

The State of Maryland's Civic Education:
Final Report from Maryland's Civic
Architecture Symposium



Background

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has developed a strong architecture to support the development of civic understanding and action among our youngest citizens; however, the results of recent opinion polls and public discussions have renewed concerns regarding American's civic knowledge and engagement. In response to the request made by the State Board of Education in September of 2017, MSDE initiated this symposium to inspect the civic programs in place to promote student knowledge and engagement in the state of Maryland. The symposia focused on two objectives:

- Stakeholders will review opportunities for civic education and engagement in Maryland's public schools in order to identify areas of strength and growth.
- Stakeholders will recommend actions to strengthen the civic architecture of public schools in Maryland.

Participants

Jack Tuttle, *Social Studies Supervisor, Charles County Public Schools*

Michael Solomon, *Co-President MoCo for Gun Control*

Simon Debesai, *Co-President of MoCo for Gun Control*

David Armenti, *Maryland Historical Society*

Kate Long, *Supervisor of Social Studies, Washington County Public Schools*

Dr. Marcie Taylor-Thoma, *President of Maryland Council for Civic and History Education*

Dr. Carol Williamson, *Deputy State Superintendent Chief Academic Officer, Maryland State Department of Education*

Dawn Fester, *Teacher, Harford County Public Schools*

Nicole Ivey, *Resource Teacher, Harford County Public Schools*

Del. Trent Kittleman, *House of Delegates District 9A*

Dr. Alexander Pope, *Salisbury University and President of the Maryland Council for Social Studies*

Julie Ayers, *Coordinator of Service Learning, Maryland State Department of Education*

Kyle Smith, *Student Representative, Maryland State Board of Education*

Monica Whippo, *Social Studies Supervisor, Baltimore City Public Schools*

Dr. Mark Stout, *Social Studies Supervisor, Howard County Public Schools*

Brianna Carter, *Teacher, Baltimore City Public Schools*

Lee Arbetman, *Executive Director of Street Law*

Tyler Kendall, *Student Representative, Student Government Association, Frederick County Public Schools*

Bella Ryb, *Maryland's General Assembly Page Program*

Macie Hakim, *Project Citizen, Baltimore County Public Schools*

Catherine Hutson, *Project Citizen, Baltimore County Public Schools*

Kelly Humble, *Resource Teacher, Baltimore City Public Schools*

YokeSan Reynolds, *League of Women Voters*

Brandi Millhausen, *Resource Teacher, Anne Arundel County Public Schools*

Hon. Pamela Brown, *District Court/Multi-Service District*

Gil Stange, *Teacher, Baltimore County Public Schools*

Shelley Brown, *Director of the Citizenship and Law Related Programs of Maryland*

Alison Jovanovic, *Assistant Professor, University of Maryland, College Park*

Symposium Overview

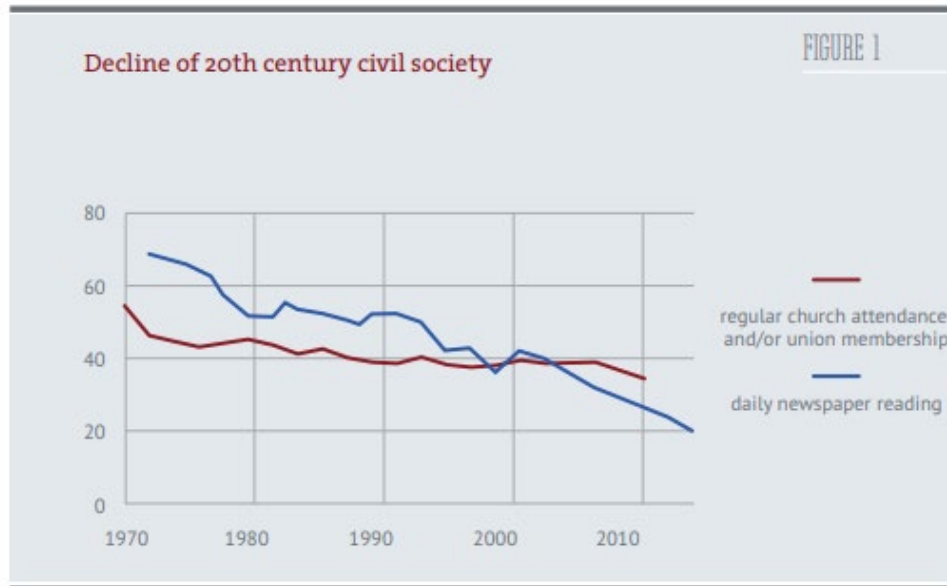
The symposium opened with a panel discussion with students from across the state who held civic leadership roles within their schools, districts, and/or communities. The students were asked a series of questions designed to elicit details regarding the access to, and benefits of the programs they represented. The student reflections during the discussion highlighted the meaningful work being done by teachers and students across the state. The discussion also highlighted that the points of entry for being civically engaged differ greatly. The student reflections shed light on the uniqueness of their efforts and experiences as well as the need to expand these opportunities to more students.

