



ILLINOIS DEMOCRACY SCHOOLS SELF-ASSESSMENT INDICATORS

ROBERT R.
McCORMICK
FOUNDATION

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

- Design/Teaching Strategy
- Foundational Civic Knowledge
- Discussion of Current and Controversial Issues
- Simulations
- Informed Action/Service Learning
- Extracurricular Activities

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

- School Climate
- Student Voice
- Vision and Leadership
- Teacher Hiring, Assessment & Professional Development
- School-Community Partnerships

**ILLINOIS
DEMOCRACY
SCHOOLS**



Youth are informed, actively participate in their communities, and have healthy civic dispositions



ILLINOIS DEMOCRACY SCHOOLS SELF-ASSESSMENT INDICATORS

Learning Experiences Assessment Indicators

Design/Teaching Strategy

Teachers design curriculum and utilize democratic teaching strategies in order to cultivate students' civic knowledge, skills, dispositions, and critical thinking across disciplines and extracurricular activities by:

- Making explicit civic learning connections and applications across all content areas
- Including fiction and non-fiction texts representing multiple, diverse perspectives that engage with civic, political and social issues in writing, speech, and other media
- Drawing on students' knowledge, lived experiences, and essential and supporting questions to engage in critical and sustained inquiry
- Engaging in critical analysis of off- and online information by judging its accuracy and credibility, developing and posing questions, investigating a range of sources, and discussing the tensions and multiple perspectives surfaced
- Employing group projects and activities that foster teamwork, collaboration, and student leadership
- Supporting students to utilize digital tools in order to investigate issues they care about, engage in dialogue, circulate and produce media, raise awareness, and create change
- Promoting an understanding of diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation) and developing mutual respect for others
- Supporting students to build confidence as well as a sense of responsibility and efficacy in order to make a difference in their schools and communities

Foundational Civic Knowledge

Teachers engage students in learning about the following core concepts as they relate to various disciplines:

- The major themes and significant events in the history of the United States as well as the tensions in our democracy and systemic issues related to race, class, gender, socio-economic status and sexual orientation
- The Constitution and founding principles as applied to the past and present
- The structure of government, at local, state, and federal levels
- The powers, authority, legitimacy, and limitations of each level of government (federal, state, and local) as well as the civic power of individuals and groups
- Various public policies (local, state, national, or international) and their impact on issues that matter to students
- The relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs
- The manner in which people, groups and communities create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance (including voting, lobbying, non-violent conflict, etc.) as well as attend to the root causes of problems in the past and present
- The ways in which digital platforms and tools have created opportunities and challenges for civic and political engagement



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Learning Experiences Assessment Indicators

Discussion of Current and Controversial Issues

Teachers provide opportunities across disciplines for students to take an active role in current and controversial issue discussions and deliberation by:

- Critically and productively engaging with the local, national, and international issues and events that animate our political system as well as issues based on student choice
- Addressing meaningful and timely questions about societal problems and ethical dilemmas that deserve both students' and the public's attention and that link to core curricular goals
- Locating or creating multimodal learning materials to provide students relevant background information in order to form their own opinion, develop effective arguments and counter arguments on varying sides of an issue, and attend to multiple points of view
- Employing several different models for discussion and ways of making joint decisions as well as demonstrating the pros and cons of each
- Developing guidelines to ensure inclusive, respectful, productive, and student-led discussions where students listen to understand, clarify, corroborate and question while attending to multiple perspectives and underrepresented voices
- Creating time for reflection and processing - including consideration of changes in viewpoint and use of evidence

Simulations

Teachers provide opportunities for students to participate in simulations--including role-playing activities, problem solving, consideration of dilemmas, interactive case studies and scenarios, and online games--that allow students to learn about issues and practice civic skills in multiple disciplines by:

- Reserving sufficient time for each simulation in order to learn challenging skills and concepts and build background knowledge
- Discussing how lessons learned in the simulation may apply in other contexts, including in local communities and society
- Building on student life experiences and knowledge of democratic structures and institutions
- Creating time for reflection and processing to understand the concepts and application of simulations



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Learning Experiences Assessment Indicators

Informed Action/Service-Learning

Teachers provide opportunities for all students, regardless of academic skill or ability, to engage in civic action by using knowledge and skills to address genuine community needs on a school, local, regional, state or broader level through preparation, action and reflection by:

- Helping students differentiate between different forms of civic participation--including face-to-face and online tactics--and identify when to use various strategies depending on the goal, audience, and context
- Developing central leadership roles where students lead the preparation, action and reflection
- Develop a plan to address identified needs in the community by building upon previous civic learning experiences, student knowledge of the community, investigation and research, and discussion
- Engaging participants in informed, meaningful and personally-relevant action that may include direct action, indirect action, research, advocacy, or a combination of the approaches that are available
- Facilitating opportunities for participants to engage in an ongoing reflection process that includes deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society, showcasing what and how they have learned, and connecting learning to essential question(s) of the unit/course
- Assessing the impact of the project, the ability to meet specified goals, and feedback from community partners (if possible)

