

# A Brief History of Civics Education in Colorado

"The practice of democracy is not passed down through the gene pool.

It must be taught and learned by each new generation."

Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

We must empower every Colorado student to become a confident, capable participant in our democracy by providing them with real-world civic engagement opportunities that build constitutional understanding and sharp decision-making skills. Currently, some Colorado teachers and schools partner with a variety of high quality civic engagement opportunities for students that build practical skills and understanding. However, giving all students access to engaging civics learning is challenging because many Colorado children do not get access to civics topics until high school. At Civics for Colorado, we aim to ensure each student has access to engaging and authentic civics education throughout their school experience.

## Timeline of Civics Education in Colorado understanding.

1993

The Colorado Department of Education began developing statewide academic standards for Social Studies, including civics.

2004

The Colorado State Legislature made civics a graduation requirement for all high school students.

2015

Colorado state social studies assessments included civics content. Every three years, 1/3 of Colorado students are tested on social studies standards and those tests include civics questions. Drawing conclusions on student achievement of civic standards is not possible because of the changing test schedules and the inclusion of multiple social studies standards.

2019

The Colorado State Legislature created a *History, Culture, Social Contributions, and Civil Government in Education Commission* (HB 19-1192) which expanded civics standards to include the experiences and contributions of diverse communities across Colorado.

2021

The Colorado Senate passed SB 21-067 to strengthen Civics in Colorado by confirming Constitutional principles and three branches are in the state curriculum and by adding requirements to study the formation of the Colorado Constitution.

2025

Students from the Colorado Youth Advisory Council called on lawmakers to create a *Civics Trust*—a proposed initiative to fund teacher training, curriculum development, and field trips to strengthen civics education statewide. This idea continues to be under consideration for the 2026 legislative session.

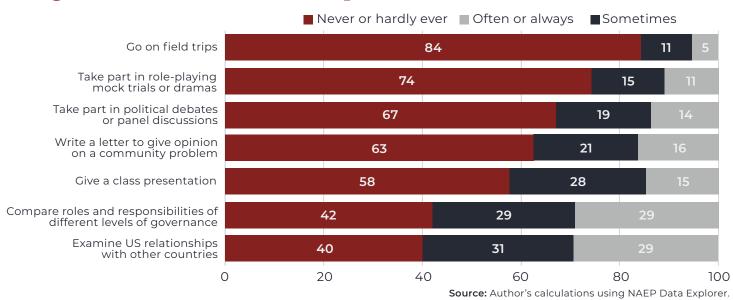
2025

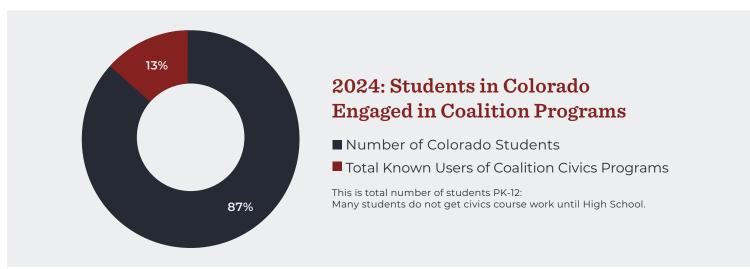
Civics for Colorado was founded to ensure every Colorado student is equipped to participate thoughtfully and effectively in our democracy. Civics for Colorado is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to sparking civic engagement across all generations in Colorado.

Civics for Colorado aims to provide students and educators with tools and opportunities to engage deeply in civic learning by:

- Convening a coalition of stakeholders who advocate for civics education
- Increasing access to professional learning for teachers to empower them in delivering effective civics education.
- · Championing real-world civic engagement opportunities for students that build practical skills and understanding.

### Eighth-Grade Students' Participation in Civic-Oriented Activities





## 2024: Colorado Student Connections to Coalition Programs



# The Path Forward

Our vision is that every Colorado student is equipped to participate thoughtfully and effectively in our democracy. We believe the most effective strategy to achieve this vision is to equip teachers with the tools and resources they need for high quality, experiential learning.

The funding landscape for public education in Colorado is one of the bleakest in our nation. At a time when many schools can barely afford to stay open 5 days a week and many teachers have to take on second jobs to make ends meet, some might ask—why civics?

—- Our future is uncertain. As we head into the 250th anniversary of our democratic republic, and the 150th anniversary of the state of Colorado, we know that our society must tackle complex problems head on. We also know that students who graduate with proficiency in civic competencies gained through high quality civic learning practices are "equipped to address complex challenges, work and study with diverse colleagues, and creatively solve problems that do not have easy solutions."

In order to achieve this, we propose multiple potential paths forward. These paths require private funders, legislators, government officials, and educators to come to the table in good faith and find a way to make these ideas become a reality.

#### Programmatic

• Build a Civics Hub through the Civics for Colorado Coalition to be the leading resource for information on high quality civics education in Colorado.

#### Legislative

- Funding for professional development and student resources<sup>2</sup> for civic education programs (See 2024-25 COYAC Bill proposal).
- Establish a state-sponsored Civic Seal program

# Engaged Citizens Are:

- · concerned for the rights and welfare of others
- socially responsible
- willing to listen to alternative perspectives
- confident in their capacity to make a difference
- ready to contribute personally to civic and political action



They strike a reasonable balance between their individual interests and the common good while recognizing the importance of practicing civic duties such as voting and respecting the rule of law.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>J. Torney-Purta and B.S. Wilkenfeld, Paths to 21st Century Competencies Through Civic Education Classrooms: An Analysis of Survey Results from Ninth-Graders. A Technical Assistance Bulletin. (Chicago, Ill.: American Bar Association Division for Public Education, 2009)

Resources would primarily be used to pay for costs associated with field trips to enable students far from the Capitol to visit hubs of civic activity in the state.



"Further threatening the civic health of our nation is the civic opportunity gap that emerges when schools provide marginalized communities with fewer and less high-quality civic learning opportunities than they provide to middle class and wealthy white students-all of this at a time when democratic aspirations are surging across the globe."

National Council for the Soocial Studies- Feb 2025

### **Partners**

- All Sides
- Civics Bee
- ICivics
- National History Day
- CO Judicial Outreach
- Bill of Rights Institute
- The Center for Civic Education

# Adult & Student Perceptions on Civic Learning



Over 93% of both Democrats, Republicans, and Independents believethat it is more important for students to learn how the US government works.



90% of Students Agree

It is important that I know how American government works. 85% of Students Agree

It is important to understand American history and the events that shaped the United States. 90% of Students Agree

It is important to learn about other races and cultures.



(USC EdPolicy HUB, 2025) civiced.org I 60 Years of Civic Education



