

# **Preparing Citizens Report on Civic Learning and Engagement**

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**Prepared by the Working Group on Civic Learning and  
Engagement for the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary  
Education**

June 2015





*“There ought to be a happy convergence between the skills most needed in the global knowledge economy and those most needed to keep our democracy safe and vibrant.”*

-Tony Wagner from the Harvard Graduate School of Education

## Background and Overview

In February of 2014, in response to expressed concerns regarding the status of civic education in the Commonwealth's schools, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education held a special meeting to address this issue. Board members, representatives from higher education and representatives from the Special Commission on Civic Engagement and Learning chaired by Senator Richard Moore, and other interested parties met to engage in a conversation concerning the present condition of civic learning and consider strategies to improve it. As a result of the special meeting, a working group was formed.

The working group was charged with:

- Investigating further the current status of civic education and engagement, including review of the Report of the Massachusetts Commission on Civic Learning and Engagement 2012, Guardian of Democracy report and College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards;
- Identifying promising practices and existing resources used in schools and districts to maximize opportunities for students' civic education and engagement;
- Identifying opportunities for elevating civic education and engagement within existing curricular and program initiatives; and
- Identifying opportunities for collaboration with public higher education to develop a civic education and engagement "pathway" from K-16.

The group began its activity on June 13, 2014 and had its final meeting to approve this report on June 8, 2015. In the intervening twelve months we have met six times, conducted a public hearing, met with the State Student Advisory Council and two of its regional councils, partnered with the Massachusetts Association of Superintendents to conduct a survey of its members and interviewed a wide array of interested citizens including leaders of the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies (MCSS), the Massachusetts Campus Compact, the Massachusetts Service Alliance and other professional organizations.

The results of this work is presented in this report, including an overview of the present condition, of civic learning and engagement examples of promising practices, and a set of specific recommendations. We believe these recommendations point to a measured achievable way forward to fulfill our obligation to prepare the Commonwealth's next generation of citizens.

## The Current State of Civic Learning

In order to conduct this review the working group considered national and state initiatives. To focus this process we settled on both a working definition of civic learning and the civic competencies that should be the goals of this work.

### *Working Definition of Civic Learning<sup>1</sup>*

Civic learning means acquisition of the knowledge, the intellectual skills and the applied competencies that citizens need for informed and effective participation in civic and democratic

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<sup>1</sup> From the Board of Higher Education Policy on Civic Learning

life; it also means acquiring an understanding of the social values that underlie democratic structures and practices.

### ***Civic Competencies<sup>2</sup>***

Civic competency includes not only civic knowledge, but also civic skills and dispositions.

- **Civic Content Knowledge:** Civic content includes both core knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge to different circumstances and settings.
- **Civic Skills – Intellectual:** Intellectual civic skills encompass knowing how to identify, assess, interpret, describe, analyze and explain matters of concern in civic life.
- **Civic Skills – Participatory:** Civic participatory skills (applied competencies) encompass knowing how to work collaboratively in groups and organizational settings, interface with elected officials and community representatives, communicate perspectives and arguments, and plan strategically for civic change.
- **Civic Dispositions:** Civic dispositions encompass interpersonal and intrapersonal values, virtues and behaviors (respect for others, commitment to equality, capacity for listening, capacity to communicate in ways accessible to others, etc.).

## **National Perspectives on Civic Learning**

At the national level, a number of research studies and policy initiatives have combined to highlight the importance of civic learning as a fundamental requirement of democracy and the need to strengthen civic learning in the United States.

### **Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools (DOD) (2011)**

At the national level, one of the more influential efforts has been the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, led by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and former Congressman Lee Hamilton. In the original 2003 report, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, a broad group of scholars and practitioners called for educators, political leaders, funders and others to “build a richer, more comprehensive approach to civic education in the United States.” The 2011 follow-up report, *Guardian of Democracy*, reaffirms that earlier emphasis.

The overarching tenet of this report is that “investing in civic learning strengthens American democracy”. “Improving civic learning can address many of our democratic shortfalls,” namely, increasing democratic accountability of elected officials, improving public discourse and fulfilling our idea of civic equality. Civic learning will enhance civic knowledge, civic skills and civic dispositions.

