

CIVICS

Civics directly addresses citizenship education within the context of political systems. Students study the assumptions upon which governments are founded, and the organizations and strategies governments employ to achieve their goals. With specific respect to the United States, students learn the underlying principles of representative democracy, the constitutional separation of powers, and the rule of law. They need to comprehend that an essential premise of representative democracy is the willingness of citizens to place a high premium on their personal responsibility for participation in social decision-making. Students develop the skills which citizens must possess in order to discharge those responsibilities while protecting their rights and the rights of others. The study of civics prepares students to translate their beliefs into actions and their ideas into policies.

Civics Standard One: Students will examine the structure and purposes of governments with specific emphasis on constitutional democracy [Government].

Governments exist and are instituted for specific purposes and employ a variety of organizational structures to pursue their objectives. Constitutional democracy attempts to balance individual freedom with the needs of the society as a whole. American citizens need a basic understanding of the structure of different forms of government and a detailed knowledge of a constitutional democracy.

The complexity of the standard will increase at each succeeding grade cluster:

- K-3:** Students will understand that leaders are sometimes chosen by election, and that elected officials are expected to represent the interests of the people who elected them.
- K-3:** Students will understand that positions of authority, whether elected, appointed, or familial, carry responsibilities and should be respected.
- 4-5:** Students will understand that governments have a variety of structures and exist for many purposes and that in America, these are explained in the United States and State constitutions.
- 4-5:** Students will understand that the United States government is divided into executive, legislative, and judicial branches, each with specific responsibilities and powers.
- 6-8:** Students will understand that governments have the power to make and enforce laws and regulations, levy taxes, conduct foreign policy, and make war.
- 6-8:** Students will analyze the different functions of federal, state, and local governments in the United States and examine the reasons for the different organizational structures each level of government employs.
- 9-12:** Students will analyze the ways in which the structure and purposes of different governments around the world reflect differing ideologies, cultures, values, and histories.

Civics Standard Two: Students will understand the principles and ideals underlying the American political system [Politics].

The American political system was intentionally created to rest on the foundation of individual liberty, freedom of religion, representative democracy, equal opportunity, and equal protection under the law. These principles and ideals are codified in the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other significant documents. Understanding, achieving, and upholding them represents a major challenge to each succeeding generation of American citizens.

The complexity of the standards will increase at each succeeding grade cluster:

- K-3:** Students will understand that respect for others, their opinions, and their property is a foundation of civil society in the United States.
- 4-5:** Students will understand that the principle of “due process” means that the government must follow its own rules when taking actions against a citizen.
- 4-5:** Students will understand that a society based on the ideal of individual liberty requires a commitment on the part of its citizens to the principles of civic responsibility and personal civility.
- 6-8:** Students will understand that the concept of majority rule does not mean that the rights of minorities may be disregarded and will examine and apply the protections accorded those minorities in the American political system.
- 6-8:** Students will understand the principles and content of major American state papers such as the Declaration of Independence; United States Constitution (including the Bill of Rights); and the Federalist Papers.
- 9-12:** Students will examine and analyze the extra-Constitutional role that political parties play in American politics.
- 9-12:** Students will understand that the functioning of the government is a dynamic process which combines the formal balances of power incorporated in the Constitution with traditions, precedents, and interpretations which have evolved over the past 200 years.

Civics Standard Three: Students will understand the responsibilities, rights, and privileges of United States citizens [Citizenship].

The political, religious, and economic freedoms provided to American citizens are accompanied by the responsibility of active civic participation at the individual, community, state, and national levels. Effective citizens need to understand the dedication and commitment necessary to safeguard those rights for themselves and future generations, as well as the potential consequences of inaction. They should also be able to distinguish between rights and privileges.

The complexity of the standard will increase at each succeeding grade cluster:

- K-3:** Students will understand that American citizens have distinct responsibilities (such as voting), rights (such as free speech and freedom of religion), and privileges (such as driving).
- 4-5:** Students will identify the fundamental rights of all American citizens as enumerated in the Bill of Rights.

- 4-5:** Students will apply the protections guaranteed in the Bill of Rights to an analysis of everyday situations.
- 6-8:** Students will understand that civil rights secure political freedom while property rights secure economic freedom and that both are essential protections for United States citizens.
- 6-8:** Students will understand that American citizenship includes responsibilities such as voting, jury duty, obeying the law, service in the armed forces when required, and public service.
- 9-12:** Students will understand that citizens are individually responsible for keeping themselves informed about public policy issues on the local, state, and federal levels; participating in the civic process; and upholding the laws of the land.

Civics Standard Four: Students will develop and employ the civic skills necessary for effective, participatory citizenship [Participation].

The intent to participate in the American political system must be matched with the specific skills necessary to be effective. Such skills include but are not limited to: registering to vote; interacting successfully with government agencies; organizing and working in civic groups; researching and advocating a position; or serving in an office of public trust.

The complexity of the standard will increase at each succeeding grade cluster:

- K-3:** Students will acquire the skills necessary for participation in a group, including defining an objective, dividing responsibility, and working cooperatively.
- 4-5:** Students will understand that in order to select effective leaders, citizens have to become informed about candidates' qualifications and the issues of the day.
- 4-5:** Students will identify and employ the formal and informal methods by which democratic groups function.
- 6-8:** Students will follow the actions of elected officials, and understand and employ the mechanisms for communicating with them while in office.
- 9-12:** Students will develop and employ the skills necessary to work with government programs and agencies.
- 9-12:** Students will understand the process of working within a political party, a commission engaged in examining public policy, or a citizen's group.