

Proponent Testimony HB2573 Civics Test
Representative Steve Huebert
February 3, 2021

Last year, in a major survey, less than half of the people could name the three branches of government. This was an improvement over the previous Annenberg survey. Dismal. 20% of those surveyed could not name one branch.

Jefferson believed the people needed education in order to keep our fragile democracy safe. We need to understand our history, the structure our country is built on, and what part we each play in keeping democracy strong. As a high school student, I attended Boys State and that engagement and education changed my life. I learned what was possible, and what part I could play in it.

The Kansas City Star described me as a lone wolf in my effort to shine a light on the importance of Civics Education. With Attorney General Schmidt and others by my side, I feel we are becoming a wolf pack – with the goal of protecting the gift of democracy and the Constitution. We protect when we educate. Without solid ground, the structures, the branches of government, free and open elections, will crumble.

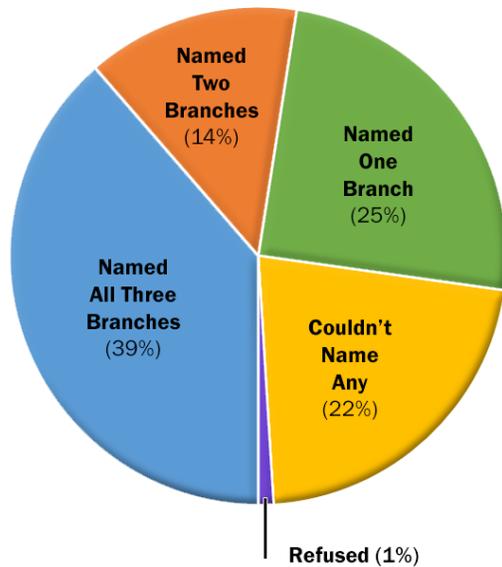
There is a movement in many states to focus on a Civics Test that is necessary for graduation. 20 states have updated their statutes to require students to learn the basic structure of our democracy. This requirement makes clear to students and the public that knowing how our system of democracy works, and what our history is, what our constitution does – these are so important that every student should be able to pass a test, like those applying to become citizens, our students should know as much and be as motivated to be part of the country. Just like math students need to learn the basic principles of multiplication in order to study physics and engineering – so all citizens need to understand the basic principles of how democracy works in order to participate for the rest of their lives.

I want to work with the Kansas State Board of Education. I respect that curriculum and standards decisions come from the State Board of Education. However, in this area, the legislature is given the task of ensuring that students are educated in Civic Government. I don't see this as a criticism of or power struggle with the State Board. This is a way of highlighting and adding to the importance of this area of study. We are all in this together; let's do what we all can to make Civic Education as important as it should be.

Therefore, I urge the Committee to vote yes to pass HB2039 favorably and do our part in encouraging and motivating Civic Involvement.

Representative Steve Huebert

Percentage of people who can name the three branches of government



Source: Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey, August 16-27, 2019
(Note: Does not add up to 100% due to rounding of decimals.)
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Links:

Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey articles:

<https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/americans-civics-knowledge-increases-2019-survey/>

<https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/political-communication/civics-knowledge-survey/>

[Huebert Podcast on Civics Test January 29, 2021](#)

Attached:

Kansas City Star Article by Michael Ryan on the Civics Test discussion in the Kansas Legislature *“What’s so wrong with a Kansas Civics Test?”*

Opinion

What's so wrong with a Kansas school civics test?



BY MICHAEL RYAN
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America is at war with ignorance and apathy — about America itself. Steve Huebert is a lonely warrior in that fight.

The state representative from Valley Center last year, and now this legislative session, has been a lone voice pushing Kansas to mandate a civics test for graduation from high school. And oddly, he's doing it against the mighty headwinds of the state's educational coterie — the

Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas Association of School Boards and Kansas National Education Association — which are all foursquare opposed to it. They say this is none of the Legislature's business.

"That's what I'm fighting," says Huebert, a former school board member and House Education Committee chair. "I'm trying to tear down the walls between the state board and the Legislature."