The premise of the report states “...civic education not only increases citizen knowledge and engagement, but also expands civic equality, improves twenty-first century skills, and may reduce the dropout rate and improve the school climate” (Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Annenberg Public Policy Center). In addition, former justice Sandra Day O’Connor and former Congressman Lee Hamilton state in this report that, “Knowledge of our system of governance and our rights and responsibilities as citizens is not passed along through the gene pool. Each generation of Americans must be taught the basics.”

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<sup>2</sup> From Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools

The report encourages the adoption of six promising practices in providing “a well-rounded and high quality civic learning experience.”<sup>3</sup> In order to assure this, standards and assessments in civic education must be emphasized along with English, mathematics and science as a core subject along with expanded and improved professional development for pre-service and in-service educators.

### C3 Framework

Within education, a similar effort to increase the emphasis on civic learning and to increase the relevance of civic education has also been taking place. In 2013, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) released its College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History.

The College, Career, and Civic Life Framework, referred to as C3, moves beyond the two futures described in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for History and Social Science by encouraging the development of standards that support students’ learning to be actively engaged in civic life. Engagement in civic life requires knowledge and experience. Working singly or collaboratively, children learn to be citizens by connecting and interacting with community organizations and/or governmental agencies. Therefore, an essential element of social studies education is experiential - practicing the arts and habits of civic life.

C3 moves beyond the acquisition of knowledge, emphasizing the application of knowledge within the disciplines of civics, economics, geography, and history to prepare students for college, career, and civic life. C3 emphasizes application through the use of the Four Dimensions, a framework structure that requires students to:

1. Develop questions and plan inquires;
2. Apply disciplinary concepts and tools;
3. Evaluate and use evidence; and
4. Communicate conclusions and take informed action.

The C3 Framework is driven by the following shared principles about high quality social studies education:

- The social studies prepare the nation’s young people for success in college and career; as well as informed, engaged participation in civic life.
- Inquiry is at the heart of social studies instruction.
- The social studies involve interdisciplinary instruction and benefit from interaction with, and integration of the arts and humanities.
- The social studies are composed of deep and enduring understandings, concepts, and skills from the disciplines.
- The social studies emphasize skills and practices that prepare students for informed and engaged participation in civic life.

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<sup>3</sup> The six recommended practices include the following: Classroom Instruction, Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Issues, Service-Learning, Extracurricular Activities, School Governance, Simulations of Democratic Process. They are discussed in more detail in a later section of the report.

- Social studies education has direct and explicit connections to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies.

## National Assessment of Educational Progress<sup>4</sup>

The latest in a series of national assessments of civic knowledge among middle and high school students also reinforces the need to reinvigorate civic education nationally. The nation's 8<sup>th</sup> graders have made no academic progress in U.S. history, geography or civics since 2010, according to the latest test results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Fewer than one-third of students scored proficient or better on any of the tests and only three percent or fewer scored at the advanced level in any of the three subjects.

The NAEP findings, known as "The Nation's Report Card," were released in early May 2015. The tests were administered between January and March 2014 to a nationally representative sample of 29,000 8<sup>th</sup> graders at more than 1,300 schools across the country. Students were last tested in the subjects in 2010.

The results raised concern among some experts about their implications for the future of the United States and its place in the world. Some experts believe social studies education has become an afterthought, taking a back seat to more talked-about subjects such as English Language Arts, mathematics, and science, technology, engineering, or STEM disciplines.

Some of the details in the report:

- In U.S. history, 53 percent of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders tested scored in the "basic" range. Only 18 percent scored at or above "proficient," and only 1 percent scored "advanced." The average score was 267 out of 500, which is just 1 point higher than in 2010.
- In geography, 48 percent scored in the "basic" range, 27 percent scored at or above "proficient," and only 3 percent scored "advanced." The average score was 261 out of 500, exactly the same as it was in 2010.
- In civics, 51 percent of students scored "basic," 23 percent scored at or above "proficient," and 2 percent scored "advanced." The average score was 154 out of 300, 3 test-score points higher than in 2010, but not a jump that was considered statistically significant.<sup>5</sup>
- Many students' scores were below even the "basic" range. According to the report, 29 percent of students scored below basic levels in U.S. history, 25 percent in geography and 26 percent in civics.