Following the panel discussion, the Coordinator of Social Studies for the Maryland State Department of Education, Leah Renzi, provided an overview of the current state of civic education in the nation and in Maryland. Key points of that presentation are included in the following four sections of this report. Also included as a part of the presentation was an introduction to the review methods that would be used by participants in the symposium. These methods informed the review of Maryland's current civic architecture, which was conducted in small groups. Those methods are further defined in "The State of Civic Literacy in Maryland" section of this report.

Participants were divided into groups and tasked with creating a working list of priorities for civic education in Maryland, identifying strengths in the current programs, and suggesting areas of further development.

The day concluded with representatives from each of the groups sharing their findings with the larger group. The whole group then identified areas of agreement and suggested recommendations for growth. The details of these findings are in the final two sections of this report.

National Overview



Peter Levine and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, *"The Republic is (Still) at Risk and civics is a Part of the Solution."*

National sentiment and discussion have recently focused on public apathy and civic disengagement. There are many historic causes of civic disengagement. Included among those causes are the historical forces that have disenfranchised certain populations both formally and informally. African Americans, women, lower socio-economic groups, and people with disabilities all face the challenge of gaining equal political empowerment. In addition, civic opportunity gaps are created in regions where inadequate public education and support services are provided for students to develop a civic identity at a young age. When deprived of these opportunities, students matriculate through the PreK-12 experience without gaining a sense of agency and competency in civics. These causes can be compounded by political infrastructures that quiet voices of dissent. Examples could include the gerrymandering of districts which results in the silencing of minority political party voice within district boundaries. Another example is the role of "big money" in the political system which can tilt the playing field for candidates as they compete for limited resources. All of these factors can contribute to a perception of corruption and/or ineptitude of civic leaders. Apathy and civic disengagement can develop as a result.

Additionally, many of the traditional organizations that historically bound Americans together are disappearing. Throughout the twentieth century regular church membership, union membership, and daily newspaper readership have continued to decline. Along with them go the opportunities to build trust and understanding among Americans from different backgrounds.ⁱ

The Benefits of Civic Education

In 2003, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (C.I.R.C.L.E.) convened a study to identify the benefits and proven practices in strong civic education programs across the nation.ⁱⁱ This body of research indicates that the benefits of civic learning include:

- 1 – Fosters civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes. School based civic learning broadens and deepens civic knowledge, hones civic skills, and nurtures civic attitudes which collectively prepare students for informed effective participation in our democracy.
- 2 – Promotes civic equality. Voter turnout is highest among white, affluent, highly educated Americans. Universally available civic learning opportunities close this empowerment gap.
- 3 – Builds 21st century skills. Students in traditional and interactive civics lessons are collaborative, economically knowledgeable, media literate, and aware of current events.
- 4 – Improves school climate. Through civic engagement activities, young people connect with the community, learn respectful dialogue, value teamwork, and appreciate diversity.
- 5 – Lowers drop-out rates. Real-world civic learning opportunities improve students' chances of staying in school.

In addition, a 2018 survey conducted by the National Council for the Social Studies found that 82% of students indicated that civic learning contributed to their own understanding of the knowledge of world events.ⁱⁱⁱ

In conclusion, research continues to confirm that civic education has important benefits for students in grades PreK – 12. Increased educational and experiential opportunities can mitigate public apathy and civic disengagement.