Huebert's bill, HB 2039, would let students take the test, over and over if need be, from grade seven on. Good grief. Is that asking too much of a citizen?

"I didn't expect this much resistance. The opposition, in my mind, is

misguided," Huebert says. Agreed.

First, the righteousness and urgency of his cause:

Since this nation, unlike most, is bound not by ethnicity but by ideas and ideals, it's sort of important for the future of the country what those ideas and ideals are — and whether they're being passed down to succeeding generations.

Spoiler alert: They're not being passed down. They're just not.

Studies show only 1 in 4 Americans can name the three branches of government. Just 1 in 3 can pass the easy citizenship test for immigrants, and a mere 24% of high schoolers score proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress

Opinion

civics test.

"Our students are performing at an incredibly low level," says Louise Dubé, executive director of iCivics, a national non-profit formed by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor to inspire our frighteningly uninspired civic education.

"Students just don't know very much about America, about American history, about American institutions," says Frederick M. Hess, director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

And get this: A Rand Corporation survey says just 1 in 5 social studies teachers feel very well prepared to even teach American civics.

Worried? You should be. If you're building a beach house and don't know where the foundation is, you're likely building on the shifting sand. Can you say "collapse"?

As important as all this is and as poorly as we're doing in civic education, Hess says, "At a minimum I think we want to know how much civic knowledge our kids have."

Should a civics test be required? Rep. Huebert thinks so anyway, and so do I, as well as some 17 other states.

For his part, Hess is non-committal, but says when a test is required for graduation, "Schools make some effort to teach those things more thoroughly."

iCivics is neutral on requiring tests. But director Dubé and a vast coalition of civics education reformers known as CivXNow say the citizenship test is too narrow to indicate much. CivXNow is expected to release a landmark road map for modern civic education in March.

"We have had decades of disinvestment in civic education," Dubé says. Is

it a crisis? "Absolutely, it is," she says.

One huge problem, as I see it: We've replaced an admittedly romanticized version of American history with one that may emphasize our admitted shortcomings to the exclusion of American exceptionalism. It doesn't have to be either/or.

"You can tell that patriotic story while being entirely honest about all of our nation's struggles and failings and the way we need to do better," says Hess.

Noting academia's recent emphasis on teaching the STEM subjects of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics — and the more recent addition of the arts, to make it a "STEAM" curriculum — Hess jokes that we just need to turn civics into a vowel and "wedge it in there."

No joke. The country's future may be at stake.

Talk about a test.