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<sup>4</sup> from *Education Week*

<sup>5</sup> The 2010 NAEP Civic Assessment found similarly disturbing results for high school students: among the 12<sup>th</sup> graders tested, 64% scored at the "basic" level on the civics assessment, 24% scored at or above "proficient" and 4% scored at "Advanced." The scores reflected a slight (not statistically significant) drop in scores from 2006. See IES Center for Educational Statistics, Institute for Educational Sciences. The Nation's Report Card: Civics 2010. Washington: US Department of Education, NCES-2011-466.

Terry Mazany, the chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for NAEP, called the results “unacceptable.”

“Geography, U.S. history and civics are core academic subjects that must be a priority,” Mazany said in a statement. “They represent knowledge and skills that are fundamental to a healthy democracy. The lack of knowledge on the part of America’s students is unacceptable, and the lack of growth must be addressed.”

### **Policy Initiatives in Other States**

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University (CIRCLE) tracks and evaluates state policy initiatives throughout the country.

Of note are:

- Florida requires all middle school students to take a high stakes civics test.
- Tennessee requires a performance based assessment in civics for all students.
- Hawaii requires a high school course called “Participation in Democracy.” Students must select a problem, gather information, propose a solution, create and administer a plan and show evidence of implementation.
- Utah requires each district to submit an annual assessment on civic learning in their schools.
- Connecticut’s Board of Education adopted new social studies frameworks in February 2015 based on the C3.
- Arizona now requires all students to pass the United States citizens test to graduate from high school.

## **Civic Learning in the Commonwealth**

### **Report of the Special Commission on Civic Engagement and Learning**

In studying the status of civic education in the Commonwealth, the Special Commission examined the effectiveness of civic learning and engagement in the school districts of Massachusetts. Based on existing legislation (M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 2), NAEP (2010) results, CIRCLE reports and *Guardian of Democracy: Civic Mission of Schools*, and other testimonies, it made several recommendations to support the importance of civic learning and engagement in our K-16 school systems and for adult learning as well.

Some of the essential recommendations include the implementation of civic requirements throughout K-12 education, the development of model civics curriculum, the implementation of the MCAS History Standards Test and the encouragement of programs pursuant to student engagement. The overall intent is to elevate civic education as the primary aim of our public schools.

## Higher Education Civic Learning

### Report by the Study Group on Civic Learning and Engagement for the Board of Higher Education – March 2014

This report was an initial response to the 2010 Vision Project, whose key outcomes did not include references to preparation for citizenship. The ‘preparing citizens’ outcome was added in 2012 and the study group was charged with presenting recommendations and how to achieve it. The study group recommended to the Board of Higher Education that each institution of higher education should conduct an internal capacity assessment, include civic learning as an expected outcome in their strategic plans, enlist the support of faculty to develop appropriate infrastructure to measure student outcomes in civic learning, work in partnership with the K-12 sector in its “college readiness initiatives to insure that entering college students have the skills, experience and background knowledge to enable them to be successful in college ready civic learning.”

### Higher Education Civic Learning Policy – Adopted May 2014

The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) has adopted a first-in-the-nation state policy on civic learning for public colleges and universities and will work with the Commonwealth’s community colleges, state universities and University of Massachusetts campuses to incorporate civic learning as an "expected outcome" for undergraduate students beginning in the 2014-15 academic year.

The BHE encouraged the state’s public campuses to develop their own programs and curricula to foster civic learning as defined by the new policy. The policy also includes a four-point action plan to advance the system-wide goals through:

1. Attention to civic learning as a goal in campus strategic plans;
2. Facilitation and support for campus work in civic learning through conferences and meetings to share best practices and provide funding for campus projects;
3. Development of new ways to measure and report students' civic learning outcomes;
4. Collaboration with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop a cross-sector plan for civic learning from kindergarten through college.

