

## CIVIC EDUCATION IN ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOLS 2010 FACULTY SURVEY

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**Introduction:** Among the funding recommendations included in the *Illinois Civic Blueprint* (McCormick Foundation, 2009), a product of the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition's February 2009 Educating for Democracy Conference, was a baseline statewide audit and annual assessment of civic progress among Illinois high schools (52). The state currently has no baseline measurement for assessing the quantity and quality of civic education and engagement opportunities in its high schools. This report, the *Civic Education in Illinois High Schools: 2010 Faculty Survey*, attempts to fulfill the first component of the recommendation.

The 2010 Faculty survey was distributed to high school social studies department chairpersons statewide, and asked respondents to report the frequency by which students were exposed to the overt teaching of civics, along with the use of promising approaches to citizenship development detailed in the *Civic Mission of Schools* report (Carnegie Foundation, 2003) and later in the *Illinois Civic Blueprint*. Respondents also reported the extent to which their respective student bodies were empowered to express their voice within the walls of school. Finally, the surveys measured the practical application of civic knowledge through engagement opportunities like service learning and extracurricular activities with a collective outcome.

The report that follows begins with a section on the methodology of the survey's design, dissemination, data collection, disaggregation, and analysis. A section on the sample of 98 Illinois high schools represented in the report follows. The heart of the report centers on the four aforementioned focus areas: curriculum, instruction, student voice, and practical application. The report concludes by setting the stage for next steps given the benchmarks established below.

**Methodology:** A survey titled "Civic Education in Illinois High Schools" was mailed on August 15, 2010, to the more than 700 public high schools across the State of Illinois, addressed to social studies department chairpersons. The mailing included a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey, the instrument itself, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. One month later, a follow-up post card was sent to the attention of the same person in an effort to improve the response rate. Ninety-eight completed surveys were ultimately received, registering a response rate of roughly fourteen percent. While this is a relatively lackluster percentage, the size of the sample is fairly impressive and demographically representative of the state as a whole. While we urge caution when generalizing these results to all Illinois high schools, we are fairly confident that they provide a baseline measurement of our high schools' current commitment to civic education.

Survey respondents completed and returned their questionnaires anonymously. This approach was employed given feedback received from partner organizations that employed school surveys to limited success in the past, and the demographic control variables described below and used

to parse the results. More than anything, we desired a large, representative sample of Illinois high schools, and felt that anonymity would help yield this outcome.

The survey itself was crafted using the six promising approaches to citizen development summarized in the 2003 *Civic Mission of Schools* report (Carnegie Foundation). The indicators of these approaches that were ultimately turned into survey questions came from the companion 2009 *Illinois Civic Blueprint* (McCormick Foundation). McCormick Foundation Civics Program 2010 summer intern Katherine Kussman created the survey, with assistance from several McCormick Foundation staff members, including Danielle Estler, Jamie Loo, and Shawn Healy. Former Illinois Civic Mission Coalition Chair Carolyn Pereira also provided timely edits. Patrick Ip, the Civics Program's 2010 fall intern, helped disaggregate the data and report the results that follow.

**Sample:** Survey respondents were asked to identify the region of the Illinois where their school resides. The population-heavy Northeastern portion of the state generated the strongest response, representing 36% of the sample. The East and West Central regions (21% and 18%, respectively) followed, trailed by the South (13%) and the Northwest (11%).

Rural schools were the most frequent survey respondent, totaling half of all entries. One third of schools were suburban, and a mere sixteen percent from urban areas. The overrepresentation of rural areas and reciprocal undercount of urban areas should once more encourage caution when generalizing the findings below.

According to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), more than half (53%) of all Illinois public school students are white. Hispanics (21%) are the largest of the minority groups, following by blacks (19%), Asians (4%), multiracial (3%), and Native Americans (0.2%). Our survey asked respondents to estimate the percentages of their racial and ethnic groups at their schools.