State Civics Test Information

State	Civics Test Requirements	Statute
AL	Requires students to correctly answer at least 60 out of 100 questions on a civics test derived from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) naturalization test for completion of the required government course in the high school course of study.	Ala. Code § 16-40-10
AZ	Requires students to correctly answer at least 60 out of 100 questions derived from the USCIS naturalization test for high school graduation or a high school equivalency diploma.	Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-701.01
AR	Requires students to correctly answer at least 60 out of 100 questions derived from the USCIS naturalization test to receive a high school diploma from a public school or a high school equivalency diploma from a state entity.	Ark. Code Ann. § 6-16-149
FL	Requires each student to take an end-of-course assessment in civics education, constituting 30 percent of the student's final course grade, for middle school promotion.	Fla. Stat. Ann. § 1003.4156
ID	Requires all secondary students to pass a civics test (the 100 questions used in the USCIS naturalization test). Students may take the test at any time after enrolling in seventh grade and may repeat the test as often as necessary to pass.	Idaho Code Ann. § 33-1602
LA	Requires the administration of a test based on the civics portion of the USCIS naturalization test as part of the required civics course for students in the ninth grade (or courses that may be substituted for the civics course).	La. Stat. Ann. § 17:274.1
MN	Requires, each year, 50 out of 100 questions to be selected from the USCIS naturalization test to create a civics test. Students enrolled in a public school must correctly answer 30 out of 50 questions on the test as part of the social studies curriculum, but districts may not prevent a student from graduating or deny a student a high school diploma for failure to correctly answer 30 out of 50 of the civics test questions.	Minn. Stat. Ann. § 120B.02
MO	Requires, as a condition of high school graduation, ninth grade students attending any public, charter, or private school to pass an examination on the provision and principles of American civics consisting of 100 questions similar to those in the USCIS naturalization test.	Mo. Rev. Stat. § 170.345
MT	Encourages public high schools to administer the USCIS naturalization test to each student during high school. Students may take the test as many times as necessary to correctly answer 70 percent of the test questions.	Mont. Code Ann. § 20-7-119
NE	Requires the school board of each school district to appoint a committee of three members (a "Committee on American Civics") to, among other things, ensure the social studies curriculum in that district incorporates certain projects or participation. One option to fulfill this requirement is the administration of a test identical to the USCIS naturalization test prior to a student's completion of 8th grade and again prior to their completion of 12th grade.	Neb. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 79-724
NH	Requires students, beginning in eighth grade and through high school in all public and private schools, to obtain a passing grade on a competency test. The USCIS test may be used to satisfy this requirement.	N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 189:11
ND	Requires students enrolled in 12th grade, in order to receive a high school diploma, to correctly answer at least 60 percent of questions on a civics test with the 100 questions derived from the USCIS naturalization test.	N.D. Cent. Code Ann. § 15.1-21-27
PA	Requires each school entity to administer a locally developed assessment of U.S. history, government, and civics to students in the 7th through 12th grades at least once. School entities may use the USCIS naturalization test to fulfill this requirement.	24 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 16-1605.1
SC	Requires students to take a civics test with the 100 questions from the USCIS naturalization test as part of the U.S. government high school curriculum. The passing grade is based on the requirement established by the USCIS. Public and charter schools must report the percentage of students at or above the designated passing score to the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee.	S.C. Code Ann. § 59-29-240

TN	Requires high school students to be given a U.S. civics test composed of questions derived from the USCIS naturalization test. Local education agencies must create the test using at least 50 out of 100 questions from the USCIS test, including at least 29 questions on American government, at least 16 questions on American history, and at least 7 questions on integrated civics. Public high schools must provide students with the opportunity to take the test as many times as necessary to correctly answer at least 70 percent of questions on the test.	Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-408
TX	Requires the U.S. history end-of-course assessment to include ten questions randomly selected by the Texas Education Agency from the USCIS naturalization test. Requires the agency to annually issue a report providing the questions included in the assessment and detailing student performance on the assessment, at both statewide and school district levels.	Tex. Education Code § 39.023
UT	Requires public high school students to correctly answer at least 35 out of 50 questions on a civics test to receive a high school diploma. Requires students enrolled in an adult education program to correctly answer at least 35 out of 50 questions on a civics test to receive an adult education secondary diploma. The civics test must include 50 out of 100 questions derived from the USCIS naturalization test.	Utah Code § 53E-4-205
VA	Requires local school boards to implement a program of instruction in the high school course on Virginia and U.S. government that includes all information and concepts in the civics portion of the USCIS naturalization test.	Virginia Code § 22.1-253.13:1
WA	Requires, as part of the required high school civics course, the study and completion of the civics component of the USCIS naturalization test.	Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 28A.230.094
WI	Requires public school boards, charter school operators, and certain private school governing bodies to grant a high school diploma only to students who have, during high school grades, answered correctly 65 out of 100 questions on a civics test comprised of 100 questions identical to those included on the USCIS naturalization test.	Wis. Stat. Ann. § 118.33

Other Resources:

- Article: "[Where Left and Right Agree on Civics Education, and Where They Don't](#)," Frederick Hess and Matthew Rice, Education Next
- Report: "[Putting civics to the test: The impact of state-level civics assessments on civic knowledge](#)," by David E. Campbell, AEI
- Blog post: "[Civic education: The time is ripe for our attention](#)," Gerard Robinson, AEIdeas
- Report: "[A Crisis in Civic Education](#)," American Council of Trustees and Alumni
- Report: "[The Republic is \(Still\) at Risk – and Civics is Part of the Solution](#)," iCivics

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