The BHE Policy reaffirmed a March 2012 vote to add civic learning as a key outcome of the Vision Project, the state's strategic agenda to achieve national leadership among state systems of public higher education.

## Elementary and Secondary Education Civic Learning

Staff members at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (the Department) have provided the working group with relevant information regarding current practice in the Commonwealth.

### *The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for History and Social Science were adopted in 2003.*

- Preschool to Grade 7: Individual grade standards
  - Grade 2 and 3: Civics and government, economics, geography, New England and Massachusetts history
  - Grades 4 and 5: North American geography and history to about 1840

- Grades 6 and 7: Ancient and classical world history/civilizations and world geography
- Grades 8-12: year-long course standards
  - United States History I and II (c. 1750 – present)
  - World History I and II (c. 700 – present)
  - Economics
  - American Government

### *Civics-based Model Curriculum Units developed by the Department*

- Grade 1 – National and State Holidays
- Grade 1 – Patriotic Sons and Symbols
- Grade 2 – Civic Rights: Equality for All
- Grade 5 – Civic Education and Community Change
- Grade 4 – The Story of Immigration to Massachusetts
- Grade 7 – Model UN – Access to Clean Water
- Grade 8 – Words We Live By: The Fourth Amendment
- US History I – Constitutional Rights
- US History II – African American Civil Rights
- US History II – Grades 11-12 Massachusetts Remembers the Civil War

### *Course Data – 2014*

- Of 358 high schools in the Commonwealth:
  - 25.4 percent offered three or fewer electives in civics and History/Social Studies
  - 22.7 percent offered between ten and twenty two electives
  - The remainder fell somewhere in between
- MassCore recommends a minimum of three years of history and social science for high school graduation.
  - 72.4% of high school graduates completed the MassCore course sequence
  - 10,841 students took an AP U.S. History or AP U.S. Government and Politics exam

### *Community Service, Service-Learning, and High School Graduation Requirements*

- In 2014, approximately 20 percent (70) of Massachusetts high schools list community service hours and/or service-learning as a graduation requirement.<sup>6</sup>
- A 2001-2002 survey of Massachusetts districts conducted by the Service-Learning Advisory Council, found that at least a third of Massachusetts districts reported service-learning taking place in at least some schools, though relatively few districts (less than a third of those reporting) indicated service-learning took place school-wide. Not surprisingly, the report found that service-learning was most widespread in districts with explicit policy support through inclusion of service-learning in the district mission statement, hiring guidelines, and professional development budgets.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Based on a review of high school handbooks

<sup>7</sup> *Fulfilling Our Civic Mission: Service-Learning in Massachusetts: A Report by the Community Service-Learning Advisory Council to the Massachusetts Board of Education.* Malden: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. March 2006.

- From 1992 through 2012, Massachusetts received as much as \$800,000 per year in federal grants supporting service-learning activities in schools and community-based programs, and between 1997 and 2002, on average, approximately \$650,000 in additional state funds were designated to support youth civic engagement through service-learning. Both of those funding streams have now ended, though service-learning continues to be supported by staff at the Department.

### ***Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents Survey***

In Spring 2015, the working group surveyed Massachusetts superintendents about the status of civic learning in their districts. Of the 80 Superintendents who responded, 59.5 percent rated the level of civic learning in their districts as “insufficient; 39 percent reported that civic learning was “sufficient,” and only 1 percent indicated that it was “extensive”. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the Superintendents noted that their districts offered only “few/limited” or “occasional” opportunities for civic learning to their students, with only 4 percent reporting that students had “frequent” opportunities for civic learning.

While the majority of superintendents saw civic learning as limited in their districts, relatively few thought the answer lay in the creation of new civics or social studies tests. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the superintendents responded that they would not favor new civics or social studies testing. Typical comments on the survey included, “We have too many standardized tests already,” and “Civic learning happens through action and service, not test taking.”