Extracurricular Activities

School staff lead structured, organized, regular, and long term extracurricular activities that foster civic learning and engagement and are accessible to, representative of, and attend to the needs and interests of the student body by:

- Teaching concrete skills that are valuable in civil society, which could include managing a budget, facilitating meetings, advertising events, choosing and rotating leaders, and dealing with individuals who break group rules or fail to contribute
- Helping students to develop and utilize agency as a member of their various communities
- Helping students to form strong social bonds and support networks with adults outside of the family, peers with different lived experiences and political perspectives, and like-minded peers
- Recognizing and confirming students' identities such as racial and ethnic identity, LGBTQ, gender, ability, political, etc.
- Modeling and promoting inclusion, equity, and constructive dialogue and deliberation while attending to multiple perspectives
- Welcoming students to join or start groups that address their genuine interests
- Cultivating student leadership in a range of meaningful ways



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Organizational Culture Assessment Indicators

School Climate

Schools create and maintain a positive and democratic school climate that promotes students' civic development, engagement, and sense of belonging by including:

- A clean, welcoming environment with visual reminders of the school's civic mission and representation of the student population
- Copies of the school's mission statement and/or values displayed throughout the school, referenced regularly, and updated periodically based on student voice and students' lived experiences
- Classrooms and hallways decorated with work reflective of teachers' and students' civic engagement
- Teachers and administration serving as role models of civically engaged community members and who are candid about their own civic engagement when appropriate
- Principals and teachers attending to student identities and interacting positively and respectfully with them
- School policies, practices, and infrastructure supporting a set of civic norms and values
- Restorative and democratic disciplinary practices work towards racial equity in application and strategy through whole school adoption and training

Student Voice

Schools provide formal, informal, and regular opportunities for student voice and student decision-making that is impactful at various levels of the school community by:

- Integrating student voice in regards to curriculum, assessments, and classroom procedures and practices
- Establishing transparent and ongoing schoolwide mechanisms to measure, gauge, analyze, and respond to student voices that are representative of the student body
- Providing forums for student voice on questions, tensions, and issues that impact the student body
- Informing students of their rights and responsibilities in school
- Facilitating school-wide democratic deliberation on school issues through school media and extra-curricular programs

Vision & Leadership

School leaders have a clear commitment to the civic mission of the school, dedicate necessary resources to sustain this vision, and ensure all students have equitable access to civic learning by:

- Engaging all stakeholders in developing and maintaining the vision of the school and developing a common understanding of how the school will reach its civic goals
- Enabling teachers to exercise autonomy, responsibility, and creativity to introduce thought-provoking, controversial, and civic topics in the classroom



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Organizational Culture Assessment Indicators

Vision & Leadership - continued

- Allocating time, money, flexibility, and staffing that is reflective of the communities the school serves to ensure that civic learning is a valued, reliable, and core part of the curriculum across disciplines and grade levels
- Leveraging policies, resources, and political capital at the district level to support teachers in integrating civic learning and creating equitable opportunities for students' civic growth
- Articulating how students will engage in civic learning and engagement across grade levels at the school and district level

Teacher Hiring, Assessment and Professional Development

School leaders have a commitment to hiring, assessing, and developing staff that can carry out the civic mission of the school as well as attend to equity and teachers' and students' identity and lived experiences by:

- Hiring mission-driven staff through democratic processes that include student, staff and teachers
- Ensuring that teachers and staff contribute to processes and decision-making at the school
- Providing resources and consistent training for staff members on the components of and approaches to integrating civic learning across disciplines and grade levels through conferences, professional learning communities, peer coaching, planning/collaboration time with colleagues, curricular models, and other available formal and informal opportunities
- Setting aside time for teachers to reflect and refine their curriculum and practice in order to integrate civic learning
- Encouraging teachers to learn from their students, colleagues, families, and community members
- Ensuring that professional development (PD) opportunities are guided by teacher and student feedback

School-Community Partnerships

School leaders and staff ensure that the school and its community are a resource for each other and that there are frequent and meaningful interactions with families and community partners through:

- Developing and sustaining community partnerships is an explicit part of someone's job (i.e. shared among teachers, department head, administrators, district community liaison)
- Building collaborative, mutually beneficial, and reciprocal relationships with community partners that attend to community needs and assets
- Integrating intentional systems and protocols to generate family feedback and engage all families in decision-making at the school
- Creating opportunities for family and community engagement to shape and strengthen the civic learning experiences in the classroom and with extracurricular activities



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