



PACE

Commission to Promote and
Advance Civic Education

FROM CLASSROOM TO COMMUNITY Advancing Civics Education in Hawai'i

FEBRUARY 2025

Introduction

Civics education plays a vital role in cultivating informed, engaged citizens, and its effective implementation is essential for a thriving democracy. In Hawai‘i, where unique cultural and historical contexts shape civic life, understanding how civics education is prioritized and supported by our schools and community organizations is vital to ensuring its success and relevance. Recognizing this, the Hawai‘i Supreme Court established the Commission to Promote and Advance Civic Education (PACE) in 2021 to develop robust programs and resources tailored to the diverse needs of Hawai‘i’s population. This report is a critical part of that mission, offering a detailed look at the current state of civics education in the islands.

Purpose and Vision of PACE

The PACE Commission emerged from the Hawai‘i Supreme Court’s long-standing commitment to increasing public understanding of government and encouraging active civic participation. The foundation for this initiative was laid in 2006 when Chief Justice Ronald T.Y. Moon of the Hawai‘i Supreme Court called on Hawai‘i’s legal community to take a more active role in promoting civics education. Later, with the support and encouragement of Chief Justice Mark E. Recktenwald, PACE was established with a vision to foster place-based, constitutionally informed, and culturally sensitive civic engagement in Hawai‘i’s schools and communities.

At its core, PACE believes that civics education is key to preserving democracy and empowering individuals to shape their own futures. The Commission’s philosophy promotes collaboration among educators, policymakers, and community leaders to increase civic engagement and break down barriers to participation. Central to this mission is the idea that civic skills should be developed from an early age and nurtured throughout a student’s academic journey.

Challenges and Opportunities for Civics Education in Hawai‘i

Civics education is often treated as a lower priority than subjects like math and language arts, reinforcing the perception that understanding government and participating in civic life is less important. This diminished focus undermines the development of crucial skills needed to sustain a healthy democracy. While some students are well-equipped to lead and engage, others may feel less confident in their ability to create meaningful change within their communities.

In Hawai‘i, these national challenges are further complicated by the state’s complex history and evolving approaches to civics instruction. In the past,

it was closely tied to “Americanization,” a process that often erased local histories and silenced indigenous voices. This legacy has left many disconnected from their civic identities, creating a pressing need for more inclusive and culturally reflective approaches to civics education today.

At its heart, civics education is about participation and power—the power to speak, to be heard, and to create change. True equity in civics education means ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to learn that their voices can shape their communities. Hawai‘i has a tremendous opportunity to transform civics education by fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility, allowing students to connect with their communities and develop a passion for positive change.

Reimagining Civics Education in Hawai‘i

Excellent civics education in Hawai‘i must begin by cultivating a strong sense of community and shared responsibility. It should help students engage with history, confront injustices, and consider how to build a more just and equitable democracy. Students should be encouraged to ask critical questions, such as: How can we, as a society, make democracy work better for everyone?

Equally important is creating space for informed debate and discussion. Civics education should foster critical thinking, self-reflection, and an understanding of how government functions. By teaching students how to engage in the civic process, from voting to testifying on legislation, we can equip them with the tools to be active participants in shaping society.

Beyond traditional classrooms, civics education should connect students with the broader world. Community-based, multigenerational learning experiences are essential for teaching collaboration and collective problem-solving. Real-world activities that allow students to see the direct impact of their actions can reinforce their role as stewards of both the environment and their society. These transformative experiences can instill a sense of purpose and show students how they can contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Purpose and Focus of the Report

This PACE Commission report offers a comprehensive examination of civics education across Hawai‘i. Its purpose is to provide educators, policymakers, community groups, and other stakeholders with research-based insights into civics education spanning K–12 public and private schools as well as the University of Hawai‘i system.

Section I presents data and analysis from surveys conducted in collaboration with the Hawai‘i State Department of Education (HIDOE) and the Hawai‘i Association of Independent Schools (HAIS). It identifies the challenges and

opportunities within current civics education programs and highlights areas that require resources and collaboration to improve civic engagement.

Section II focuses on civics curricula, extracurricular programs, and available resources in Hawai'i's public and private schools, including the University of Hawai'i system. This section will also evaluate how these programs align with the broader goals of civic engagement. Ultimately, the PACE Commission seeks to create a vibrant, inclusive civics education experience that reflects the cultural richness of Hawai'i and prepares students to engage meaningfully in democratic life.

By addressing these challenges and opportunities, the PACE report serves as a roadmap for fostering a stronger, more equitable civics education system in Hawai'i. We hope it inspires collaboration and action that will help to educate informed, engaged citizens who can lead and contribute to the future of Hawai'i.