The most frequent responses recommended increased service-learning, project-based learning opportunities, use of capstone projects and other experiential learning opportunities as the most effective strategies for enhancing civic learning. Similarly, when asked to highlight local practices that they believed were effective, Superintendents pointed toward a variety of hands-on learning opportunities: school-based community service and service-learning programs; simulation activities (such as mock elections and town meetings); capstone projects focused on community issues; visits and meetings with state and local officials; and student council activities, as well as regular civics courses.

### **Promising Practices**

The *Guardian of Democracy* recommends six proven practices that “constitute a well-rounded and high-quality civic learning experience.” The following provides a brief definition of these practices and highlights just a few of Massachusetts’ promising examples in each area.

These examples were gathered through research and outreach to partners in the field, as well as from the public forum held on January 22, 2015, and a survey of Massachusetts superintendents. There is currently no formal system in the Commonwealth for comprehensively tracking or measuring implementation of a quality civic learning program.

#### ***Classroom Instruction “Schools should provide instruction in government, history, economics, law and democracy.”***

The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks include standards for grades pre-Kindergarten through 12 that outline “the academic content, concepts, and skills in history, geography,

economics, and civics and government that are essential to the study of democracy, and to the development of educated and responsible citizens.”

- The Department, as part of Race to the Top, has developed over 100 Model Curriculum Units (MCUs.) These units are intended to help educators with implementation of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Thirty-six (36) MCUs were developed in the history/social sciences (H/SS) domain, at least ten of which have a specific civics focus.
- Approximately 46 percent (164) of the 358 secondary schools that offer electives in the history/social sciences domain offer between **one and five** such electives. About 23% offer **10 or more**. *(The thirty-four (34) schools that report offering **none** are not included in the percentages above and are primarily alternative schools, with a few charter schools and vocational schools as well.)*
- Hudson Public Schools requires that all 9<sup>th</sup> grade students take a year-long civics/English course that includes a service-learning component.
- Braintree Public Schools requires a course in government as a graduation requirement.
- At Andover High School, students can take an elective called Democracy in Action, which includes a focus on media literacy that teaches students to interpret and question media messages.
- The Greater Boston Project is an interdisciplinary senior elective course, now in its second year at Needham High School, where students explore how individuals and groups have worked throughout history to effect change in Greater Boston. Students look at different historical moments through a variety of different lenses - population, government, economy, education, and art & leisure - and consider how all of these moments have molded what we see in Greater Boston today. The course culminates in a community action project.
- At Millbury High School, the “We the People” program forms the third semester of a two year American History sequence. In each lesson, students are encouraged to discuss the principles and values of government in independent and also cooperative work. They are expected to take, evaluate and defend their positions. The culminating activity is a simulated congressional hearing whereby each student in the class participates through researched, prepared responses to the issues raised, as well as responding to questions raised by a panel of judges.
- Students in middle schools in Plymouth and Monomoy Regional School districts use “Project Citizen,” whereby each class discusses how public policy can be used to improve schools and communities, through work with governmental entities. Each class discusses an issue and plans a project to address that issue.
- Some superintendents reported that social studies content is being embedded in literacy units at the elementary level.

***Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Issues “Schools should 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.”***

- Some districts report offering social studies elective courses focused on current events and controversial issues, and superintendents report that most social studies courses include these types of discussions.

***Service-Learning “Schools should 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-learning is currently supported by the Department through professional development, and is an encouraged and/or required teaching and learning methodology within several initiatives. Educators throughout the Commonwealth are using service-learning across all content areas as a way for students to acquire new academic knowledge and skills while engaging in “apprentice citizenship.”

