcome these incorrect ideas while creating a productive and successful learning environment. Having materials (visual and oral) to help teach civics PLUS engaging activities will help students become better citizens.”
- “Civics is de-emphasized, treated like an add-on course.”
- “The toughest components to providing meaningful civic learning are the polarization of political discourse and dialogue in our state and nation. Second, the apathy of some towards public service and community good will.”
- “You must be careful how you say things so the students don't misinterpret what you say. You must also provide both sides of issues and not lean any which way or you as an educator can get into trouble.”
- “Practice with reading primary source documents, and time. I integrate civics education in a U.S. History class; however, there is not much time to do anything beyond the required citizenship strands.”

- “TIME is an obstacle. As teachers, we plan, teach, grade, beg students to come to class, help students make up work when they do not come to class, and complete a lot of district paperwork. I frequently work 10-12 hour days. I do not have time to create innovative and entertaining lessons. Also, when our district provides training, it is often generically focused on all teachers teaching secondary students so that all teachers can benefit. We do not often focus on specific disciplines. I'm not sure our district (or any public district) has the resources or expertise to focus on specific civics training. I have sought out these opportunities outside my district and my district has allowed and supported me in attending these - especially when they are free.”
- “Wading through the good resources to find the best. There is so much out there.”

7 Instructional Practices

Wanting to get a comprehensive overview of the current state of civics education in Texas, we were also interested in learning more about the teaching techniques and strategies teachers are currently using in the classroom, and which instructional practices they might be interested in working with in the future, or learning more about.

7.1 Instructional Practices Currently Being Used

We asked teachers what kind of instructional techniques they are presently using in their courses and which ones they would like to learn more about. To that end, we posed the following question: “In your own courses, generally, do your students experience any of the following instructional activities?” The respondents could choose from the following possible answer choices:

- “yes, all are required to do this;”
- “this occasionally happens but not always;”
- “this is not part of my course;”
- “my students do not currently do this but I would like to implement this in future;” and
- “no direct knowledge.”

While a majority of teachers reported using a variety of these techniques on at least an occasional basis, there were two particular areas of notable interest. Nearly 40% of teachers said that they did not currently meet with or experience visits with elected officials or community leaders, but that they are interested in this type of activity. Additionally, nearly a quarter of teachers said that they were interested in activities like analyzing public policy with their students, and identifying, researching, and analyzing issues affecting their local communities. On the other

hand, teachers were broadly not interested in or excited to learn more about asking their students to take one or more assessments on current affairs or events.

Table 7.1 Question: In your own courses, generally, do your students experience any of the following instructional activities?

	Yes	Sometimes	No	No, but interested	No knowledge
Take one or more assessments on current affairs or events	24.65%	27.11%	30.63%	14.44%	3.17%
Research, discuss, and write about news from multiple sources/ perspectives	33.80%	33.10%	17.25%	13.38%	2.46%
Research, debate, and write about issues related to elections, politics, public policy, or social issues	36.27%	36.62%	13.73%	11.62%	1.76%
Participate in mock elections, debates, mock trials, or other simulations of adult civic roles to understand political or social processes and issues	21.83%	36.97%	19.01%	20.07%	2.11%
Research and discuss current and controversial public policy issues in class	32.75%	32.75%	20.42%	12.68%	1.41%
Meet with or are visited by elected officials or other community leaders	7.04%	23.94%	25.70%	38.03%	5.28%
Collaborate in groups to create projects or presentations related to course content	52.46%	25.70%	10.21%	9.15%	2.46%
Plan and facilitate discussions about topics related to civics, government, and / or history	46.83%	31.69%	8.80%	11.27%	1.41%
Analyze public policy (at any level) with a goal of proposing changes	25.35%	26.76%	22.89%	22.54%	2.46%
Research and analyze the effectiveness of citizens and civic institutions (such as government agencies, legal system, courts, schools) in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, national, and / or international level	26.06%	32.75%	21.83%	17.61%	1.76%
Make decisions as a group using a range of methods (e.g. debate, deliberation, voting, negotiation, choosing randomly, deferring to experts, etc)	27.11%	34.15%	19.37%	16.55%	2.82%
Identify, research, and analyze issues affecting people in the local community and identify root causes and possible solutions	16.20%	28.17%	28.52%	24.65%	2.46%

Given the above range of activities which were used, at least to an extent, we also asked teachers to report which instructional techniques or practices they felt most comfortable using on a regular basis.

- Around 80% of teachers were comfortable with teaching a dedicated course on civics, government, law, or related topics;
- 70% of teachers reported being comfortable with peer-to-peer discussions about current and controversial issues;
- Just under 30% of teachers reported comfort with service-learning, defined as the combination of community service with academic study of the issues addressed by the students' services;
- Around 45% of teachers reported feeling comfortable working with student associations that allow students to work on projects and issues;
- 50% of teachers were comfortable with student voice in schools through student government, student inputs into classroom rules, and other means;
- And around 58% of teachers were comfortable using simulations of the democratic process (e.g. mock trial, mock Congress).

