

# Synthesis Snapshot

## Civic Engagement



# Overview

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We've been hearing from many educators that too often students feel alienated from civics lessons. They don't know if they're allowed to act, if the system respects their voice, and if what they want to do ultimately matters. But it's our students who will bear the impact of the political and social decisions made today and will carry forward important policies and practices that shape who we become. This is why **The Teachers Guild** and **ASCD** are working together to support educators in reimagining civic education for students today.

Over two weeks, we collected stories and insights from educators and experts across the country to help us answer this question: **How might we prepare our students to be civically powerful and use their unique voice to address issues that matter to them?** The following themes were identified based on the insights educators gathered and shared in the Discover phase of this project.

# The themes we heard are:

## MAKE IT INTERDISCIPLINARY

- How might we integrate civics across content areas and embed it within school culture?
- How might we make room for civics in different parts of the school day?

## STUDENT-OWNED

- How might we place students at the heart of civics?
- How might we elevate student voice in our schools and address the issues that matter most to them?

## REIMAGINE ASSESSMENT

- How might we creatively assess civic engagement in our schools so we better emphasize high quality civics in our schools?

## REAL-WORLD CONNECTION

- How might we better connect civics to real-world issues?
- How might we create opportunities for students to contextualize civics lessons in the real-world?

**THEME 1**

# Make it interdisciplinary

**What we heard:**

"What's civics?" That's the question we most often heard when talking with educators. Part of the confusion comes from the fact that civics is taught in very different ways depending where you are. At the high school level, civics is thought of as a contained, mandatory 10th grade class, and is often referred to as American Government. These high school classes focuses more on institutions and processes, less on the role of the citizen. In the lower grades, it's thought of as social studies instruction, which can often be neglected to make room for additional ELA and math instruction. But, at its best, civics is so much more than that. As Emma Humphries, Chief Education Officer at iCivics, put it: **“It’s education that should inspire our students towards a lifetime of informed, fierce, and tireless engagement in their communities and in public life.”** To achieve this definition, we need to reimagine civics as something that is integrated in all aspects of school life. Use this Opportunity Area to design solutions that bring civics into new content areas, and prioritize it at the school level.

**Opportunity Areas:**

How might we integrate civics across content areas and embed it within school culture?

How might we make room for civics in different parts of the school day?

**Provocations:**

- What if a “Civic Connection” was embedded into lesson plan templates?
- What if there was a “Civics Committee” at schools with representatives from various department areas. Their goal would be to bring civics-oriented activities to respective content teams.

**THEME 2**

# Student-owned

**What we heard:**

**"When I think about civics, I think about students taking ownership,"** said Crystal Bustillos, Social Studies Department Chair in El Paso Unified School District. As we seek to prepare students to take on issues that matter most to them, we need to support them to identify those issues first. That begins by celebrating their voice and perspective in our classrooms and schools in rich and meaningful ways - ways that are integral to curricular goals and embedded in normal, day-to-day instruction. Use this Opportunity Area to create lessons, processes or programs that better integrate student perspective into the heart of civics.

**Opportunity Areas:**

How might we place students at the heart of civics?

How might we elevate student voice in our schools and address the issues that matter most to them?

**Provocations:**

- What if units began with student explorations about issues that matter most to them?
- What if we created space for students to actively build, challenge, co-create school culture with teams of teachers and community members?

**THEME 3**

# Reimagine assessment

**What we heard:**

There is no one way to assess civics - and that's because it's so encompassing. It can't just be a simple multiple choice test or a performance essay because good civics is about how you prepare students to be civically powerful in the real world. But how do we as educators know we're making progress toward that goal without some guideposts? Peter Levine, author of We Are The Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise of Civic Renewal in America and thought leader in civic education has said, "Civics is about interacting with other people. So let's make an assessment on how we're listening, and acting and solving problems together." Use this Opportunity Area to design tools or processes for establishing what good civics is - to us and for our students and that will serve as guideposts for other classrooms and schools.

**Opportunity Areas:**

How might we creatively assess civic engagement in our schools so we better emphasize high quality civics in our schools?

**Provocations:**

- What if schools developed a "civics award" for students based on criteria co-developed with students and the community?
- What if units embedded a "civics rubric" to focus students' attention on quality interaction and problem-solving?

**THEME 4**

# Real-world connection

**What we heard:**

**Students are highly motivated to learn and to become active members of their community when they see that their voices are heard and taken seriously,** shared Steve Zemelman a High School teacher in Evanston, Illinois. Bridging the gap between theory and action, let's facilitate more real-world civics learning in schools so students can see the impact that their voice and action can have in raising awareness, activating networks, and maybe even creating meaningful community change. Use this Opportunity Area to develop solutions to better link civics to the real-world in your classroom or school.

**Opportunity Areas:**

How might we better connect civics to real-world issues?

How might we create opportunities for students to contextualize civics lessons in the real-world?

**Provocations:**

- **What if lesson plans linked to public action pathways?**
- **What if community members had more opportunity to collaborate with students?**