Service-learning is defined as: A teaching and learning methodology that challenges students to identify, research, propose and implement solutions to real needs in their school or community as part of their curriculum. (KIDS Consortium)

- Through the state-funded Quality Enhancements in After-School and Out-of-School Time grant, five school-community partnerships developed STEM Service-Learning curricula centered around the theme of ecosystems. Students discovered and investigated needs and problems in their communities related to ecosystems, they researched and proposed possible solutions, and then planned and implemented projects to help address the issues.
- In the summer of 2011, the state-funded Commonwealth Corps program supported a pilot initiative for summer academic and civic enrichment programming for middle school students at 15 sites throughout the Commonwealth. Fifteen partnerships among higher education, K-12 schools and other community partners provided 20-40 hours each week for 4-8 week programming that included academic enrichment each morning and service each afternoon. Students had access to higher education campus facilities for recreational and enrichment activities.
- In Malden, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, as part of their history/social studies curriculum, engage in Generation Citizen’s action civics program. Students choose an issue they care about, develop a focused, strategic plan to address the issue, take real action, and then reflect on their successes and challenges.
- The E3 Academy is an alternative program of Drury High School in North Adams, serving students who are under-credited and at risk of not completing high school. The school uses a competency-based curriculum to provide students with real world experiences as preparation for life, college and career. As a core instructional method, students engage in service-learning throughout the school year. These students have engaged in a variety of service-learning projects where they have developed and practiced new knowledge and skills that include: fostering river health and recreation, promoting city pride and the local economy through a marketing campaign, and developing and installing a “Voices of Youth” exhibit at a local gallery with the goal of increasing understanding between people of different ages and backgrounds.

- Worcester Public Schools is implementing Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) in all of the major high and middle schools. The elective includes a service-learning component as part of its academic instruction in critical reading and writing, organizational skills, college tutorial support and focus on higher order thinking skills.

*Extracurricular Activities “Schools should offer opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities outside of the classroom.”*

- The State Student Advisory Council was established by the Massachusetts State Legislature with Chapter 1009 of the Acts of 1971 as one of the first organizations to provide for direct student involvement in statewide decision-making in education. There are 460 students who participate on the regional councils, where they explore and address local education-related issues. Sixty-two of these students also participate on the state council, where they identify state-level education issues on which to work and make policy recommendations to the Department and Board. The students elect a state chair who serves as a full-voting member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- Many afterschool programs include service-learning and other civic learning opportunities. The Massachusetts federally-funded 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers program requires all sites to implement at least one service-learning project each year.
- The Massachusetts Association of Student Councils is comprised of member schools representing the four regional student councils of Massachusetts: the Southeast, Central District, Northeast, and Western Councils. MASC provides activities for both middle and high schools, providing a major opportunity for students to learn and apply leadership skills.
- Participating in National History Day, students choose historical topics related to a theme and conduct extensive primary and secondary research through libraries, archives, museums, oral history interviews, and historic sites. After analyzing and interpreting their sources and drawing conclusions about their topics’ significance in history, students present their work in original papers, websites, exhibits, performances, and documentaries. These products are entered into competitions in the spring at local, state, and national level, where they are evaluated by professional historians and educators. The Massachusetts History Day state competition is held each spring.
- Superintendents report offering other extracurricular programs that include, but are not limited to:
  - Rotary Early Act Club
  - ROTC
  - Model UN
  - Various after-school clubs engaged in service
  - Peer-leadership programs
- Falmouth Public Schools provides all graduates with the opportunity to register to vote at their commencement ceremony.

*School Governance “Schools should encourage student participation in school governance.”*

- Massachusetts law requires that schools containing any of grades nine to twelve must include at least one student on its school council. (Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, Section 59C)
- Massachusetts law requires that school committees meet at least every other month with a student advisory committee, which consists of five students elected by the student body of the high school(s) in the district. The members of the student advisory committee elect a chairperson who serves as an ex-officio, nonvoting member of the school committee, without the right to attend executive sessions unless such right is expressly granted by the individual school committee. (Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, Section 38M)
- Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) is a citywide body of elected student leaders representing most Boston Public School high schools. BSAC works to identify and address pertinent student issues. BSAC students have led organizing efforts, forged relationships with district and city leaders, impacted policy change, and transformed school culture across the board. BSAC has played a key role in advising the School Committee and the Superintendent on district policy, working with the Headmasters on student climate issues, and informing students of their rights and responsibilities under district rules. [from the BSAC website]

*Simulations of Democratic Process “Schools should encourage students to participate in simulations of democratic process and procedures.”*

