

A CIVIC LEARNING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COLLABORATION

# #GETCIVIC

Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center  
Oakland, California

Institute for Community Leadership  
Kent, Washington



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF OAKLAND  
PRESENT THIS 2017

**“MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK AWARD”**  
TO THE MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. FREEDOM CENTER

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## WHAT IS CIVIC LEARNING?

Civic learning provides students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to be informed and engaged participants in our democracy. Research identifies six proven practices in civic learning:

1. Providing classroom instruction in Government, History, Law, Economics, and Democracy
2. Combining community service and learning
3. Discussing current events
4. Giving students a voice in school governance
5. Offering extracurricular clubs
6. Simulating democratic processes<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Civic engagement works to increase access and participation in voting, voter registration and voter education. However, democracy relies on many other expressions of civic engagement in order to function. Civic engagement also involves understanding of government structures and functions, getting to know how government works, communicating with elected officials and public workers, understanding the relationship between community problem solving and how decisions are made, and how we can individually and collectively strengthen our role in shaping the laws, structures, and systems that impact our day-to-day lives.

## WHAT IS #GETCIVIC?

#GETCIVIC is a civic learning and engagement collaboration between the Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center, Oakland, CA and the Institute for Community Leadership, Kent, WA. The collaboration is designed to strengthen school and community efforts at increasing civic learning and civic engagement in schools, and in community life.



Rebecca & Albertina registering voters at a community event with the Freedom Center's and Institute's civic education project.

## BENEFITS OF CIVIC LEARNING

### 1. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The American public and business community are keenly interested in youth developing the competencies necessary to thrive in a changing global economy. Civic learning not only enhances knowledge of economic and political processes, but supports college and career readiness through opportunities for youth to apply academic concepts in real-world settings, work collaboratively in teams, and engage with professional role models.

### 2. SCHOOL CLIMATE

Civic learning builds a positive school climate, which in turn has a positive impact on a wide range of outputs for students, ranging from academic achievement to personal character. Research shows that providing opportunities to engage in civic learning teaches the importance of community (both within the school and more broadly). Respectful dialogue about controversial issues is foundational to a positive school climate. The benefits of civic learning in one classroom can help shape the norms of other classrooms and the school more broadly.

### 3. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND REDUCING THE DROP-OUT RATE

Civic learning provides compelling, motivating, and challenging experiences that can keep kids in school. Civic learning, beginning in elementary and middle school with a focus on civic responsibility, is directly tied to a student's propensity to drop out of high school. More than 80% of students who drop out indicate that they would have been more likely to stay in school if they had more opportunities to participate in experiential learning. In particular, taking courses that require community service and participating in student government have been found to predict high school graduation and college attendance and success.<sup>2</sup>

### 4. SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Civic engagement provides opportunity to develop one's voice, increase self-confidence, assist in developing the capacity to work as a part of a team, strengthen social emotional skills. Research affirms socioemotional skills, of perseverance, attention, motivation and self-confidence as important determinants of socioeconomic success. Further, they are also determinants of performance in society at large, and in in test scores used to measure academic success.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Gould, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Peter Levine, Ted McConnell, and David B. Smith, eds., (2011), *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*

<sup>2</sup> California Task Force on K-12 Learning, (2014), *Revitalizing K-12 Civic Learning in California: A Blue Print for Action*

<sup>3</sup> Heckman, (2008), *The Case for Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children*; Bohlke, (2013), *Academic & Civic Engagement Impact of Nonviolence Leadership Education*

