

Civic Engagement



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Civic Engagement: Individuals sharing their skills and knowledge through actions intended to improve communities, states, nations, the world, and themselves.

Background

In 2015, the Kansas State Department of Education hosted over 280 focus groups in twenty communities across the state, asking “What are the characteristics, qualities, abilities and skills of a successful 24-year-old Kansan? Kansas community and business leader focus groups identified “citizenship, ethics, and duty to others” as critical interpersonal social skills required for student success. In response the Kansas State Board of Education created the following definition.

*A successful Kansas high school graduate has the **academic preparation, cognitive preparation, technical skills, employability skills and civic engagement** to be successful in post-secondary education, in the attainment of an industry recognized certification or in the workforce, without the need for remediation.*

Civic engagement is comprised of actions and attitudes associated with social participation. The most obvious are voting, volunteering, and donating money, but civic engagement may also involve membership in civic and community organizations, public speaking, petitioning, mentoring, assisting a

neighbor, or other informal volunteering activities that lead to stronger communities.

The first three words of the Constitution, We the People, best underscore the principle of civic engagement. The Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies standards mission statement reinforces this principle by asking schools to prepare students to be “informed, thoughtful, engaged citizens.” Schools must provide students with the academic and cognitive preparation, and the technical skills required for future success in an environment that encourages and facilitates civic engagement pre-Kindergarten through the 12th grade. In order for schools to cultivate a culture of civic engagement, students need regular opportunities to engage in civic learning, participate in their communities, and see similar behavior modeled by adults. This would involve partnering with communities, organizations, businesses, and other groups to provide engagement opportunities at all academic levels. Civic engagement isn’t learned by reading text, listening to a lecture, or watching a video. Students learn to be civically engaged by being civically engaged.

Mission Statement for the Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies Standards:

The Kansas Standards for History, Government, and Social Studies prepare students to be informed, thoughtful, engaged citizens as they enrich their communities, state, nation, world, and themselves.

- An informed citizen possesses the knowledge needed to understand contemporary political, economic, and social issues.
- A thoughtful citizen applies higher order thinking skills to make connections between the past, present, and future in order to understand, anticipate, respond to, and solve problems.
- An engaged citizen collaborates, contributes, compromises, and participates as an active member of a community.

Definition of Civic Engagement: Individuals sharing their skills and knowledge through actions intended to improve communities, states, nations, the world, and themselves.

- **Civic skills** are the abilities necessary to participate as informed, thoughtful and engaged citizens in a democratic republic. They are necessary for critical thinking and collective action, and they include speaking, listening, collaborating, community organizing, public advocacy, and the ability to gather and process information.
- **Civic knowledge** begins with a fundamental understanding of the structure of government, and the processes by which law and policy are made. It also requires an understanding of the history that shapes the present, and the geography and economics that impact policy options.
- **Civic actions** include voting, volunteering, participating, collaborating, compromising, speaking, and any number of activities designed to assist others, sway opinions, or impact policy.
- **Civic intent** (dispositions) are personal commitments to ideals important in a democracy that include concern for others' rights and welfare, freedom, fairness, reasonable levels of trust, and a sense of public duty.

Schools Can:

- Provide rigorous course work in history, government, political science, and other related subjects.
- Encourage classroom use of moderated discussions of contemporary and/or controversial issues to encourage student interest in current issues.
- Implement service projects that begin in the community and extend to the classroom and others that begin in the classroom and extend to the community.
- Provide access to high quality volunteer, service, and extracurricular activities to increase student learning and school and community engagement.
- Provide a strong participatory student government as a laboratory for practical civic learning.
- Provide instruction and student access to simulations of democratic processes.

Building Self-Efficacy: Self-efficacy is the confidence that one's actions can make a difference, either alone or in collaboration and cooperation with others. The results of this confidence are students who:

- View challenges as problems to be solved (critical thinking).
- Tend to develop deeper understanding around the problem they are facing (depth of knowledge).
- Tend to feel a stronger sense of dedication to their activities (commitment).
- Recover more quickly from setbacks and disappointments (perseverance).

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