- Student Government Day involves nearly 400 students annually. Students (elected at their schools to participate) simulate the democratic process in the Commonwealth, with opportunities to: give testimony before a legislative committee comprised of their peers; debate legislation on the floor of the House or Senate; or observe state government from the perspective of a constitutional officer or Supreme Court justice.
- The Edward M. Kennedy (EMK) Institute for the United States Senate offers a free Senate Immersion Module experience for Massachusetts students (grades 8-12), during which students experience a hands-on approach to learning about representation and the legislative process. Students work together to create a bill on an historic issue or current policies affecting the country. The EMK Institute also provides curriculum resources to accompany these experiences.
- Discovering Justice partners with schools to provide civics/social studies curriculum and justice-oriented experiential programming in courthouses, including mock trials for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, and a constitutional appellate field trip for middle school students. The Stand Up for Your Rights program engages teams of volunteer lawyers with teams of middle school students to work together at law firms or legal offices. The program culminates in a mock trial or appellate argument in a real courthouse with a real judge presiding, in front of families, friends, lawyers, educators, and community members.

**These promising practices have become widely accepted as effective strategies for civic learning. The working group believes that these six promising practices should form the basis**

of school and district strategies for civic learning experiences for all students PK-12 throughout the Commonwealth.

## Recommendations

We believe effective civic education for all students PK-12 is a core responsibility of education in the Commonwealth.

### *1. Revise the definition of college and career readiness to include readiness for civic life.*

A common definition of college and career readiness was approved by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on February 26, 2013, and the Board of Higher Education on March 12, 2013. The BHE Policy on Civic Learning acknowledges that “the specific civic learning competencies which entering college students should demonstrate are not discussed in [this] definition. Addressing this gap should be part of our overall approach to civic learning and college readiness.” The study group on civic learning recommended that “for this discussion, the [BHE] should collaborate with its colleagues at the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Executive Office of Education.” We agree. To establish a working group for this purpose would send a clear and certain message about the importance of civic learning.

### *2. Establish a statewide network of regional advisory councils that will provide the Board with advice and recommendations to improve and enrich civic learning in the Commonwealth.*

The purpose of this process will be to empower a wide range of K-16 educators, their partners in school committees, government, business, non-profits, and communities to provide concrete, specific recommendations to the Board regarding civic learning.

We envision five regional councils established along the geographic configurations of our existing State Student Advisory Council. These councils would convene at least three times annually and in early winter select delegates to attend an annual convention in the spring of each year to prepare a report on the state of civic learning in the Commonwealth that would contain specific recommendations for improvement. The Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate has agreed to serve as our partner in this endeavor and has offered to host the annual convening of delegates. This report would be presented annually to the Board in June.

Our working group recommends that the first charge given to the advisory councils be to devise and recommend a model for schools and districts to assess effectiveness and measure progress in civic learning across the six promising practices. (See recommendation 6.)

***3. Convene an annual conference sponsored by the Department and planned in partnership with the many professional organizations committed to effective instructional practice in history, social studies and civics. This conference should have as its goal the identification and promulgation of promising practices in civic learning across all disciplines.***

In recent years the Department's efforts to collaborate with teachers and school leaders relative to instruction and curriculum have been dominated by work in the priority areas of implementation of the revised English and mathematics frameworks, and work in the STEM disciplines and teacher evaluation. There has been no statewide convening of practitioners in history, social studies and civics in recent memory. To do so would be an appropriate response to the issues raised in this report.

***4. Initiate the process to revise the 2003 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework and, in doing so, consider developments in the field that, if thoughtfully integrated into our existing frameworks, could enhance the effectiveness of civics instruction.***

We refer specifically to the integration of the C3 Framework which begins with the acquisition of knowledge and emphasizes skills and practices that prepare students for informed and engaged participation in civic life.

***5. Establish funding to support district adoption and expansion of the six promising practices in civic learning. Three specific ideas would be to:***

- a) Offer grants to match local education funds and/or other partners to expand and improve local practice;***
- b) Offer grants to existing educational collaboratives to establish dissemination projects; and***
- c) Dedicate funds to support professional development in these areas.***

Local education funds have grown in recent years to a place where they have a viable role in many districts to support innovative practice. Collaboratives maintain unrealized potential to support innovation through dissemination in the regions they serve. Professional development is a cost-effective strategy for improving and sustaining effective practice.