Section I: Survey Insights from HIDOE and Independent Schools

To assess the current state of civics education in Hawai‘i, two comprehensive surveys were conducted—one in collaboration with the Hawai‘i State Department of Education (HIDOE) and another with independent schools through the Hawai‘i Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) and the Davis Democracy Initiative at Punahou School.

These surveys provide an in-depth look at how civics education is prioritized, implemented, and perceived by educators across the state. Through the voices of teachers and administrators, the surveys reveal common challenges and opportunities within public and private educational systems. From the survey results, it is clear that educators across all institutions recognize the importance of civics. Still, they face significant barriers, such as limited time in the curriculum, a shortage of civics-specific resources, and a lack of professional development opportunities.

This report explores the findings from these surveys and offers a comparative analysis of how public and independent schools in Hawai‘i approach civics education. By addressing the needs identified in these surveys and fostering collaboration between policymakers, educators, nonprofits, and the broader community, Hawai‘i can build a robust civics education framework that reflects its unique values and prepares future generations to engage meaningfully in civic life.

1. Hawai‘i State Department of Education Schools

This survey gathered insights from educators and school leaders regarding the status of civics education in HIDOE schools. It was conducted between October 2023 and April 2024 and was distributed by HIDOE over email to all relevant public school personnel across the state. The survey included specific sets of questions for administrators and teachers that reflected their distinct roles in civics education. The final sample consisted of 168 administrators (mainly school principals, vice-principals, and complex area personnel) and 627 K - 12 public school teachers who reported having responsibility for social studies or civics education.

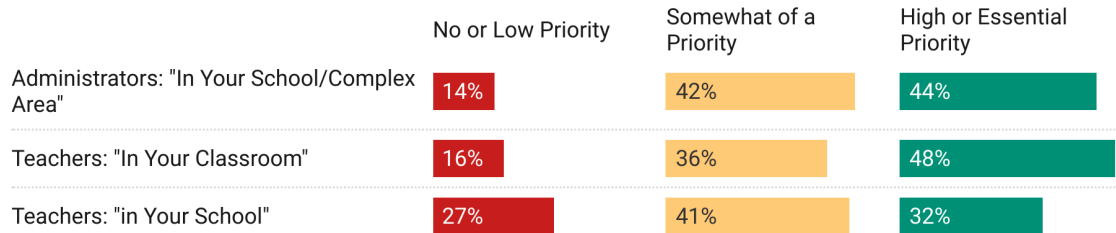
Civics Education: Priority and Satisfaction

Understanding how civics education is prioritized and perceived in Hawai‘i’s public schools is key to improving its effectiveness. The views of teachers and administrators on the importance and quality of civics education differ in understandable but significant ways. This section explores these differences and highlights gaps in prioritization and satisfaction across the state. To compare

the perspectives of teachers and administrators, identical or very similar questions were posed to both groups.

FIGURE 1

Perceived Priority of Civics Education

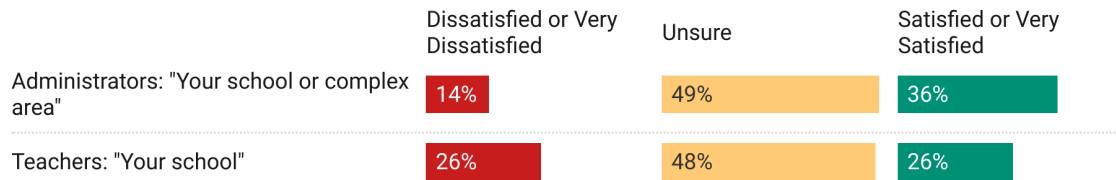


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Figure 1 shows a clear disconnect between teachers and administrators regarding the emphasis placed on civics education. While 48% of teachers feel civics is a high or essential priority in their own classrooms, only 32% believe it receives the same attention school-wide. In contrast, 44% of administrators see civics as a high or essential priority across their schools or complex areas, and only 14% report it as a low priority.

FIGURE 2

Satisfaction with Quality of Civics Teaching and Learning



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As illustrated in Figure 2, teachers and administrators have different perceptions about the quality of civics teaching and learning. Among administrators, 36% report being satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of civics education, with only 14% expressing dissatisfaction. While 26% of teachers also report satisfaction, there is room for growth as nearly half (48%) remain uncertain about the quality of civics instruction in Hawai‘i.

Challenges to Civics Education in HIDOE Schools

Civics education in Hawai‘i’s public schools faces several significant challenges impacting administrators and teachers. Table 1 highlights different but

overlapping concerns from administrators and teachers. For administrators, the primary challenge is a lack of time in the curriculum, with 59% identifying this as a major obstacle to implementing civics education. An additional 32% of administrators point to the difficulty in discussing controversial topics, and a similar proportion cite limited support for civics education.