Proven Practice	Old Civics	Active Civics	Implementation
Classroom Instruction	High-quality instruction is the foundation of civic learning, but students are unlikely to view tedious facts about dull procedures as essential to their future role as engaged, informed citizens.	Classroom instruction is relevant and interesting to students. Content reflects real-lived struggles, racial and economic diversity, controversy, current events, and local issues and campaigns of concern to the students.	<p><b>We The People:</b> Promotes civic competence and responsibility among upper elementary and secondary students through interactive strategies, and a simulated congressional hearing.</p> <p><b>Project Citizen:</b> Teaches middle school students how to identify, research, draft, and present solutions for local problems.</p> <p><b>Restorative Justice:</b> Teaches students the framework for repairing harm caused by criminal behavior. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that include all stakeholders in fact-to-face circles.</p>
Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Issues	Political controversy is a natural part of the democratic process; however, civic learning often fails to address or include such controversy. Consequently, students may not learn how to engage constructively with political issues and events that affect them.	Classroom discussions center on current local, national, and international issues and events, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives. A safe and supportive environment is fostered that assures differing views and beliefs are encouraged and affirmed.	<p><b>Institute for Community Leadership:</b> Provides professional development and classroom instructional content engaging students in culturally relevant community-based problem solving, speaking from the heart, and sharing core beliefs and values which increases respect for peers and authority, self-esteem and social emotional learning.</p> <p><b>Deliberating in a Democracy:</b> Teaches students how to deliberate controversial public issues.</p>
Community Service and Learning	Past civic education typically required students to complete a number of service hours that were unrelated to course work. This was volunteerism, not active engagement in one's community.	Active civics encourages the design and implementation of programs that provide students with opportunities to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom activities.	<p><b>Chicago Public Schools Service-Learning Initiative:</b> Chicago uses service-learning to deepen and extend the classroom for high school students across subject areas to improve academic achievement, build social skills, and develop civic skills and dispositions.</p> <p><b>Guilford County Schools, NC Character Education Initiative:</b> Through Guilford County's Character Development Initiative (developed to address a district strategic plan goal of providing students "the tools and motivation necessary to positively impact [the] world") students may earn a Service-Learning Diploma.</p>
Extracurricular and Out-of-school Activities	Historically, extracurricular activities were viewed as peripheral to high-quality civic learning and instruction in general.	Supports campaigns and activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in real issues. These activities must be viewed as indispensable to civic education and may include electoral education and participation, testimonies in public bodies, and meetings with key decision makers.	<p><b>Martin Luther King Jr Freedom Center:</b> Works with school personnel to engage students in community problem-solving campaigns, public lectures, public speaking in legislative bodies and electoral participation.</p> <p><b>Mock Trials:</b> Many state bar associations collaborate with schools to engage students of all levels in mock trial projects.</p>
School Governance	In the past, student councils generally made inconsequential decisions on social matters rather than dealing with true governance issues and addressing student concerns.	Student councils and other school governance opportunities are viewed as laboratories for students to gain practical experience in civics and democracy.	<p><b>The California Association of Student Councils:</b> Involves students in activities and programs outside the classroom that build citizenship and encourage self-esteem.</p> <p><b>The Colorado Youth Advisory Council:</b> Supports students in examining, evaluating, and discussing the issues affecting Colorado youth. Through the Council, students formally advise and make recommendations to elected officials on such issues.</p>

<sup>4</sup> Chart taken from the National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement, (2014), *Guidebook: Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning* with additions made by, #GETCIVIC Collaboration Partners

## With Special Appreciation and Recognition to #GETCIVIC Collaborators and Partners

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Council on Public Legal Education, Seattle, WA  
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Pierce College, Lakewood, WA  
Quinault Indian Nation, Taholah, WA  
Seattle Foundation, Seattle, WA  
Tacoma Community College, Tacoma, WA  
United Parcel Service, Northwest Region, Seattle, WA  
Washington Education Association, Federal Way, WA  
Working America, California

### Additional Civic Education and Engagement Efforts

*National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement, Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning*  
[http://www.lawforwa.org/sites/default/files/ECS%20Six%20Prov%20Pract%20Guidebook\\_0.pdf](http://www.lawforwa.org/sites/default/files/ECS%20Six%20Prov%20Pract%20Guidebook_0.pdf)

*League of Women Voters, The State We're In, Washington, Civic Education Text*  
[http://www.lawforwa.org/sites/default/files/StateWereIn-CompleteBook-Updated-2-14\\_0.pdf](http://www.lawforwa.org/sites/default/files/StateWereIn-CompleteBook-Updated-2-14_0.pdf)

*Center for Civic Education, National Standards for Civic and Government*  
[http://www.lawforwa.org/sites/default/files/53858149-National-Standards-for-Civics-and-Government\\_0.pdf](http://www.lawforwa.org/sites/default/files/53858149-National-Standards-for-Civics-and-Government_0.pdf)

*Council for Public Legal Education (CPLÉ)*  
<http://www.lawforwa.org/>

*CPLÉ Civic Learning Initiative*  
<http://www.lawforwa.org/sites/default/files/Civic%20Learning%20Initiative%20LC.pdf>

*California Power of Democracy*  
<http://www.powerofdemocracy.org>

*The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)*  
<http://civicyouth.org>

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