



Integrating Civics Education into Elementary Instruction

Community Partner: Civic Learning Council

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Describe the specific need within the K–12 system

As the nation prepares to celebrate its 250th birthday, we have an opportunity to revisit the ways in which we invest in, educate, and train our future voters, public servants, and residents.¹ The civic educational needs of our students are diverse. For those born in the United States, civic engagement modeled by family members in the home can vary widely, and new arrivals to the country often come from nations with very different political systems and traditions and may be relying heavily on their K–12 education to understand the systems and structures within which they now live and participate. All children need to develop a basic understanding of democratic principles and processes, and to be taught from an early age that as part of a democracy, every voice matters, including theirs.

Research shows that political engagement and civic identity develops in children during the elementary years;² however, Washington’s K–12 system places specific emphasis on civics education in high school only, requiring one half-credit standalone course for graduation. Knowing that students are much more likely to develop a strong and lasting understanding of civics and a commitment to lifelong civic engagement if they are exposed to social studies, including civics education, throughout their K–12 experience, starting with elementary school,³ it makes sense to focus additional investment on elementary civics education. While a standalone course may be appropriate at the high school level, there is not space within the elementary school day to require a standalone focus on civics, nor does research show that a standalone focus best conveys subject matter at the elementary level.⁴ Instead, strategic integration of civics content throughout other required subjects such as language arts, math, and science will expose students to these fundamental and enduring concepts in a manner that is accessible without introducing an additional burden on an already overburdened school day.

¹ Wallace, Rebecca. (2024). *Temperance and Good Citizenship Day—Voter Registration*. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. <https://ospi.k12.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/03-24-update-youth-voter-registration.pdf>.

² The Circle for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). (2003). *The Civic Mission of Schools*. Carnegie Corporations of New York. https://media.carnegie.org/filer_public/9d/0a/9d0af9f4-06af-4cc6-ae7d-71a2ae2b93d7/ccny_report_2003_civicmission.pdf.

³ Diliberti, M.K., Woo, A., Kaufman, J.H. (7 March, 2023). *The Missing Infrastructure for Elementary (K–5) Social Studies Instruction*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA134-17.html.

⁴ Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). (28 February, 2022). *Opportunity for Teacher/Leader Teams to Pilot the Integration of Elementary Science, ELA, and Math*. <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/WAOSPI/bulletins/2ff2a94>.

How a state investment in community partnership meets this need

Like the Legislature, State Superintendent Chris Reykdal is a champion of civics education and strengthening civic knowledge and engagement among Washington students. Through research and stakeholder outreach to groups including the Washington State Council for the Social Studies and the League of Women Voters, the Washington Civic Learning Council has identified the absence of elementary civics education as an area of strategic focus for the state. Without dedicated resources and clear guidance and expectations for civics education infrastructure and methods to evaluate program success, it is unfair to expect Washington's elementary educators to bridge this gap in civics education in the consistent and high-quality manner that our students and school system deserve. With research pointing to the importance of content integration at the elementary level, OSPI requests state investment in centralized support for integration of elementary civics subject matter into the existing K–12 curricula for language arts, math, science, social studies, and the *John McCoy (luliaš) Since Time Immemorial* curriculum which is required to be adopted by every school district statewide.

Created at the direction of the Legislature, the John McCoy (luliaš) Since Time Immemorial curriculum makes an excellent focal point and example for how elementary civics education can be integrated into existing elementary lesson planning. This carefully researched and curated framework centers on the history, political engagement and advocacy, community empowerment, and legacy modeled by the nation's original and most resilient stewards, Native American Tribes.⁵ By supporting individual elementary educators across the state in elevating civics material within existing required content and creating new connections where needed, Washington student can receive and build upon a rich education in civic history and engagement, weaving a strong civic identity into their most fundamental understanding of themselves and the communities around them.

Whether through a short-term contract or dedicated staffing over the 2025–27 and 2027–29 biennia, OSPI can provide targeted, centralized support to districts and educators across the state and promote incorporation of civics lessons and material into required subjects. As much of this work will be carried forward by existing state support for already required elementary content areas, OSPI is not requesting investment beyond the next two biennia. However, should the work uncover the need for more permanent support, the agency will approach the legislature for additional investment at that time.

