

SB 29 – Civics Education in Alaska

What Research Says About Solutions

Two main documents have gathered an ideologically and demographically diverse national network of scholars, educators, and practitioners to synthesize expert judgment from the fields of history, political science, law, and education about recommended content, instructional strategies and policy changes.

[CivXNow State Policy Menu](#) (more course time, better assessment, revised standards, better PD, and training and community and school commitments) etc. The problems below are addressed in this policy menu.

[Educating for American Democracy Roadmap](#) (consensus regarding content and instructional strategies)

What Research Says about the Problems

Little Public Investment National concerns about security and global economic competitiveness roused America to invest \$2.9 billion per year over many decades to STEM education. At the federal level, we spend approximately \$50 per student per year on STEM fields, nearly a thousand times greater than the roughly 5 cents per student per year we spend on civics.

Lackluster National Testing On the most recent iteration of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) in Civics and U.S. History for 8th graders in 2018, only 24% and 15% of students demonstrated proficiency in these subjects, respectively. However, eighth graders whose social studies teachers spent at least three hours per week on the subject significantly outperformed peers on NAEP Civics compared to those with less instructional time.

Support for Democracy is in Decline In the United States, support for democracy, itself, and the country's democratic system of government is in steep decline, especially among the youngest generations. Whereas 72 percent of those born before World War II believe it "essential" to live in a democracy, only 30 percent of Millennials hold the same belief.

Weak Course and Time Requirements Most states require only a one-semester high school civics course, allotting just 3½ months of instruction to acquire essential civic knowledge and skills, a marked decline from requirements that once called for as many as three. At elementary levels, research has shown that over the last two decades, the nation has seen a significant decrease in time devoted to civics and social studies.

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Lack of Media Literacy Skills A 2019 study by the Stanford History Education Group explored a nationally representative sample of high school students' media literacy skills.⁵ Nearly all of the students failed to complete basic tasks like evaluating the source of a video claiming voter fraud, distinguishing between news stories and advertisements, and assessing the credibility of a website on climate change tied to the fossil fuel industry.

Professional Development Teachers rarely rate PD opportunities as “useful” and many have little control over the type of PD they receive. Civics PD is underfunded.

Teachers Need More Pre-Service Training There is a lack of uniform undergraduate pre-service requirements or certifications in civics, law, history, government and political science. Teachers are not equipped to help students master civics.

Assessment and Accountability If it isn't tested it isn't taught. Testing burdens in schools can be an issue, and while the Naturalization Test is one popular way to test knowledge, it does not measure skills, behaviors and attitudes. Many schools are moving towards project based assessments.

State Standards There is wide agreement among educators that state standards must address 4 main domains of learning: civic knowledge (understanding), civic skills (ability analyze), civic attitudes (value of democratic beliefs), and civic behaviors (civic habits: voting, volunteering).