As indicated by the numbers above, Illinois schools are racially and ethnically diverse. High schools represented in this survey show similar diversity, but also a high degree of racial segregation (see Figure 1). For example, 43% of schools in the survey have student populations that are more than 90% white, yet Hispanics and African Americans, the most populous minority groups in Illinois schools, register at less than ten percent at more than six in ten respondent schools. By comparison, Asian Americans were a distinct minority at almost all of the schools.

**Figure 1: Estimated percentages of the racial/ethnic make-up of school respondents**

	<u>&lt;10%</u>	<u>10-30%</u>	<u>30-50%</u>	<u>50-70%</u>	<u>70-90%</u>	<u>&gt;90%</u>
Asian or Pacific Islander:	94%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%
African American (not of Hispanic origin):	61%	21%	5%	4%	3%	4%
Hispanic:	62%	23%	9%	3%	0%	1%
Native American or Alaskan Native:	99%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Caucasian (not of Hispanic origin):	11%	2%	14%	8%	20%	
43%						

Note: Given variance in reported ranges, combined percentages may not equal 100% for each category.

The ISBE reports that 45% of Illinois students can be classified as low income. Once more, we asked our survey respondents to estimate the percentage of students at their schools who qualify for free or reduced lunch. While a plurality of schools registered in the 10-30% range (see Figure 2), below the state average, a full 56% of all schools had more than 30% of their students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, an indication that our sample is economically representative of the state.

**Figure 2: Estimated percentages of school respondents whose students qualify for free or reduced lunch**

<u>&lt;10%</u>	<u>10-30%</u>	<u>30-50%</u>	<u>50-70%</u>	<u>70-90%</u>	<u>&gt;90%</u>
8%	34%	27%	12%	11%	6%

Finally, the ISBE claims that nearly 8% of students exhibit limited English proficiency. Once more, we asked survey respondents to estimate the percentage of students at their high school who were English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Language Learners (ELL, see Figure 3). As anticipated, more than three-quarters of respondent schools have ESL/ ELL populations of less than 10%. Nearly one in five schools (19%) have ESL/ ELL populations between 10-30%, and a mere 4% of schools have populations greater than 30%.

Figure 3: Estimated percentages of school respondents whose students are English as a Secondary Language/ English Language (ESL/ ELL) learners

<u>&lt;10%</u>	<u>10-30%</u>	<u>30-50%</u>	<u>50-70%</u>	<u>70-90%</u>	<u>&gt;90%</u>
76%	19%	3%	1%	0%	0%

### Part I: Curriculum

The *Civic Mission in Schools* report articulated six promising approaches for citizenship development in schools. The first approach points to overt instruction in civics. It reads, “if you teach them, they will learn,” arguing this is the “lesson of modern research on civic education” (22). Specifically, this means a curriculum that includes instruction in the United States Constitution and its principles; United States history; the structures and processes of government and elections; the powers and limitations of different branches of government at each level in the federal system; explicit connections between formal instruction and students’ lives; material not included in the traditional textbook; and finally, key democratic knowledge, skills, and concepts, including the role of citizens in a democracy (McCormick, 24).

Niemi and Junn (1998), in their analysis of 1988 National Assessment of Education Progress test scores, found that students who did not take civics courses exhibited less knowledge about all aspects of government than those who did. Moreover, it is the amount and recency of civics course work that matters. Civics courses not only improve student knowledge, but they also improve their reasoning capacities and ability to engage in discussions of civic affairs. They also increase faith in government responsiveness and political efficacy tied to elections (69, 72).

The survey results indicate that the vast majority of Illinois high schools incorporate civic content into their social studies curriculum throughout students’ four year experience (see Figure 4). Nearly all address the United States Constitution and its principles as applied to both the past (99% of all schools) and present (96%). Similar numbers teach United States domestic history (99%) and foreign policy (92%). Both the structures (89%) and processes (92%) of government and elections over time are also incorporated into Illinois high schools’ curricula.

While the powers and limitations of the different branches of government are almost universally taught when it comes to the federal level (98%), state (82%) and local government (51%) are much less likely to be addressed. Here lies the only overt civic education deficit when it comes to the content of the curriculum as measured by this study.