TABLE 1

Top Three Answers for Each Group About "Major Challenges" Facing Civics Education

Check all that apply

	Administrators: "What are the major challenges in implementing civics education in your school or complex area?"	Teachers: What are the major challenges you face in teaching civics education in your classroom?"
1	Lack of time in the curriculum 59%	Too much pressure to teach other content 56%
2	Difficulty addressing controversial topics 32%	Don't have enough/the correct resources 54%
3	Limited support 32%	Students do not have sufficient background knowledge 46%

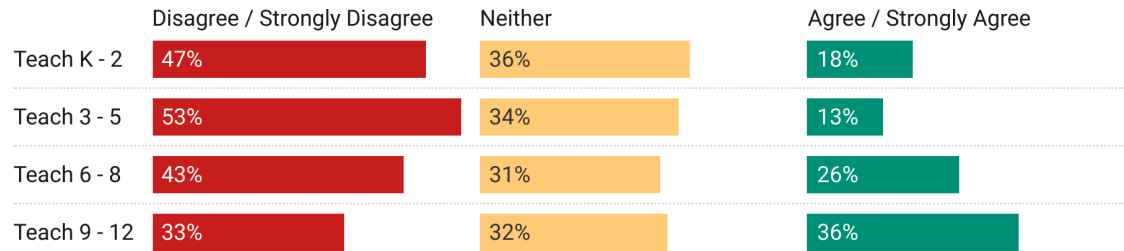
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Teachers, on the other hand, report slightly different challenges in the classroom. According to 56%, the top issue is too much pressure to teach other content, which limits their ability to focus on civics. About half (54%) of surveyed teachers also highlight the lack of sufficient or correct resources, while 46% note that students often lack the background knowledge necessary for understanding civics concepts.

A related survey question asked teachers to what extent they agreed with the statement, "I have access to high-quality, civics-focused curricular materials or resources designed for teaching or learning." The results reveal a concerning trend: 45% of all teachers found the available resources insufficient, which aligns with the broader concerns about the lack of support for civics education across Hawai'i's public schools. When broken down by grade levels, the disparities become even more apparent.

FIGURE 3

"I have access to high-quality civics-focused curricular materials or resources designed for teaching and learning"



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Figure 3 reveals that the greatest opportunity for growth lies in the elementary grades, where 47% of K - 2 teachers and 53% of Grade 3 - 5 teachers expressed a need for more resources. With only 13% of grades 3 - 5 and 18% of K - 2 teachers reporting that they have access to sufficient materials, this gap points to a clear area for investment, especially given the critical role elementary teachers play in building the foundation of civic understanding at an early age.

Middle and high school teachers reported slightly better access to civics-focused resources, with 26% of middle school and 36% of high school teachers feeling they have adequate materials. Nevertheless, many teachers across all grade levels express a need for more resources. By addressing these gaps, Hawai'i's schools can equip teachers to provide more comprehensive and engaging civics instruction at all levels.

Professional Development Needs and Opportunities

In addition to resources, professional development plays a crucial role in supporting teachers. Both administrators and teachers emphasized the need for stronger professional development in civics education, particularly in effective teaching methods.

Table 2 highlights the areas where administrators and teachers believe more training is needed to teach civics effectively. Both groups overwhelmingly agree that the pedagogy of effective civics education—including best practices for engaging student voice—should be the top priority. Three-quarters of surveyed administrators and 71% of teachers identified this as the most essential area for professional development.

TABLE 2

All answers for each group about teacher professional development needs

Check all that apply

		Administrators	Teachers
1	Pedagogy of effective civics education (e.g., best practices, engaging student voice, etc.)	75%	71%
2	Service-learning	56%	49%
3	Taking informed action	51%	48%
4	Media/News literacy	51%	42%
5	Understanding how government works	42%	33%
6	Campaigns and elections	35%	30%
7	Other reply (write-in)	4%	7%

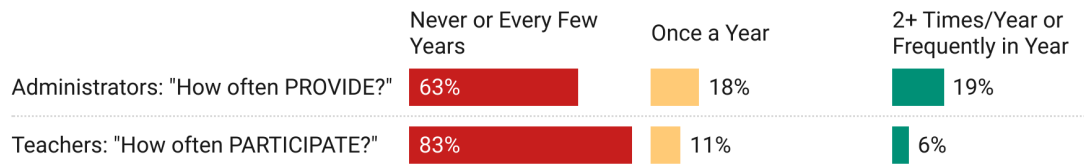
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Other areas of need show some variation between the two groups. Service-learning, a teaching method that integrates community service with classroom instruction, was identified as important by 56% of administrators and 49% of teachers. Similarly, media and news literacy, a crucial skill in today’s digital age, was prioritized by 51% of administrators and 42% of teachers.

