

Illinois Civic Mission Coalition
Civic Audit for Illinois High Schools

WHAT IS A DEMOCRACY SCHOOL?

Illinois *Democracy Schools* are those that provide students with authentic experiences in the rights, responsibilities, and tensions inherent in living in a constitutional democracy. They are schools which consciously promote civic engagement by all students, which have an intentional focus on fostering participatory citizenship, and which place an emphasis on helping students understand how the fundamental ideals and principles of our democratic society relate to the problems, opportunities and controversies that matter in the present.

Democracy Schools collaborate with parents, students, and their communities in developing a civic mission and in providing curricular and extra-curricular civic learning experiences for students.

Evidence of these characteristics can be found in students' classrooms and formal learning opportunities, in their interactions with school governance structures, and in the opportunities for civic growth provided through service learning and extra-curricular activities.

PURPOSE OF THIS CIVIC AUDIT

The goal of this Civic Audit is not to test the civic knowledge of students, but rather to help Illinois high schools identify opportunities for civic learning. Additionally, this Civic Audit will help Illinois high schools identify where they can better align their curriculum, standards, and extra-curricular opportunities to meet their civic mission.

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INDICATOR 1: Formal instruction in U.S. government, history, law and democracy using interactive methods and opportunities to apply learning to "real life" situations	What is our school already doing?	Where do these opportunities exist and who has access to them?					Notes
	Description of current activities	Course	Teacher	Grade	% of Students	Current Support/ Resources	
Constitution and its fundamental principals as applied to the past and the present							
U.S. History and its major themes							
Structure and process of government and elections over time							
The powers and limitations of branches of government at the federal, state, and local levels							
Legal system depicted realistically showing ways in which it has changed and can change to reflect "a more perfect union"							
Diverse values, opinions, and how they are rep. by elected officials							
Relationship between government and other sectors							
Explicit connections with formal instruction and concrete actions							
Includes material not contained in text book, particularly primary source materials							
Includes visits from people in the community to learn about important events and ideas							
Includes the role of citizen as the most important role in a democracy							
Marked by active discussion and debate and other interactive methods such as role plays, mock trials, or dramas							
Reflects key democratic knowledge, skills and concepts							
Connects to students' lives							

Note: For the purposes of these indicators, see the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Studies (Goals 14-18).

For example, Goal 14.D.5 the standard for late high school expects the student to interpret a variety of public policies and issues from the perspectives of different individuals and groups. Likewise, Goal 16.A.4a standard for early high school suggests the student be able to analyze and report historical events to determine cause-and-effect relationships.

The Illinois Standards can be found at: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/social_science/standards.html

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INDICATOR 2: Discussion of current events that students view as important to their lives; discussion puts formal civic instruction in context of current political and social context	What is our school already doing?	Where do these opportunities exist and who has access to them?					Notes
	Description of current activities	Course	Teacher	Grade	% Students.	Current support/resources	
Controversial public issues (local, national, and international) are discussed							
Students are informed about public issues through a variety of sources, including newspapers and other media							
Discussion is balanced and does not indoctrinate							
Students have opportunities to speak and feel welcome to participate from a variety of perspectives							
There is a focus on an interpretable text, issue, or idea							
Open-ended (authentic) questions are asked--ones for which there is no obvious answer							
Relevant background knowledge, including life experience, is used in a logical way							
Different opinions are expressed, heard, respected, understood, and analyzed							
Participation is not centered on any one person							
Students are engaged intellectually and emotionally							
Students develop reasoned positions using ideas and arguments presented in the discussion							

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INDICATOR 3: Service-Learning	What is our school already doing?	Where do these opportunities exist and who has access to them?					Notes
	Description of current activities	Course	Teacher	Grade	% Students.	Current support/resources	
Is part of the broader educational philosophy of the school and reflected in the school's mission statement							
Is used to consciously pursue civic outcomes							
Allows students to engage in meaningful work on public issues with a chance of seeing positive results							
Students have a role in choosing and designing their projects and strategies							
Allows students to reflect on their experiences and work							
Is linked to academic learning and the broader curriculum							
Encourages students to assess political problems and pursue political responses while maintaining a non-partisan classroom setting							
Increases student's community knowledge (i.e. identifying key organizations and individuals in the community; policies and issues that affect the community; and the community's strengths, needs, and challenges)							
Encourages leadership skills (i.e. Communicating effectively; organizing others toward a shared vision; developing a plan to solve problems; willingness to take risks and accept failure; serving as a role model)							
Encourages civic commitment (i.e. Participating in civic dialogue; taking action to solve problems; working for the common good)							
Service is not altruism or charity but rather a contribution to the public good							

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INDICATOR 4: Extra-Curricular Activities	What is our school already doing?	Where do these opportunities exist and who has access to them?					Notes
	Description of current activities	Course	Teacher	Grade	% Students.	Current support/ resources	
Multiple opportunities for involvement in school or community							
Students are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities							

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INDICATOR 5: Student Voice in School Governance	What is our school already doing?	Where do these opportunities exist and who has access to them?					Notes
	Description of current activities	Course	Teacher	Grade	% Students	Current support/	
Students have opportunities to discuss school policies and weigh-in							
Student have opportunities to be heard respectfully							
Students have established mechanisms and processes to discuss and respond to school policies							
Students are informed of their rights and responsibilities in school							
There are opportunities to work with others to address school problems							
There is a process for students to air their grievances, including issues of fairness							
Meaningful decision-making about facets of school life that are important to students							
Students have roles in resolving tensions and issues in school							
School has established mechanisms and processes by which to gauge and respond to student voices							

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INDICATOR 6: Simulations of democratic processes and procedures	What is our school already doing?	Where do these opportunities exist and who has access to them?					Notes
	Description of current activities	Course	Teacher	Grade	% Students	Current support/resources	
Students practice democratic roles and processes in a safe way							
Students learn important civic content and skills							
<i>Note: Classroom-based examples might include mock trials, legislative hearings, public policy forums, peer teaching.</i>							
<i>External examples might include Model UN, Youth Summits, Political Campaigns.</i>							