8 Assessment

8.1 Classroom Assessment

Generally speaking, the methods of assessment that teachers reported both using and finding effective in their own classroom are those techniques that we might think of as fairly traditional: tests and quizzes, essay questions, graded papers, individual and group presentations, and classroom observations.

Teachers tend to rely much less on methods such as portfolio assessment, badges for specific civics skills, media projects, or capstone and research projects.

Table 8.1 Classroom Assessment Techniques

	Not Used	Used & very ineffective	Used and somewhat effective	Used and effective	Used and very effective	No knowledge
Tests and quizzes with multiple-choice or short-answer questions	1.06%	3.89%	10.60%	48.41%	35.34%	0.71%
Tests with essay questions	14.84%	2.83%	10.95%	31.45%	39.22%	0.71%
Graded papers	2.83%	3.89%	10.95%	46.64%	34.89%	0.71%
Individual presentations in class	10.95%	4.24%	8.48%	38.16%	37.46%	0.71%
Group presentations in class	10.95%	4.24%	13.78%	30.74%	39.22%	1.06%
Individual reflections or journaling	28.27%	3.89%	7.07%	32.51%	25.80%	2.47%
Classroom observation of behaviors	14.13%	2.12%	9.89%	36.40%	34.38%	3.18%
Public presentation of student research and other work	55.83%	3.53%	3.53%	15.90%	15.19%	6.01%
Portfolio assessment	66.08%	1.41%	5.65%	12.72%	9.54%	4.59%
Badges for specific civics skills	79.86%	2.47%	2.47%	3.53%	3.18%	8.48%
Media projects such as public service announcements, social media campaigns, or writing an editorial	61.13%	2.83%	6.36%	13.78%	9.89%	6.01%
Projects involving research/ analysis of issue and development of a plan action to address it.	50.53%	1.77%	5.65%	16/25%	21.20%	4.59%
Successful completion of a capstone project	68.55%	0.71%	2.83%	7.77%	10.95%	9.19%

8.2 Statewide Assessment

Classroom assessment, of course, is much more ad hoc and individualized than statewide assessment; and it also does not get reported in any way that researchers or policymakers can assess the state of civics education broadly. We therefore asked next how teachers felt about statewide assessment. Texas teachers expressed strong support for establishing some type of common civic readiness assessment at the state level.

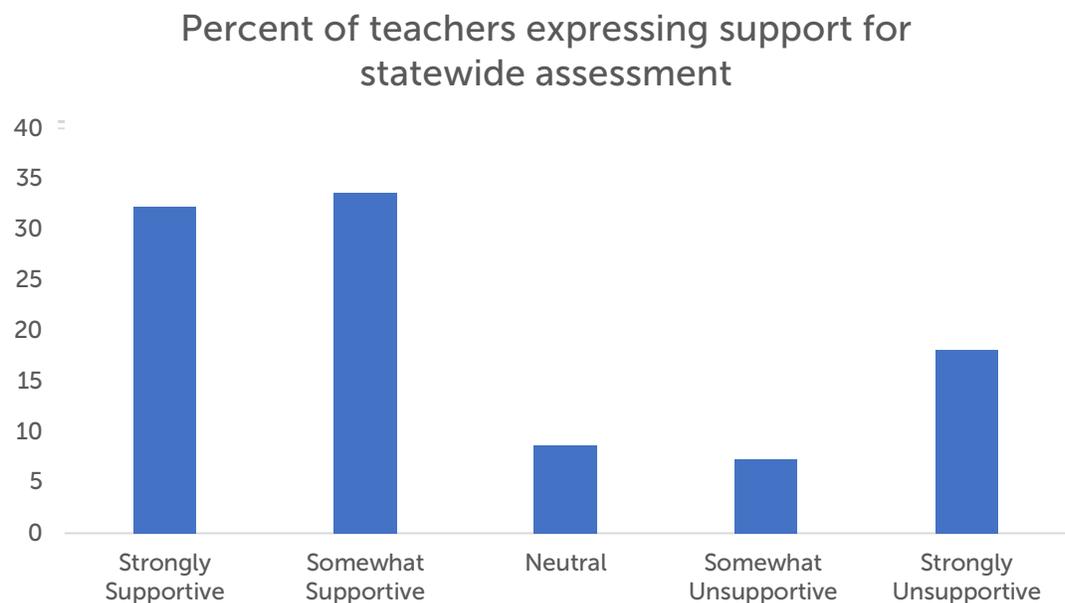


Figure 8.1 Support for Statewide Assessment

Over 65% of Teachers responded that they were either strongly supportive or somewhat supportive of some kind of common civic readiness assessment at the state level. However, “civic readiness assessment,” is a vague question, given the many possible means of assessing student knowledge and readiness.