Describe existing or previous state investment in this work

Previous and current state investment in civics education focuses on high school. Washington has required students complete 0.5 credits of stand-alone civics in high school in order to graduate beginning with the 2020–21 school year per [RCW 28A.230.094](#).

Since 2018, the legislature has required OSPI to submit an annual report on youth voter registration, and research conducted to author the report has highlighted the importance of civics education before students enter high school in order to best meet legislative intent for the 0.5 credit high school requirement.

⁵ Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). (2024). Elementary Curriculum. <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/resources-subject-area/time-immemorial-tribal-sovereignty-washington-state/elementary-curriculum>.

Though not directly named as such, Washington has invested in elementary civics content through its investment in the *John McCoy (lulilaš) Since Time Immemorial* curriculum, which began in 2008 following the 2005 passage of House Bill 1497. The curriculum weaves lessons in civic history and engagement into content at every grade level. Because the Legislature required districts to adopt this curriculum in 2015, making the *Since Time Immemorial Curriculum* the only curriculum that every district in the state must teach, this curriculum is a built-in starting place for integration of stronger and more focused elementary civics education. Current investment in the *Since Time Immemorial* curriculum can be found in the state operating budget, Senate Bill 5950, Sec. 501(1)(g), and Sec. 522(3)(bb).

SUPPORTING DATA AND EVIDENCE OF POSITIVE IMPACT

Summarized findings from a longitudinal study that followed thousands of U.S. students from kindergarten through fifth grade shows that increased focus on social studies in the classroom correlated with increased reading ability, with the impact particularly evident among low-income students and students whose home language was not English.⁶

FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Fund 001-1 (program 010)	188,000	187,000	187,000	187,000
Total Expenditures	188,000	187,000	187,000	187,000
Biennial Totals	375,000		374,000	
Staffing	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Director 2	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10
Average Annual	0.10		0.10	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Obj. A	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000
Obj. B	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000
Obj. C	167,000	167,000	167,000	167,000
Obj. G	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Obj. J	1,000	0	0	0
Obj. E	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Revenue	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029

⁶ Tyner, A. Kabourek, S. (24 September, 2020). *Social Studies Instruction and Reading Comprehension: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study*. Thomas B. Fordham Institute. <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/resources/social-studies-instruction-and-reading-comprehension>.

General Fund 001	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total Revenue	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Biennial Totals	\$0.00		\$0.00	

ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS

OSPI requests the following to expand civics education into elementary grade levels:

Contract

Through a short-term contract, OSPI can provide targeted, centralized support to school districts and educators across the state and promote incorporation of civics lessons and material into required subjects. OSPI assumes a contract cost of \$167,000 annually, beginning in fiscal year 2026.

Staffing

0.10 FTE Elementary Education Director to implement and manage the civics contract. OSPI assumes \$21,000 in fiscal year 2026 and \$20,000 annually from fiscal years 2027 through 2029.

Expansion, reduction, elimination or alteration of a current program or service:

There is not a current standalone proviso or dedicated funding for elementary civics education. In Section 501(4)(q) of the 2021–23 Operating Budget, OSPI received \$250,000 in fiscal year 2022 and \$250,000 in fiscal year 2023 for civics education.

Workforce assumptions:

Fiscal Year 2026 (Total = \$21,000)

Director: 0.10 FTE

- Salary: \$12,426
- Benefits: \$6,125
- Goods/Services: \$668
- Travel: \$668
- Equipment: \$1,113

Fiscal Year 2027 and Ongoing (Total = \$20,000 Annually)

Director: 0.10 FTE

- Salary: \$12,426
- Benefits: \$6,238
- Goods/Services: \$668
- Travel: \$668

There are \$1,000 of projected one-time equipping costs associated with this position in fiscal year 2026.

Historical funding:

Fiscal Year 2026

- FTE = 0.00
- Total Funds = \$0
- Near General Fund = \$0
- Other Funds = \$0.00

Fiscal Year 2027

- FTE = 0.00
- Total Funds = \$0
- Near General Fund = \$0
- Other Funds = \$0.00