



What does it mean to be a Democracy School?

The Democracy Schools Initiative was established in 2006 by the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition (ICMC) with the purpose of recognizing schools that have deep commitments to civic learning. The Robert R. McCormick Foundation, who now convenes the ICMC, supports 54 high schools in Illinois.

Your work as a Democracy School is preparing our next generation for meaningful engagement in public life. As a Democracy School, you are committed to strengthening the five common elements necessary for sustained, schoolwide commitments to civic learning. As a school community, you strive to:

- ◆ Encompass visionary leadership as a driver of change and live your mission to provide high-quality civic learning opportunities for all students
- ◆ Emphasize civic learning in both the hiring and staff development process
- ◆ Weave civic learning practices (discussion of current/controversial issues, simulations of democratic processes, service learning, and direct instruction on government institutions) throughout the formal curriculum in multiple disciplines
- ◆ Develop a school climate that nurtures and models civic dispositions and encourages student voice
- ◆ Build reciprocal school-community relationships that serve as a resource to each other

Democracy Schools have both strengths and growth areas with these elements. As you work to identify civic learning goals this year to address your growth areas, the Democracy Schools Network (DSN) can be a resource and support for your efforts to improve civic learning in all disciplines. The DSN offers:

- ◆ In-person meetings focused on community building, best practices in civic learning and reflecting on school civic learning goals
- ◆ Participation in an annual convening with statewide civic learning stakeholders
- ◆ Support for collaboration between network schools
- ◆ Discussion and resources through an online forum
- ◆ Analysis of data on civic learning in our schools
- ◆ Financial resources to support schools to achieve civic learning goals

Civics has been traditionally housed within the Social Studies department, but as we know, civic learning occurs throughout all content areas. This important work can only be strengthened with your entire school's commitment to embracing civic learning. We applaud your administrators, teachers, parents, community partners and students who are actively working to empower students to nurture and sustain our democracy.

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