**Figure 4: Curriculum**

Does your school's social studies curriculum address:	<u>Yes:</u>	<u>No:</u>
The U.S. Constitution and its principles as applied to the <i>past</i> .....	99%	1%
The U.S. Constitution and its principles as applied to the <i>present</i> ...	96%	4%
U.S. domestic history.....	99%	1%
U.S. foreign policy history.....	92%	8%
The <i>structure</i> of government and elections over time .....	89%	11%
The <i>processes</i> of government and elections over time .....	92%	8%
The powers and limitations of the different branches of government at the <i>federal</i> level.....	98%	2%
The powers and limitations of the different branches of government at the <i>state</i> level.....	82%	18%
The powers and limitations of the different branches of government at the <i>local</i> level.....	51%	49%

**Part II: Instruction**

Recall that Niemi and Junn (1998) cemented the importance of civic education in the political socialization process. However, they lamented the tendency toward dry, textbook approaches to civics, with little topical variation from grade-to-grade, and a weak link between what students study and what they know (73-75). They write, "...What the teacher brings to the classroom by the way of methods and material—in ways that are understandable and theoretically plausible—seems to be an important factor in what students take away from their classes" (81).

Two of the six promising approaches to Citizen Development identified in the *Civic Mission of Schools* report are addressed in this section: structured engagement with current and controversial issues and participation in simulations of democratic structures and processes.

Hess (2009) writes, "...The purposeful inclusion of controversial political issues in the school curriculum...illustrates a core component of a functioning democratic community, while building the understandings, skills, and dispositions that young people need to live in and improve such a community" (5). Schools, Hess contends, are ideal sites for students to encounter controversial political issues because they complement the curriculum, are in the presence of trained teachers

who have or can develop expertise in fostering deliberation or inquiry, and the classroom setting presents rich ideological diversity among students (6).

Parallel research on simulations of democratic structures and processes is, by comparison, rare. However, Ganzler (2010) did an intensive study of the Legislative Semester simulation of United States government at Community High School in West Chicago, Illinois. His analysis of student results revealed that comfort with conflict as a result of the simulation experience was associated with political engagement (125). Along these lines, Ganzler found that students were dramatically more confident in speaking before their peers, and also felt that their classroom environments were open for discussion (137).

Turning to the survey results, a wide range of instructional techniques are incorporated in social studies classrooms across the State of Illinois. Most of the promising approaches to civic development are employed on a weekly or daily basis (see Figure 5). For instance, every day more than half (56%) of schools ask open-ended questions to their students for which there is no correct answer. Information about public issues provided through the newspaper and other media is the second most common promising approach utilized, with 27% of schools using this approach every day and another 63% at least weekly. Controversial issues discussions parallel media attentiveness (21% daily and 60% weekly), as does the use of primary source documents (15% daily and 63% weekly).

Illinois high schools do a decent job of making connections between formal instruction and concrete actions in students' lives (46% weekly and 28% quarterly). Simulations of democratic structures and processes, like mock elections and trials, occur less often, but 41% of schools use simulations quarterly, and another 33% once per semester. Schools are least likely to host visits from experts and other resource people in the community, yet more than one-third (34%) do so once per semester and nearly a quarter host community members annually (23%). Unfortunately, simulations and community visits never occur in at least one in ten Illinois high schools.

Figure 5: How often do social studies classes at your school include

	Once per year	Once per semester	On a quarterly basis	On a weekly basis	On a daily basis	Never
Connections between formal instruction and concrete action in students' lives.....	5%	9%	28%	46%	12%	1%
Use of primary source documents.....	1%	3%	2%	63%	15%	0%
Visits from experts and other resource people in the community.....	23%	34%	32%	2%	1%	11%
Discussion of controversial issues.....	0%	1%	21%	60%	21%	0%
Information about public issues provided through the newspaper and other media...2%	2%	2%	7%	63%	27%	1%
Simulations of democratic structures and processes (e.g., mock elections and trials)	15%	33%	41%	3%	1%	10%
Asking of open-ended questions to the students for which there is no correct answer.....	0%	1%	5%	40%	56%	0%

### Part III: Student Voice

Student participation in school governance stands as the fourth promising approach detailed by the *Civic Mission in Schools* report. Examples include holding deliberative meetings to discuss school issues, reserving blocs of time for intensive, collaborative projects, student representation on administrative committees and/ or the school board, and the creation of a school constitution (27-28). More than anything, students should have opportunities to discuss school policies, present their viewpoints, and have their views and positions heard and respected (McCormick, 40).