The State of Civic Literacy in Maryland

In 2011, C.I.R.C.L.E. produced a report identifying “Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning.”^{iv} These practices served as the basis for the review of Maryland’s civic architecture at the symposium. Those six practices are:

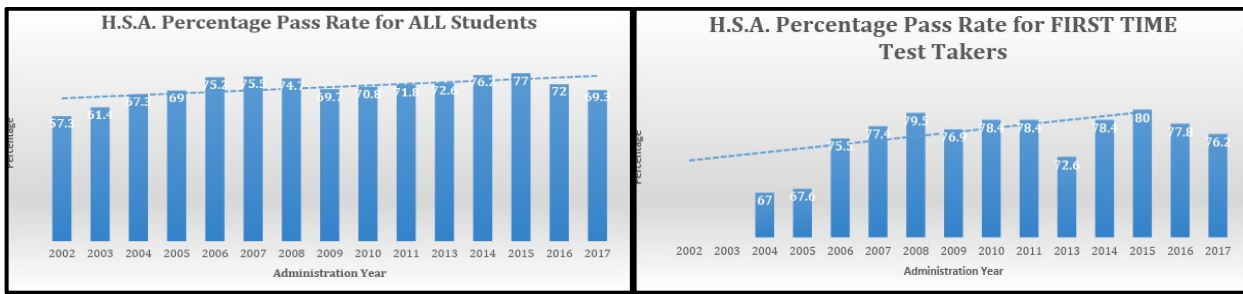
Practice	Description
1	Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy.
2	Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.
3	Design and implement programs that provide students with opportunities to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.
4	Offer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools and communities.
5	Encourage student participation in school governance.
6	Encourage students’ participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

The state of Maryland is distinguished from other states nationally in regard to Practice #1.

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) requires that students earning a diploma must acquire “three credits including one credit in United States history, one credit in world history, and one credit in local, state, and national government aligned with the Maryland High School Assessment for government.” The state of Maryland is only one of ten states, and the District of Columbia, that require students to earn a full credit in government as a graduation requirement.

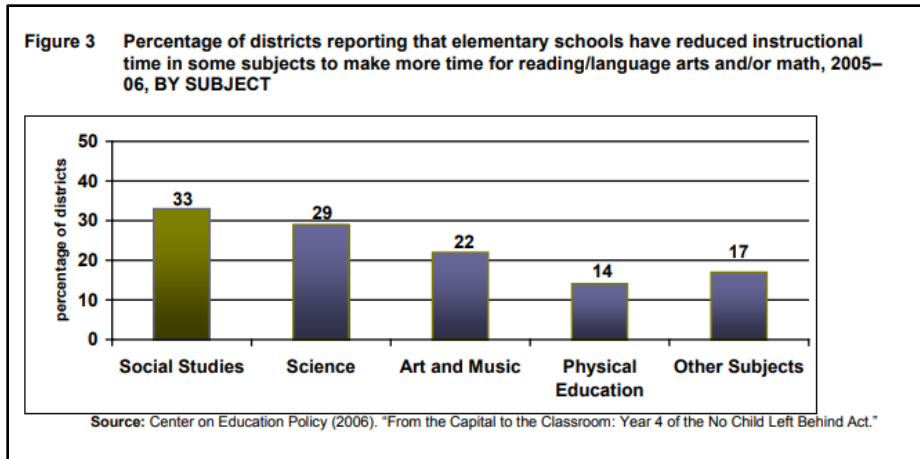
In addition, students must take and pass the High School Assessment in American Government, or successfully complete the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation in American Government. The Maryland General Assembly has further defined and expanded these assessment requirements in §7-203 the “Less Testing, More Learning Act” to include “performance-based tasks that require students to utilize critical and historical thinking skills and analyze primary sources;” on both the middle and high school levels.

Over time the pass rate for the H.S.A. in American Government has fluctuated, however it has experienced a positive growth trend overall. In addition, the pass rate for first time test takers has increased over time as well.

