

Most U.S. social studies teachers feel unprepared to teach civic learning

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Only one in five social studies teachers in U.S. public schools report feeling very well prepared to support students' civic learning, saying they need additional aid with instructional materials, professional development and training, according to a RAND Corporation survey.

"These findings are concerning," said Laura Hamilton, lead author of the report and adjunct behavioral scientist at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "Beyond being a component of social studies, civic education can teach students the skills and attitudes—a sense of civic duty, concern for the [welfare of others](#), critical thinking—that are crucial in a democracy."

Between a third and just over half of both elementary (K-5) teachers and secondary (grades 6-12) teachers who taught social studies reported they had not received any training on civic education despite most still prioritizing schools' role in promoting civic development and using various means to do so. The survey was conducted in late 2019 using the RAND American Educator Panels (AEP) - nationally representative samples of educators who provide their feedback on important issues of educational policy and practice.

RAND examined how, in a partisan political landscape and with increasing distrust in institutions like the media, teachers are handling civics education today and what state standards and [community support](#)—or resistance—might influence teachers' approaches. The report is part of RAND's Truth Decay initiative, which is exploring the

diminishing role of facts and analysis in American public life.

Elementary social studies teachers were less likely to highlight practices explicitly related to civic education but reported a similar emphasis as secondary teachers on practices such as social and emotional learning, improving school climate and conflict resolution. Teachers of color and those serving English-language learners reported more emphasis on civic-related topics.

Most teachers reported using civics instructional materials they found or created themselves.

"District materials were reported to be culturally appropriate and effective, but at least half of the teachers reported a need for better civics resources and instructional resources more culturally relevant and appropriate for English-language learners." said Julia Kaufman, co-author and a senior policy researcher at RAND. "Most reported a need for better civics instructional resources, as well as more nonteaching time and community partnerships to support their efforts to promote students' civic development."

Among the report's recommendations:

- Teachers should receive training, encouragement and support to enact practices that promote civic development, especially at the elementary level. Teachers could especially benefit from guidance on how to integrate civic-learning opportunities into their academic instruction and other classroom activities so that these opportunities support, rather than detract from, teachers' other responsibilities.
- Teachers need additional instructional materials to promote the full menu of civic skills, knowledge and dispositions and to provide instruction that is engaging, culturally relevant and

tailored to the needs of all their students, particularly English-language learners.

- Policy supports that create more sustained attention on civic learning—like an emphasis on civic education standards and recommended high-quality curricula to teach civics—could create environments that are more conducive to civic [education](#).

The other author of "Preparing Children and Youth for Civic Life in the Era of Truth Decay: Insights from the American Teacher Panel" is Lynn Hu.

Provided by RAND Corporation

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