Social studies classes in Illinois high schools encourage students to express their opinions and respect those of others. Nearly all social studies classes encourage students to express their opinions always (62%, see Figure 6) or most of the time (35%). The same is true for asking students to respect others' opinions (71% always and 26% most of the time). Most schools seek student opinions some or most of the time (46% and 33%, respectively, see Figure 7), but this is an everyday occurrence at less than one in five schools (19%).

Figure 6: How often do social studies classes at your school encourage

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	Don't Know
Students to express their opinions during discussions.....	62%	35%	3%	0%	0%
Students to respect others' opinions.....	71%	26%	3%	0%	0%

Figure 7: How often does your school

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	Don't Know
Seek student opinions.....	19%	33%	46%	1%	1%

The vast majority of schools provide information pertinent to student rights and responsibilities (77%, see Figure 8), and the same percentage provide students with opportunities to work with peers and parents to address school problems. More than two-thirds of schools (67%) have established processes to students to air grievances, including issues of fairness, and similar numbers (70%) create opportunities for students to assist in resolving tensions and other issues in schools. Among the other forms of student engagement in school governance listed by survey respondents include: peer mediation, a peer leadership group, and the availability of a school psychologist and social worker.



**Figure 8: Does your school provide students with**

Information about student rights and responsibilities.....	77%
Opportunities to work with peers, parents, etc., to address school problems.....	77%
Established processes to air grievances, including issues of fairness.....	67%
Opportunities to assist in resolving tension and issues in schools.....	70%
None of the above.....	5%
Other(s).....	5%
Don't Know.....	1%

**Part IV: Practical Applications**

**Service learning:** The fifth promising approach embedded with the *Civic Mission in Schools* report centers on service learning. It encompasses classroom-based volunteerism with the conscious pursuit of civic outcomes. Service learning has evolved from community service and volunteer activities to a more structured experience that includes a strong relationship between service and classroom learning objectives. Such experiences enable students to venture into the community and perform work that is explicitly connected to their academic work through writing, discussion, and reflection. Students who participate in service learning programs show higher civic knowledge and dispositions, a greater tendency to value school, and an increased likelihood to vote as adults (Billig et al, 2005).

According to the survey, sixty percent of Illinois high schools offer service learning opportunities to their students. Of these schools, 39% consider it part of the broader educational philosophy of the school (see Figure 9). Similar numbers (38%) link service learning to the broader curriculum and connect it to academic learning (37%). Fewer schools use service learning as a tool to focus on civic outcomes and encourage civic commitments (31%), and reflect their commitment to service learning in the mission statement (31%). While more than a third of schools provide students with a role in selecting and designing their service projects and strategies (37%) and give students a chance to reflect upon their experience and work (34%), schools are less likely to enable meaningful student work on public issues (24%).

Less than one-third (31%) of schools focus on increased student knowledge of the community through asset mapping and other methodologies, and only one in five (21%) provide students with opportunities to assess political problems and pursue political responses within a non-partisan classroom setting. Schools rarely require service learning to graduate, but of those who do, service

hours (22% of schools) are more common than service projects (6%). In sum, although service learning opportunities are offered in most Illinois high schools, best practices in this promising area are rarely employed.