Because this survey asks about a wide variety of possible ways to assess civics readiness and knowledge, we also gave teachers the opportunity to rank some of the possible means of assessment. We asked teachers to rank, in order from most to least effectiveness, the following possible methods of assessment: undertaking a

community initiative, or proposing a change in school policy; badges for specific civic skills; research project that leads to taking informed action such as drafting model legislation; standardized statewide assessment; portfolio assessment; grade level or grade span capstone project; student survey about civic attitudes and behaviors; and performance assessment of civic tasks, such as classroom discussions or classroom presentation.

While the ranking of the various assessment forms was largely evenly distributed, there were two main findings that stood out. The option for performance assessment of civics tasks was ranked relatively more favorably than most other options, with over 50% of teachers ranking it among their top three preferred means of assessment; and standardized statewide assessment was ranked among as least effective means of assessment by 44.5% of teachers.

9 Concluding Thoughts

In this final section of the report, we would like to share with you some final thoughts from the teachers who responded to our survey, as well as some concluding remarks of our own, in section 9.2.

9.1 Teachers' Thoughts

We concluded by offering teachers the opportunity to share any final thoughts or suggestions about civic education in Texas that the survey did not cover.

These responses ranged from giving us critiques about the effectiveness of the survey, to requests for more information, to specific examples of the kinds of support or changes that teachers would like to see in the area of civics education.

However, one of the main themes emerging was that Texas teachers feel overburdened by the amount of standardized testing that they are required to prepare students for and because of this, they feel that civics often gets shortchanged in the classroom and curriculum.

A sample of comments:

- “Statewide assessments can be effective if developed with care and input from teachers. They are less effective when developed by those who also seek to sell a specific curriculum and then imposed from above. With regard to student-developed projects aimed at making policy change, extreme care must be taken in identifying areas to change and guidance must be provided to ensure that the changes for which they advocate are meaningful and positive, not merely socially popular or subject to their own personal whims.”

- “TIME is the most important element. We have so much to teach already and a limited amount of time.”
- “There needs to be less TEKS so there is more time to study civics.”
- “Establishing a strong partnership with local and state government organizations would be beneficial.”
- “I believe Civics should be a separate class.”
- “Dear God, do not introduce more statewide assessments. The ones that already exist have done enough damage.”
- “The best thing we could do is make Government a year long course instead of a semester.”
- “Other core subjects should participate in civic education as well.”
- “Civics integration in Math and Science could expand interest and knowledge.”
- “I see a great need for Civics being taught to our students. We do not have a sense of community as decades past. We NEED THIS. We DO NOT NEED to add it to already existing classes or subjects. The all encompassing STAAR tests (especially reading and math) already take up so much time in the school day. Why cant reading ELAR teachers institute reading skills by doing some of these topics. I know ELAR teachers that do this are very successful in project based learning and inspiring civic growth. As stated before, the TEKS for grade 8 Soc St are too numerous and cannot possibly put another factor in their courses. I would love to teach this in greater depth and attempt to layer it within my course.”
- “The last thing schools in Texas need is more testing! We don't have the time we need to complete the curriculum as it is.”

- “Students should be required to participate in some sort of community project as part of a civics course before they graduate from high school.”
- “Making available grade-level appropriate case studies linked to major concepts in civics and civil rights would be very helpful.”
- “I truly believe that students need to have a thorough understanding of government to be productive citizens. However, incorporating civics questions into the EOC or STARR is not the way to accomplish this. Teachers already have SO much curriculum to teach and so much pressure to increase student performance. Civic duty can't be tested, it must be learned through hands on experience.”
- “Teachers and administrators understand the importance of civics education. I do not feel that the state should create an assessment for civics. The EOC US History TEKS had suffered due to politicization (though I feel the recent streamlining of the TEKS has helped reduce this problem). The key support from the state would be to add, in a neutral manner, more civics TEKS into the 12th grade govt. class and make it a full credit/full year class. On a local level, teachers need more time to teach AP classes, especially since dual enrollment is taking away many of the more prepared and more motivated students. I would love to enroll in the CollegeBoard's new civic engagement program, but do not see where the additional time could come from. Most of students time is already taken up by band, UIL, One Act, etc.”
- “This is something that is built into all Social Studies curriculums but it is not always so easy to actually integrate. In theory, every student in every Social Studies class should be getting this, but it probably will not be the focal piece of any class other than government.”
- “Separating Civics from 8th grade Social Studies so more time could be spent on civics”