Lower on the list were more content-specific areas like understanding how government works (42% of administrators and 33% of teachers) and campaigns and elections (35% of administrators and 30% of teachers). While teachers clearly view these topics as important, there is a greater demand for training focused on teaching methods and student engagement. This alignment between administrators and teachers presents an opportunity to develop targeted professional learning programs emphasizing pedagogical techniques and real-world applications, such as service-learning and media literacy, to strengthen civics education across Hawai‘i’s public schools.

FIGURE 4

Professional Learning Opportunities



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Figure 4 highlights a gap in the frequency of professional learning opportunities. There is a discrepancy between how often administrators provide civics-focused professional development and how often teachers participate. While 37% of administrators report offering such opportunities at least once a year, only 17% of teachers indicate that they participate that often. More critically, most of both groups responded "Never" or "Once every few years," signaling a need for more regular and accessible opportunities.

Civics Education Strategies and Techniques

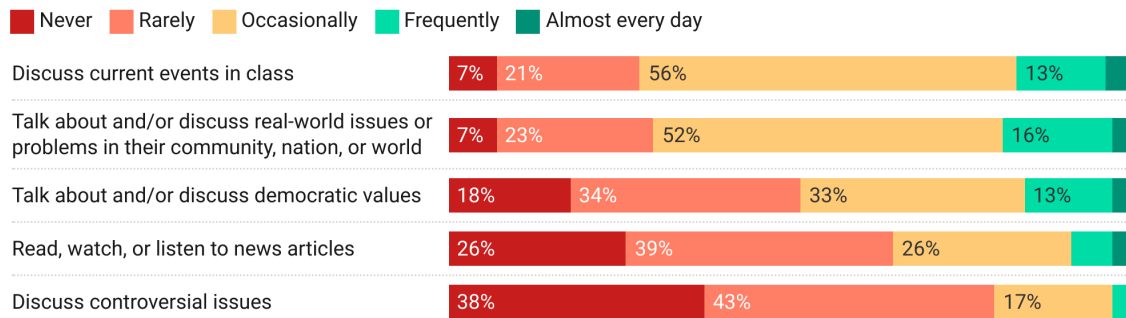
Effective civics education relies on various teaching strategies and techniques that help students engage with civic concepts and develop the skills necessary for active participation in democratic life. This section examines how frequently teachers across different grade levels in Hawai'i's public schools use various discussion methods and civic skills activities in their classrooms.

Discussion Methods

Figures 5 - 8 provide a comprehensive view of how civics discussions are incorporated across different grade levels in Hawai'i's public schools. These charts reveal patterns in the frequency of key civics discussion methods, from engaging with current events to discussing controversial issues, and highlight how these approaches evolve as students progress through the education system.

