

# Why Project-Based Civics? Empirical support for HD2189/SD954

*An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement (HD2189/SD954) supports comprehensive, project-based civic education integrated into existing curricula and focused on local communities.*

## Declining Civic Engagement

- Only one-third of Americans can name all three branches of government; one-third can't name any.  
*Source: Annenberg Public Policy Center surveys; 2016*
- Only 20% of 18-29 year-olds voted in the 2014 midterm, the lowest youth turnout ever recorded by the Census.  
*Source: 2014 Youth Turnout and Youth Registration Rates Lowest Ever Recorded; Changes Essential in 2016 (CIRCLE, author); 2015*
- Civic shortfalls extend beyond mere voting. Between 1973 and 1994, the number of people who have served as an officer of a club or organization, worked for a political party, or attended a public meeting declined by over 35%. During the same period, the number who wrote to their local newspaper or contacted their member of Congress declined by nearly 15%.  
*Source: Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, author); 2011*
- Only 32% of Millennials believe they “have a legitimate voice in the political process.”  
*Source: 2016 Millennial Poll Analysis (CIRCLE, author); 2016*

## Civics Education in Schools

- Until the 1960s, three courses in civics and government were common in American high schools: Civics, Problems of Democracy, and U.S. Government.  
*Source: Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, author); 2011*
- A 1999 civics education study revealed that “nearly 90% of U.S. students reported that the most frequent instructional methods when studying civic-related topics were reading textbooks and studying worksheets, the more rote types of learning activities.”  
*Source: Judith Torney-Purta, “The School’s Role in Developing Civic Engagement: A Study of Adolescents in Twenty-Eight Countries,” (Applied Developmental Science, 6:4, 203-212); 2002*

## Civics Education Gap

- Students who are more academically successful and those with parents of higher socioeconomic status receive more classroom-based civic learning opportunities.  
*Source: Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh, “CIRCLE Working Paper 59: Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School,” (2008).*
- African-American and Hispanic students are twice as likely as their white counterparts to score below proficient on national civics assessments. A similar civic knowledge gap exists between wealthier and poorer students.  
*Source: Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, author); 2011*

## Impact of Civics Education

- Young people who know more about government are more likely to vote, discuss politics, contact the government, and take part in other civic activities. This holds even when controlling for income and race, showing that civic learning can increase the knowledge of all students.  
*Source: Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996); Henry Milner, “CIRCLE Working Paper 60: #e Informed Political Participation of Young Canadians and Americans,” (2006).*
- Students who receive effective civic learning are more likely to vote and discuss politics at home, four times more likely to volunteer and work on community issues, and more confident in their ability to speak publicly and communicate with their elected representatives  
*Source: All Together Now: Collaboration and Innovation for Youth Engagement The Report of the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge (CIRCLE, author); 2013*

## Promise of Approaches that Emphasize Student-Led Civics Projects

- The 2012 National Youth Survey reveals a very strong relationship between recalling interactive and engaging civics experiences in high school and being politically engaged as a young adult.  
*Source: All Together Now: Collaboration and Innovation for Youth Engagement The Report of the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge (CIRCLE, author); 2013*

## Spillover Benefits of Project-Based Civics Education

- 81% of high school dropouts said they would have been less likely to do so if they received more experiential learning.  
*Source: Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, author); 2011*
- Civic activities undertaken during high school are related to significantly higher odds that individuals graduate from college in later years, when controlling for a host of socio-economic and demographic characteristics.  
*Source: Alberto Dávila and Marie Mora, “CIRCLE Working Paper 52: Civic Engagement and High School Academic Progress: An Analysis Using NELS Data,” (2007).*