- “History and civics are not a priority to the district or the the school. They are only focused on math, reading and the staar scores. Civics or history classes get 45 minutes a day while English and math get 90 minutes every day. Teachers around the district allow their bias to enter their classroom and focus on their own political beliefs not teaching the civics and government aspect.”
- “I live in a rural community in West Texas and access to quality professional development is costly or non-existent. Bringing training to remote areas would be beneficial.”
- “Media literacy and discerning valid, factual media is very vital and overlooked.”
- “It should be built into the curriculum for each grade level. It should be scaffolded up through each grade level, culminating in a capstone project.”
- “Government is a required course, but 1) it's only one semester long, 2) civics education is largely ignored before students' senior year when they typically take government, 2b) if students drop out before their senior year, they've effectively had little to no civics education, 3) typically, government is a course reserved for educators whose priorities are expected to be focused on athletics over academics, 4) as it is not a tested subject, classes can be overfull and neglected (see item 3), 5) there is an accountability test for US History that does include some civics education, but that test seems constantly in danger of being scrapped also. Many cultural problems with teaching civics to students is symptomatic of problems in the larger community but it is difficult to overcome the apathy and skepticism about civic involvement if we don't bring up a new generation to revive and sustain democracy.”
- “It is our obligation to prepare the students to be fully functioning citizens. It should be done through practice. This requires a "buy in" at the district level. It needs less focus on the daily grind and more on the big picture. For the best interest of the students, do not create yet another standardized test to

'prove' their readiness. Include TEKS that require election participation during election years. (We created a lesson for World Geography, yet were banned at the district level from using it due to there not being a TEKS mandating the immersive activity.)”

- “Mandatory testing in the social studies should focus on civics rather than 8th/11th grade content knowledge.”
- “I think civic education has been taken for granted and has been reduced in importance as compared to STEM classes. Students have not been developed for critical thinking skills for things such as media literacy and life-long civic duties and responsibilities required of citizens in a republic. I think that knowledge in math and science is only able to be applied when it is understood by the people in social groups and implemented in political life.”
- “On the one hand I would like some sort of state-wide assessment so that I could see how my students are doing compared to students at other schools/districts. That being said, government is currently a non-tested subject, which takes away a lot of potential stress. The idea of government becoming a tested subject intimidates me due to fears of my students being unsuccessful. Part of that is on my teaching, but it's also hard to teach students complex civics ideas when reading and taking notes on three pages of a textbook takes them 40 minutes, and even then they don't really know how to take notes. There's so much background knowledge and study skills that I need to teach them in order for them to be successful, but there isn't enough time to do that and teach them the content.”
- “The reality is parents no longer talk with their children, so the children come to school with no political or civic knowledge or views. Texas history should be in elementary school taught as a story of truth to catch the children's interests. Students should have Geography in 6th grade, Civics in 7th grade, U.S. History 1 in 8th grade, World History in 9th Grade, U.S. History 2 in 10th grade, Government in 11th grade, and Economics in 12th grade. The electives such as Policy Debate, Sociology, Psychology, and Independent Research

Project in 11th and 12th grade. This is a more cohesive way to teach the topics.”

- “Civic Education should be taught as a separate content area because this is where we mold, teach, and model how to become a well rounded and responsible individual or citizen of this country. This is where students comprehend our society and government. How to become responsible and patriotic member of our growing diverse society.”
- “My students would benefit the most from being assessed on their knowledge of how to actually participate in politics, such as voting, or community organizing, being a part of a campaign, contacting a representative etc. Indifference toward politics is a big barrier with teenage students. I would also like to mention that many of the methods provided in this survey would be difficult to implement for students who lack background knowledge and adequate reading comprehension of standard news sources, and may not be actionable based on our current TEKS which is heavy on government function, and not so much on actual political participation. TEKS Resources is my main "planning" guide, as it is for many districts. Activities using the methods in this survey but based on the Instructional Focus Document (provided by TEKS Resource) by TEKS groupings (e.g. 8a, 8b, 8c), would be immensely helpful. A required, year long course would be ideal for the suggested methods.”
- “The iCivics program helped me a lot when I taught government/economics. When I taught Government & Economics to seniors and got the eligible ones registered to vote, I felt like it was one of the most important things I have ever done.”

9.2 Our Thoughts

This survey indicates that Texas teachers overwhelmingly view civics education as an important, and under-resourced area of the Texas school curriculum. They indicate that, in order for school districts to treat the subject as worthwhile, direction should come from the state in the form of some kind of accountability and assessment. Teachers also worry about the appearance of bias when left to their own devices in developing civics curriculum content. If offered additional training and professional development opportunities to improve their content and teaching practices, most teachers would be interested and enthusiastic.