



Illinois Civics Mandate Guidance Document

Grades 9-12

Intended Audiences: District and school administrators, curriculum coordinators, teacher-leaders, and classroom teachers

Description: This document is to serve as a guide for districts, schools, and teachers in interpreting the amendments to the School Code that affect civics instruction (Public Act 99-434 and Public Act 99-485). Included are the Illinois State Board of Education's interpretation of the law and common misconceptions.

There are changes in the required social science high school courses for students that begin with students entering the ninth grade in the 2016-17 school year and each subsequent year thereafter. The changes to these requirements can be found in the Illinois General Assembly Compiled Statutes. This change is highlighted in the red box below.

From the Illinois General Assembly Compiled Statutes:

Sec. 27-22. Required high school courses.

- (e) As a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma, each pupil entering the ninth grade in the 2008-09 school year or a subsequent school year must, in addition to other course requirements, successfully complete all of the following courses:
- (1) Four years of language arts.
 - (2) Two years of writing-intensive courses, one of which must be English and the other of which may be English or any other subject. When applicable, writing-intensive courses may be counted toward the fulfillment of other graduation requirements.
 - (3) Three years of mathematics, one of which must be Algebra I, one of which must include geometry content, and one of which may be an Advanced Placement computer science course if the pupil successfully completes Algebra II or an integrated mathematics course with Algebra II content.
 - (4) Two years of science.
 - (5) **Two years of social studies, of which at least one year must be history of the United States or a combination of history of the United States and American government and, beginning with pupils entering the ninth grade in the 2016-17 school year and each school year thereafter, at least one semester must be civics, which shall help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives. Civics course content shall focus on government institutions, the discussion of current and controversial issues, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process. School districts may utilize private funding available for the purposes of offering civics education.**

(Source: PA 98-885, eff. 8-15-14; 99-434, eff. 7-1-16 (See PA 99-485 for the effective date of changes made by PA 99-434); 99-485, eff. 11-20-15; 99-674, eff. 7-29-16.)

Several key issues are addressed in the language of the legislation on the previous page. *Text from the legislation is in standard font; clarification and explanation follow in bolded font.*

Course requirements:

“Two years of social studies, of which at least one year must be history of the United States or a combination of history of the United States and American government and, beginning with pupils entering the ninth grade in the 2016-17 school year and each school year thereafter, at least one semester must be civics...”

- **Begins with students starting the ninth grade in 2016-17**
- **Two years required social science courses**
- **One year must be U.S. history (or combination of U.S. history and American government)**
- **One semester of civics**

“...which shall help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives.”

Additionally, the language provides clarification about the required content of the civics coursework.

Civics course content shall focus on:

- **Government institutions:** This may include ideas of discussing foundations of our American government, branches of government, and other institutions per the Illinois civic content standards 9-12.
- **Discussion of current and societal issues:** Current and societal issue discussions may link issues to core curricular goals as well as address meaningful and timely essential questions about public policy issues that deserve the attention of students and the community.
- **Service learning:** Service learning addresses the idea of taking informed action upon learning; service learning **MUST** connect to the content *within* the classroom. This could take the form of a traditional service project in civil society and/or advocacy for public policy at the local, state, or federal levels of government. Service learning does **NOT** refer to having students gather community service hours or volunteering.
- **Simulations of the democratic process:** The goal of simulations is to engage students in practices of citizenship and promote deeper understanding of the workings of government institutions through role-playing, scenario consideration, or problem-based case solutions.

Civics instruction should also align to the Illinois Learning Standards for social science, which enumerate the knowledge and skills that students should acquire in civics during the high school experience. **(The Illinois Learning Standards for social science should guide learning in *all* social sciences. All social science courses should strive to incorporate inquiry skills simultaneously with disciplinary concepts. Cross-curricular integration is highly encouraged in all courses. For example, civics coursework should include the civics standards as well as any other applicable standards from the other areas of disciplinary concepts.)**

From ISBE's Graduation Guidance Document:

The legislation has led to many questions about options for how the civics requirement can be addressed within the high school structure while still maintaining compliance. Many districts and schools have questions about whether civics is now mandated to be a stand-alone course or if it can be incorporated within existing course structures.

Clarification exists in the Graduation Guidance Document from the Illinois State Board of Education. The Graduation Guidance Document states:

7. Do schools have to offer a separate civics course or may they incorporate civics into existing social studies courses?

Under Section 27-22 of the School Code, civics education must "help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives"; address government institutions; discuss current and controversial issues; and include service learning and simulations of the democratic process. Civics instruction should also align to the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science, which are currently being expanded to enumerate the knowledge and skills that students should acquire during the high school experience. The course of study must be a

School districts are free to determine how to incorporate civics education into their current curricula in a way that best meets the needs of their students.

This key issue is addressed in the sentence highlighted above. Text from the Graduation Guidance Document is in standard font; clarification and explanation follow in bolded font.

"School districts are free to determine how to incorporate civics education into their current curricula in a way that best meets the needs of their students."

- **School districts have the discretion to determine how to implement civics. They can have a stand-alone course, but they *may* also infuse a semester's worth of civics course content into another course. In other words, it is NOT a requirement for the civics coursework to be a stand-alone course. The coursework is required to be at least a semester, but required coursework may be incorporated into existing course structures.**