***6. Develop a strategy to assess each school and district's effectiveness in developing and delivering sound civic instruction, including ample opportunities for community engagement and varied practice in democratic processes to ensure every Massachusetts student graduates from high school prepared for active citizenship.***

The Department will work with the regional advisory councils and the Department of Higher Education to develop these strategies to allow for state-wide application and to support schools/districts in this work, with the goal of presenting initial ideas at the 2016 promising practices conference.

## Next Steps: Fall 2015

The working group recommends the following next steps:

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will communicate with the Board of Higher Education and the Secretary of Education its interest in revising the current definition of college and career readiness with the specific purpose of expanding that definition to include readiness for civic life.

By September 2015 the Commissioner will establish a Steering Committee to establish a framework for the regional advisory councils with the goal of initial meetings before Thanksgiving. The members of the steering committee shall include individuals with expertise in the six promising practices, representative of PK-16, school committee, government, business, non-profits, communities, and others as appropriate.

By September 2015 the Commissioner will establish a planning group composed of appropriate Department staff and representatives from stakeholder groups whose goal will be to present a conference on best practice in civic learning in the spring of 2016.

By October 2015 the Commissioner will initiate the process to revise the 2003 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for History and Social Science.

## Conclusion

There is some civic learning in every school in the Commonwealth. In many it is adequate. In a few it is exceptional. Presently, there is no reliable way to quantify this impression. Yet, overall, we concur with the view of the 60% of the Superintendents surveyed who deem it “insufficient” in their own districts.

Our recommendations are designed to do three things:

- **Raise the profile of civic learning by including it in the core purpose of public institutions of learning.**
- **Begin a patient, inclusive process that will result in our ability to quantify effective practice in every school in the Commonwealth.**
- **Support and expand effective civic learning through the professional development of teachers and funding the adoption and expansion of promising practices.**

It is the intent of the working group to provide specific recommendations that are achievable within the present context in which we operate. This context is defined by two larger realities.

First, many teachers, school and district leaders believe the ambitious agenda put forth by the Board and the Department has provided them with more than enough to accomplish and has limited, to a degree, a school or district’s capacity to embark on initiatives of their own choosing. The working group has sympathy with this perspective and has attempted to propose a set of recommendations that will require balance, patience and collaboration to achieve.

Second, the Department will be expected, at least in the short term, to maintain its present pace in advancing current initiatives with fewer fiscal and human resources. We recognize the potential for the activity we seek to further overextend those who are already overextended. We have sympathy with this circumstance as well. Yet, the purpose this report has been too long deferred. We suggest a modest set of next steps that point the way forward. We need to proceed.

Respectfully Submitted,  
The Working Group on Civic Learning and Engagement  
June 8, 2015

Membership:

- Vanessa Acheampong, regional program manager, Today's Students Tomorrow's Leaders, Worcester
- Maureen Binienda, principal, South High School, Worcester
- Roger Desrosiers, president, Massachusetts Center for Civic Education
- Daniel Gutekanst, superintendent, Needham Public Schools
- Kristen McKinnon, service-learning and student engagement specialist, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Alan Melchior, deputy director, Center for Youth and Communities, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University
- Elena Quiroz, academic policy and project coordinator, Department of Higher Education
- John Reiff, director of civic learning, Department of Higher Education
- David Roach, vice chair, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Mark Wilson, educational consultant

## Appendices

- [Board of Higher Education Civic Learning Policy](#)
- [Preparing Citizens Report on Civic Learning and Engagement](#)
- [The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement \(CIRCLE\)](#)
- [The C3 Framework - National Council for the Social Studies](#)
- [Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools \(2012\)](#)
- [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) - Civics Assessment](#)
- [Report of the Massachusetts Commission on Civic Learning and Engagement 2012](#)
- MASS Survey Results Report (pdf attached)