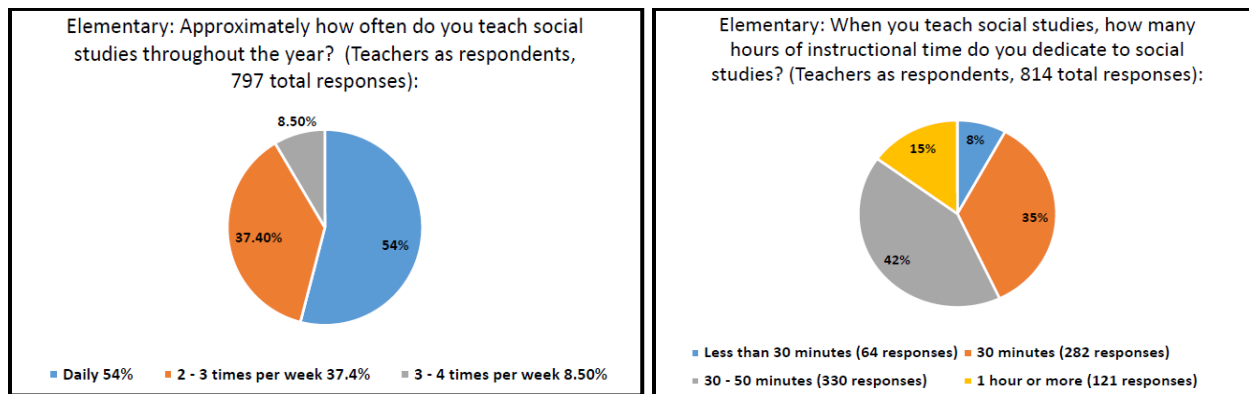


While many gains have been made regarding Practice #1, there is still room for growth. Although the High School Assessment in American Government has the highest pass rate of all the required high school assessments, pass rates for students with limited English proficiency, students receiving special education services, and those whose families qualify for free and reduced lunch continue to lag behind the pass rates for the general population.

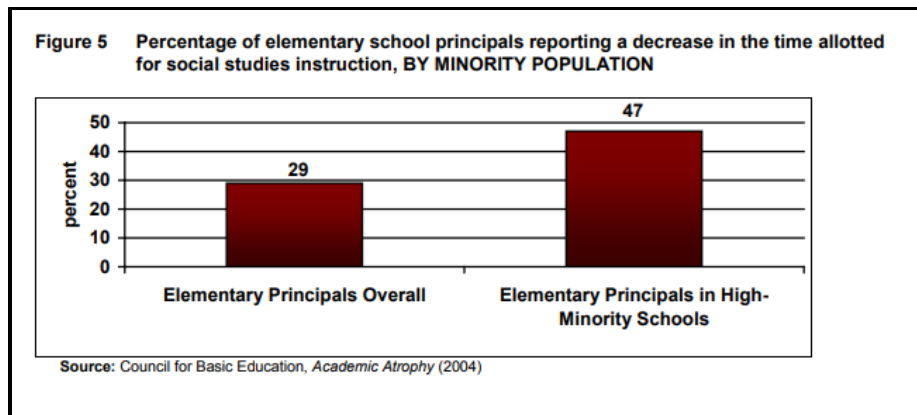
Along with the areas for potential growth in secondary social studies, elementary social studies continues to be marginalized in the PreK– 5 curricula. In efforts to increase time in reading and math, 33% of Maryland districts indicated that social studies instructional time had been reduced.^v



Results of the 2017 Social Studies Survey conducted by MSDE show an inconsistent approach to teaching social studies on the elementary level across the state. When asked how often social studies was taught each week, 54% of respondents indicated daily, 8.5% indicated 3 – 4 times a week, and 37% indicated 2 – 3 times a week. Further, when taught, the amount of time dedicated to social studies instruction varies. The time dedicated to social studies instruction varied from less than 20 minutes to one hour in length when taught. These discrepancies highlight the inconsistent approach on the elementary level in addressing social studies content in grades PreK – 5.^{vi}



The marginalization of social studies on the elementary level disproportionately impacts minority students. According to the *Task Force on Social Studies in Maryland: The Challenge and the Imperative*, 47% of elementary principals in high minority schools reported a decrease in the time allotted for social studies instruction.^{vii}



As a result, a significant narrowing of the curricula has occurred on the elementary level. In doing so, “civic deserts” are created where students are not provided with opportunities to interact regularly with civic content and activities. Without these opportunities, the students’ development of a civic identity and agency are delayed or dismissed. Research has shown that “the knowledge, skills, and disposition gained through civic education are critical precursors to increasing the levels of civic participation in our democratic republic.”^{viii} Securing a strong and consistent social studies program on the elementary level for all students in the state of Maryland is an area of need.