**Figure 9: Is service learning at your school**

Part of the broader educational philosophy of the school.....	39%
Reflected in the school's mission statement.....	30%
Linked to academic learning.....	37%
Linked to the broader curriculum.....	38%
Intentionally focused on civic outcomes and encouraging civic commitment.....	31%
Enabling meaningful student work on public issues.....	24%
Providing students with a role in selecting and designing their projects and strategies.....	37%
Giving students a chance to reflect on their experience and work.....	34%
Focused on increased student knowledge of the community.....	31%
Providing opportunities for student assessment of political problems and pursuit of political responses within a non-partisan classroom setting.....	21%
Embedded in graduation requirements based on service <i>project hours</i> completed.....	22%
Embedded in graduation requirements based on service <i>projects</i> completed.....	6%

**Extracurriculars:**

The final promising approach highlighted in the *Civic Mission of Schools* report centers on extracurricular activities. Student participation in instrumental extracurricular activities with a collective outcome like student government or the school newspaper are effective vehicles for enhancing students' civic engagement. Expressive organizations like sports or band, while beneficial in their own right, do not exhibit the same civic side effects (Kirlin, 2003).

Extracurriculars, even those without an overt political focus, are powerful vehicles of political socialization. They contribute to one's sense of being able to make a difference, create influential relationships, and may change the political motivations of adolescents, the realization that they have a stake in the political world (Thomas and McFarland, 2010).

According to the survey, almost all Illinois high schools have a student yearbook club (96%, see Figure 10). Student government is the second most common instrumental organization, present in more than four of five (81%) schools surveyed. Three-quarters of schools sponsor vocational clubs like Future Business Leaders of America, and six in ten boast student newspapers.

Community organizations like Habitat for Humanity and Big Brothers, Big Sisters are present in less than half (45%) of all Illinois high schools, and debate teams exist in only one-third. Political clubs are quite rare, surfacing in less than one-quarter (24%) of all schools surveyed. The list of student extracurriculars reported is extensive. Model United Nations, National Honor Society, and Chicago-based After School Matters are among the organizations listed. Illinois Civic Mission Coalition exemplars are also referenced, including Capitol Forum, Mikva Challenge, and Youth and Government.

**Figure 10: Does your school offer any of the following clubs or activities?**

Student government.....	81%
Student newspaper.....	60%
Yearbook.....	96%
Political clubs.....	24%
Debate team.....	33%
Community organizations.....	45%
Vocational clubs.....	75%
None of the above.....	1%
Other(s).....	33%

**Conclusion:**

Overall, the results from the *Civic Education in Illinois High Schools 2010 Faculty Survey* are mixed. Students appear to be receiving adequate content when it comes to United States history, the Constitution, and the structures, processes, powers, and limitations of the federal government. However, parallel instruction focused on state and local government is notably lacking. Similarly, teachers engage their students in structured ways with current and controversial issues, but could increase the frequency and rigor of these conversations. Moreover, Illinois high schools should experiment more often with simulations of democratic structures and processes, and invite key community members into the classroom.

According to the survey, student voice is encouraged and respected in state high schools. Yet service learning is present in just six of ten state schools, and among those who employ service learning, its quantity and quality exhibits much variety. Students are largely afforded extracurricular opportunities with collective outcomes, but staples like student government and school newspapers are far from universal. Political clubs and debate teams are available to only a minority of students statewide.

Future data analysis will disaggregate the findings along demographic lines, specifically the racial composition of schools' student bodies, the percentage of their students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, and the number of students who are ESL/ ELL learners. Kahne and Middaugh (2008), in study of 2,500 California high schools students over a two-year period, found massive inequities in reported school-based civic opportunities by race, socioeconomic status, and academic track. African-American students reported fewer civic-oriented government classes, while Latinos were afforded fewer community service opportunities and open classroom environments. By comparison, students with higher socioeconomic standing were more likely to study how laws are made, participate in service activities, and experience debates or panel discussions. It is imperative to determine whether or not a similar "democracy divide" exists in Illinois.

Moreover, given the regional diversity of Illinois, the existing data set will also be broken down along these lines to determine disparate opportunities depending upon where in the state a student resides. Similar disaggregation of data will occur among urban, suburban, and rural schools.

As stated in the methodology section, a relatively low survey response rate (14%) undermines the generalizability of these findings, the demographic representativeness of the sample aside. Future efforts should focus on increasing response rates, and using the existing data as a benchmark to measure the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition's progress in restoring the original civic goals of primary and secondary education statewide. Finally, the authors are hopeful that this baseline will serve as the stimulus for an annual assessment of civic progress among Illinois high school students.

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