



Illinois Civics Mandate Guidance Document

Grades 6-8

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 amendment to the School Code that affects civics instruction (Public Act 101-0254). Included are the Illinois State Board of Education’s interpretation of the law and common misconceptions.

There are changes in the required social science middle school (grades 6-8) courses for students that begin with the 2020-21 school year and each subsequent year thereafter. The changes to these requirements can be found in the Illinois General Assembly Compiled Statutes.

From the Illinois General Assembly Compiled Statutes:

Section 5. The School Code is amended by adding Section 27-3.10 as follows:

[\(105 ILCS 5/27-3.10 new\)](#)

Sec. 27-3.10. Elementary school civics course of study. In addition to the instruction required to be provided under Section 27-3 of this Code, every public elementary school shall include in its sixth-, seventh-, or eighth-grade curriculum, beginning with the 2020-21 school year, at least one semester of civics education, 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 education course content shall focus on government institutions, the discussion of current and societal issues, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process. Civics education in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade shall be in accordance with the Illinois Learning Standards for social science. Additionally, school districts may consult with civics education stakeholders, deemed appropriate by the State Board of Education, with regard to civics education curriculum for sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. School districts may utilize private funding available for the purposes of offering civics education.

Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect July 1, 2020.

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

Course requirements:

“... every public elementary school shall include in its sixth-, seventh-, or eighth-grade curriculum, beginning with the 2020-21 school year, at least one semester of civics education ...”

- **One semester of civics instruction required during sixth, seventh, and/or eighth grade**
- **A district may embed the semester of civics instruction in one or more grade level**
- **Begins with the 2020-21 school year**

“... 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 education 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 6-8.
- **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 education in sixth, seventh, or eighth grades shall be in accordance with the Illinois Learning Standards for social science. **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 would include the civics standards as well as any other applicable standards from the other areas of the disciplinary concepts.**

From ISBE’s Graduation Guidance Document:

The legislation has led to questions about options for how the civics requirement can be addressed within the middle 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.

Additional clarification about the middle school civics mandate can be gathered from the language pertaining to the high school civics mandate. Clarification on the high school civics mandate 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 require in civics during the high school experience. The course of study must be a minimum of one semester. 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.

- **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.**