Identified Priorities of Civic Education in Maryland

Symposia participants reviewed characteristics of civic education programs and identified the following areas as priorities for programs in the state of Maryland. This was not intended to be an exhaustive list, but one that could be used in combination with the Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning to review Maryland’s civic architecture. Participants indicated that as a result of civic education in Maryland public schools, students should be able to:

- deliberate current and controversial issues with civility and respect for others’ point of view;
- identify reliable sources of news and information;
- learn skills for effective civic engagement;
- know important facts about current events;
- understand the structure of the US government; and
- learn skills for effective civic engagement/serve their communities.

Identified Strengths and Proposed Recommendations

Participants reviewed the state of civic education in Maryland using the Six Proven Practices as a guide. The following strengths and recommendations for further growth were identified for each priority:

Priority	Identified Strengths	Proposed Recommendations
Practice #1 Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy.	The High School and Middle School Assessments provide important legitimacy and support for social studies instruction in the state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Emphasize inquiry based learning at all grade levels not just secondary. ✓ Increase the amount of time spent in social studies at the elementary school level. ✓ Address the scope of civic education included in the elementary curricula.
Practice #2 Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.	Instruction includes discussion protocols in classrooms. Current events are included in classroom instruction and provide connections for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increase and/or improve pre-service and professional development training on discussion methods in the social studies classroom.
Practice #3 Design and implement programs that provide students with opportunities to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.	Service learning opportunities can begin as early as elementary and middle school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Make student service learning more student driven and connected to the community. Increase opportunities on the elementary level.
Practice #4 Offer extra-curricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to become involved in their schools and communities.	There are wide variety of extra-curricular activities available to students which support civic development (Mock Trial, Page Program, Rho Kappa, National History Day, Civic and Law Academies, etc).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Expand opportunities to all students by providing after school support services (i.e. transportation) and/or through the daily school schedule.
Practice #5 Encourage student participation in school governance.	Where in place, student government programs are effective for teaching civic responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students need the opportunity to see that their work through student government programs can create change. Staff and administration should move toward approving appropriate recommendations in order to foster greater student empowerment.
Practice #6 Encourage students' participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.	Where in place, the Project Citizen, Mock Trial, United Nations, Civic and Law Academy, and other programs provide effective and powerful learning experiences for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Expand Student Government Associations programs to include a greater number of schools (middle school, elementary school, and "civic deserts")

Conclusions

Strengthen and Expand Elementary Social Studies Education in Maryland

Social Studies education on the elementary level should be afforded daily instructional time comparable to the other core academic subjects. According to C.D. Jerald, in *The Hidden Costs of Curriculum Narrowing*, the impact of denying students the opportunity to build social studies vocabulary and background knowledge impacts more than development of civic awareness and agency. It also negatively impacts literacy development overall and thus further expands the opportunity gap among students. When instruction is narrowed on the elementary level, educational practices become steeped in the “teach to test” phenomenon, reducing what is learned to that which is covered on state assessments rather than providing a well-rounded program that can prepare students for the responsibilities of citizenship.^{ix} The results of the Annual Social Studies Survey in Maryland show that instructional time for social studies on the elementary level is currently squeezed out by the demands of math, literacy, and science. In doing so, students are not only denied a robust social studies experience in elementary school, but they are also not building literacy skills of context and comprehension. As a result, elementary social studies needs to be given equal instructional time to build context and comprehension skills as well as social studies skills and processes.

Elementary curriculum and instruction needs to be meaningful and integrative. Meaningful social studies instruction on the elementary level includes supporting the development of civic identity. Young learners need to be given the opportunity to question their world, evaluate grade-level primary and secondary sources, and take informed action both within and beyond their school house. Inquiry based learning provides students with these opportunities and allows for a diversity of ideas and experiences to be explored. When students are given the chance to acquire new knowledge and take informed action on that learning, civic agency and competency is fostered. Allowing students to find ways to take informed action in their communities further develops important literacy skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. These same skills are needed for participatory citizenship. Additionally, meaningful elementary social studies instruction should be deliberate and thoughtful throughout the course of the year and not a collection of disconnected learning activities and field trips. In doing so, students see that social studies is meaningful and an important part of their academic and civic development.

