

GOVERNOR PRITZKER SIGNS BILL REQUIRING CIVIC EDUCATION IN ILLINOIS MIDDLE SCHOOLS

New Public-Private Partnership to Support Implementation

CHICAGO, Wednesday, August 14, 2019 — On Friday, August 9, 2019, Governor JB Pritzker signed House Bill (HB)-2265, legislation that will require all Illinois middle schools serving grades 6th, 7th, and 8th to provide a civics class.

“This middle school civics requirement is a game-changer,” said Dr. Shawn Healy, Chair of the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition. “Illinois middle school students stand to gain a greater understanding of government institutions, current and societal issues, democratic processes, and their role as citizens. It’s exciting to see this legislation become a reality as our local communities will directly benefit from its passage.”

The bill passed the Illinois House and Senate last spring with strong bipartisan support.

Young Illinoisans are ill-prepared for their role as citizens in our democracy. Only 23 percent of 8th graders tested proficiently in civics on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2014, and this comes at a time when nearly half of schools have cut back on time devoted to civic learning and the social studies more generally. According to a 2018 Education Week survey, school administrators agree that their schools spend too little time on civics.

“Active participation in civic life in our communities begins with the lessons we learn as children,” said David Hiller, President and CEO of the Robert R. McCormick Foundation. “Our investments in teachers and students will pay high dividends when these kids grow into engaged adults.”

The McCormick Foundation, working other funders and members of the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, will support implementation of the new law helping support middle school teachers, schools, and districts to incorporate civics in 6th, 7th, or 8th grade. This will be done through a three-year, privately funded plan beginning in early 2020 with \$1 million of annual investments to support professional development and the development of additional resources for teachers.

The effort will be modeled after the 2015 effort to bring quality civic education to all public high schools. It has since been implemented by teachers, schools, and districts throughout the state with early evidence of strong student civic learning and engagement outcomes.

“All students deserve access to the knowledge and skills needed to navigate our political institutions and an opportunity to explore their rights and responsibilities in this republic,” added Healy.

About the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition

The Illinois Civic Mission Coalition (ICMC) is a broad non-partisan consortium including educators, administrators, students, universities, funders, elected officials, policymakers and representatives from the private and non-profit sectors. Formed in 2004 by the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago, the ICMC is part of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, a national initiative to restore a core purpose of education to prepare America’s youngest citizens to be informed and active participants in our democracy. The Robert R. McCormick Foundation has convened the ICMC since 2010. For more information visit <https://www.illinoiscivics.org/resources/about-the-icmc>.