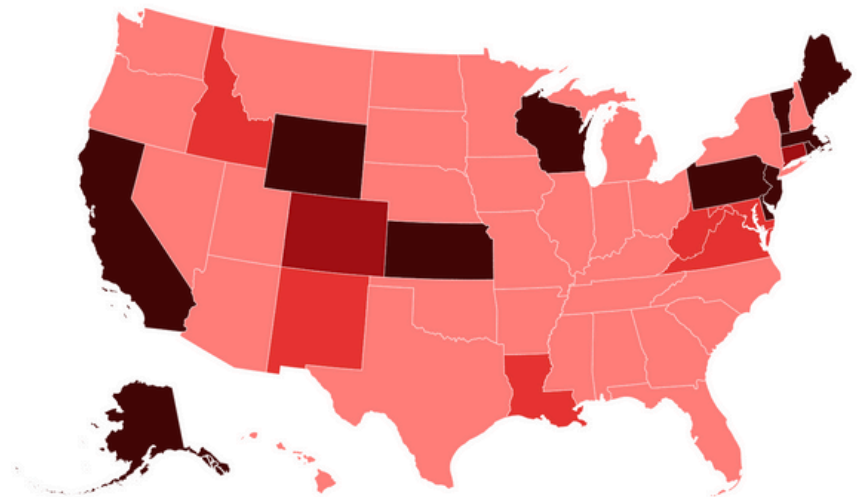


# Civic Education in Massachusetts and Beyond

## U.S. High School Civics - Instructional Requirements

■ No requirement but integrated in standards ■ Yes, but no specified time requirement  
■ Yes, full year course ■ Yes, half year course



Source: [Data Compiled from CivxNow](#)

The data shown are from a presidential election.

| NOMINEES   |                        |                                  |                        |                  |  |
|------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|--|
| Party      | Presidential Candidate | Number of States Won             | Electoral College Vote | Popular Vote     |  |
| Republican | Candidate A            | 30                               | 271 50.4%              | 50,455,156 47.9% |  |
| Democrat   | Candidate B            | 20 plus the District of Columbia | 266 49.4%              | 50,992,335 48.4% |  |
| Green      | Candidate C            | 0                                | 0 0%                   | 2,882,738 2.7%   |  |

According to the data, which of the following statements about the election is true?

- ☐ A Candidate A became president because he won the most states.
- ☐ B Candidate A became president because he won the Electoral College vote.
- ☐ C Candidate B became president because he won the popular vote.
- ☐ D Candidate B became president because he won the vote in the District of Columbia.

Sample 8<sup>th</sup> Grade NAEP Civics Exam Question

## Facts About Civic Education in the United States

1. The U.S. Federal Government does not provide or mandate a specific curriculum or set of educational standards for civic knowledge and skills.
2. Two important responsibilities for U.S. Citizens are to: 1) vote in federal elections and 2) serve on juries.<sup>1</sup>
3. At the federal level, the U.S. spends \$.05 per year, per student, on Civic Education.<sup>2</sup>
4. Thirty-one states require a one-semester high school civics course and only six require a full-year course.<sup>3</sup>
5. Five states received “exemplary” ratings by ranking an A- in both U.S. History and Civics Standards: Alabama, California, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia. Twenty states were rated “inadequate,” meaning they received “D” or “F” grades in both subjects.<sup>4</sup>
6. 81% of youth who remembered high school experiences in which they felt their voices and opinions mattered said they were extremely likely to vote compared to 44% of those who did not recall having those experiences.<sup>5</sup>
7. Approximately 42% of young voters (age 18-29) cast ballots in the 2024 presidential election as compared to approximately 50% in 2020.<sup>7</sup>
8. Thirteen states require students to pass an exam, such as the USCIS Civics Test to earn a diploma.<sup>8</sup>
9. Ten states require neither a standalone civics course nor a test for high schoolers.<sup>9</sup>
10. Since 1998, student performance on the NAEP 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Civics Assessment has largely remained flat.<sup>10</sup>

# 2018 MA Civics Legislation An Act to Promote Civic Engagement

The purpose of civic education is to prepare all students to be thoughtful and active citizens, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and applied competencies needed for informed and effective participation in civic and democratic life. (MA DESE)

## Mandatory Civics Education

- MA public schools must teach U.S. history and social science, including civics, to prepare students for active citizenship.
- The curriculum must include the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, and the Massachusetts Constitution.

## Student-Led Civics Projects

- It requires public schools serving 8th grade and high school students to provide at least one student-led, non-partisan civics project per student.
- These projects aim to develop students' abilities to analyze issues, consider diverse viewpoints, make logical arguments, and engage in civil discourse.

## Goals of Civics Education

- The law aims to promote civic service and a greater understanding of civic duties.
- It seeks to prepare students morally and intellectually for the responsibilities of citizenship.

## History and Social Science Frameworks

- The Law is tightly coupled with the 2018 History and Social Science Frameworks which stress preparing students to be thoughtful and active citizens. The 8<sup>th</sup> Grade course in the MA standards is United States and Massachusetts Government and Civic Life.
- The 2024-2025 school year is the first operational test year which the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Civics MCAS test will report results to schools and districts.

## How are two MA school districts approaching Civics?

### Springfield Public Schools

*23,670 Students (2025)*

- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Civics Class w/ student-led projects
- HS student-led projects embedded in United States History II course
- Implementing Discovering Justice modules at early grade levels.

### Mohawk Trail Regional School District

*805 Students (2025)*

- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Civics Class w/ student-led projects
- Half year HS Civic Action course and student-led projects
- Beginning to adopt Investigating History, an inquiry-based curriculum for early grades.

## Additional Resources

- CivxNow and iCivics, founded by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, focuses on advancing civic learning by providing educators and students resources and advocating to make civic education a nationwide priority.
- The Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition (MCLC) strives to make 21<sup>st</sup> century civic education a part of every student's journey. They provide a range of resources for schools and districts.
- The Institute for Citizens and Scholars has developed new tools to measure civic readiness and opportunities.
- The Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP) partners with K-12 schools providing resources and facilitating professional learning.
- The MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), in partnership with Generation Citizen, hosts Student-Led Civics Project Showcases across Massachusetts.