Responsible integration of curricula material supports achievement overall. Providing dedicated time for learning the skills unique to social studies (geographic, economic, cultural, civic awareness) is important; however, providing opportunities for integrated experiences among English language arts, science, math, and the arts is equally important and supportive of academic achievement overall. Symposium participants further recommended that in addition to dedicated time for social studies instruction, PreK-5 curriculum be re-envisioned to include opportunities for inquiry based, integrated social studies instruction. Viewing curriculum and instruction in this way will improve performance in all areas and better prepare students for upper grade levels and civic life. Much of civic activity is integrative in nature. In order to understand modern political discourse, citizens need adequate skills in reading, speaking, and listening; however, they also demand a foundation in mathematical, scientific, literary, and civic awareness. For example, responsible citizens must understand the cause of environmental issues in their community, the budgets that influence those issues, and the projected impacts of policy decisions. This level of integrated knowledge is required of voting age citizens. As such, integrated learning and thinking should be modelled and directly taught from an early age. Learning civic content in isolation of other subjects robs all subject areas of the authenticity and enrichment students deserve.

Provide Opportunities for Maryland Students to Participate in Democratic Processes

Civic dispositions are learned through active participation in democratic processes. Maryland PreK-12 students should be given the opportunity to make decisions within their school houses that allow them to practice problem solving skills, collective action, leadership, and deliberate discourse. Programs such as Student Government Associations, We the People, Project Citizen, Mock Trial, National History Day, Civic and Law Academies, service learning, mock elections, and many others across the state provide these types of opportunities for students. Participation in these programs and activities helps students learn how to participate in the functioning of our democratic system, and polish their skills of civic interaction and advocacy. Additionally, these opportunities include real world discussions that wrestle with controversial issues of the past and present. In doing so, teachers reinforce the listening and speaking skills of deliberative discourse. Lastly, these opportunities create civic identities that include self-awareness of the rights and responsibilities associated with democratic societies. To do this, schools must be open to providing space for student voice to be a regular part of

the curricular and extra-curricular program. School and district administrations will need to both model these civic dispositions and be responsive to student action when appropriate.

Provide Professional Development and Improve Teacher Preparation in Social Studies

On the elementary level, teacher preparation courses need to provide opportunities for student interns to refine their teaching skills according to the inquiry based and integrated social studies models. Once placed in a school, teachers need continuing professional development that is both based on the unique content and skills of social studies, and also on the cooperative development of integrated curriculum for their grade level students.

Additionally, secondary teachers need resources to support instruction that is aligned to the American Government High School Assessment and the new Grade 8 United States History exam (to be field tested in 2020). Both assessments will measure achievement in the State Social Studies Standard 6.0, Skills and Processes.^x Specifically, this means that students will be assessed on their ability to evaluate the credibility of sources by considering the authority, origin, type, context, and corroborative value of each source. They will be asked to identify credible, relevant information contained in sources. Using those skills, students will be asked to construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources. The inclusion of these skills on the statewide assessment further supports the priorities of civic education identified by symposium participants and bolsters Practice #1 of strong civic education programs. Further supporting teachers with resources and professional development in these areas will increase student achievement on these new items. Most importantly, opportunities to hone these skills will prepare Maryland students for active and informed citizenship.

ⁱ Peter Levine and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, *“The Republic is (Still) at Risk and civics is a Part of the Solution.”*

ⁱⁱ Carnegie Corporation of New York, CIRCLE. *The Civic Mission of Schools* (Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE, 2003)

ⁱⁱⁱ Paska, Larry. *“The Civic Life of Social Studies.”* Executive Director's Message, NCSS, 29 May 2018

^{iv} Lisa Guilfoile and Brady Delander. *“Guidebook: Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning.”* National Council for Learning and Civic Engagement, January 2014.

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- ^v *Task Force Report on Social Studies in Maryland: The Challenge and the Imperative*, marylandpublicschools.org, 2010.
- ^{vi} “Results of the 2017 Social Studies Survey”
<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SocialStudies/2017SocialStudiesSurveyResults.pdf>
- ^{viii} David Adkins and Paul Bauman. “State of Civic Education Toolkit” The Council of State Governments, Education Commission of the States, December 2017.
- ^{ix} Heafner et al., “A Case for Advocacy: Becoming AGENTS for Change”; M. Neill, “Low Expectations and Less Learning: The Problem with No Child Left Behind,” *Social Education* 67, no. 5 (2003): 281-284.
- ^x *State Standards: Social Studies Grade 8 Skills and Processes* Maryland State Department of Education. 2016
http://mdk12.org/instruction/curriculum/social_studies/standard6/grade8.html, 2016