FIGURE 5

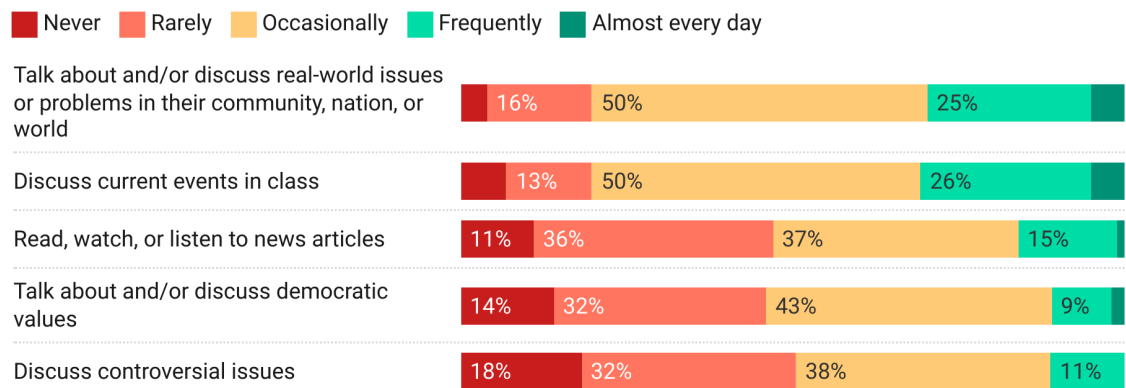
Discussion Methods, Grades K - 2



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FIGURE 6

Discussion Methods, Grades 3 - 5

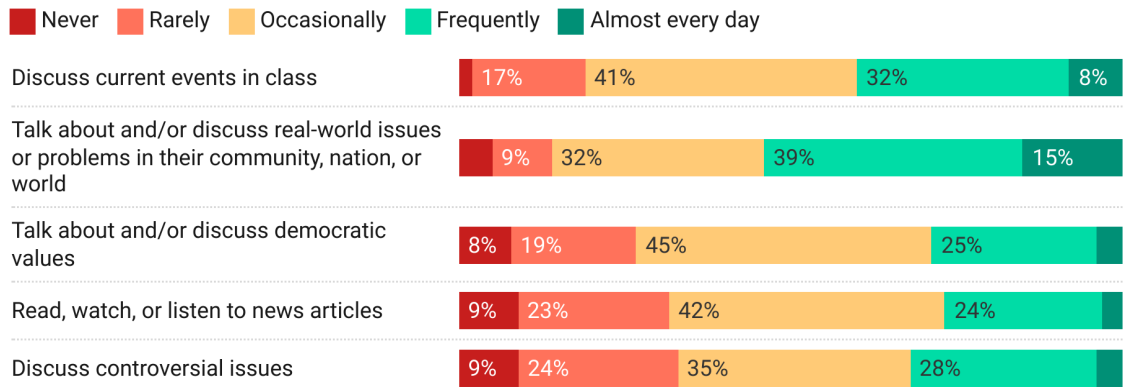


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For grades K - 2 (Figure 5), the most frequently employed methods include discussing current events, where 56% of teachers report using this method occasionally, while 16% do so frequently or daily. Understandably, teachers in these grades are more reluctant to address controversial issues, with 38% never engaging in these topics. As students move into grades 3 - 5 (Figure 6), discussions about real-world issues and current events become slightly more common, with 25% of teachers discussing them frequently and 5% discussing them almost daily. Still, 18% of teachers report that they never discuss controversial topics, and 14% never discuss democratic values, indicating a continued hesitation to engage younger students with more sensitive or complex civic issues.

FIGURE 7

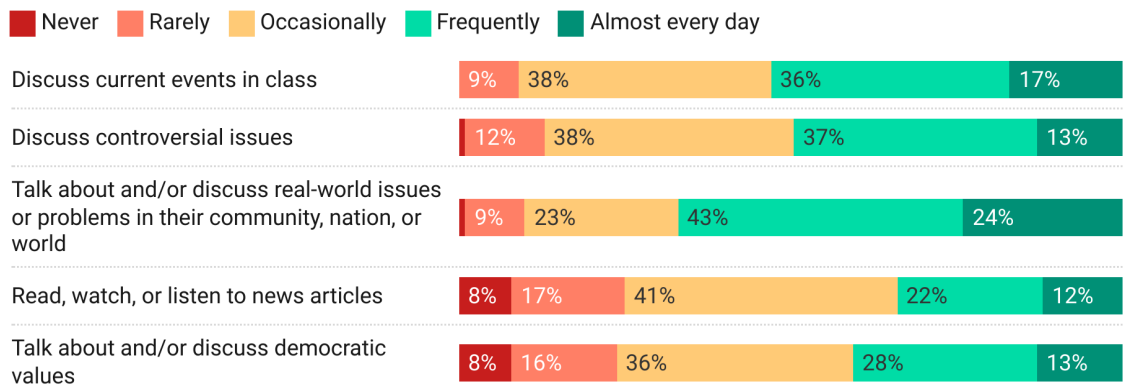
Discussion Methods, Grades 6 - 8



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FIGURE 8

Discussion Methods, Grades 9 - 12



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In grades 6 - 8 (Figure 7), there is a marked increase in the use of discussion methods, reflecting the growing capacity of students to engage with more complex topics. For instance, 40% of teachers discuss current events frequently or daily, 39% engage students with real-world issues at least frequently, and another 15% do so almost daily. There is a noticeable rise in the use of more challenging discussion methods, such as addressing controversial issues, with 32% of teachers addressing these topics frequently or daily. The increased focus on democratic values is also evident, with 28% of teachers discussing them frequently or daily.

By grades 9 - 12, these methods are used even more consistently. More than half (53%) of high school teachers frequently engage students in current events and 67% use real-world issues as a regular discussion topic. Furthermore, 50% of teachers frequently or almost daily discuss controversial issues, which shows a more open approach to addressing sensitive or divisive topics. Democratic values discussions also gain prominence, though 8% of teachers still report never engaging in these discussions. The relatively high use of reading, watching, or listening to news articles—with 34% of teachers incorporating it frequently or daily—further illustrates the emphasis on connecting students to the broader world.

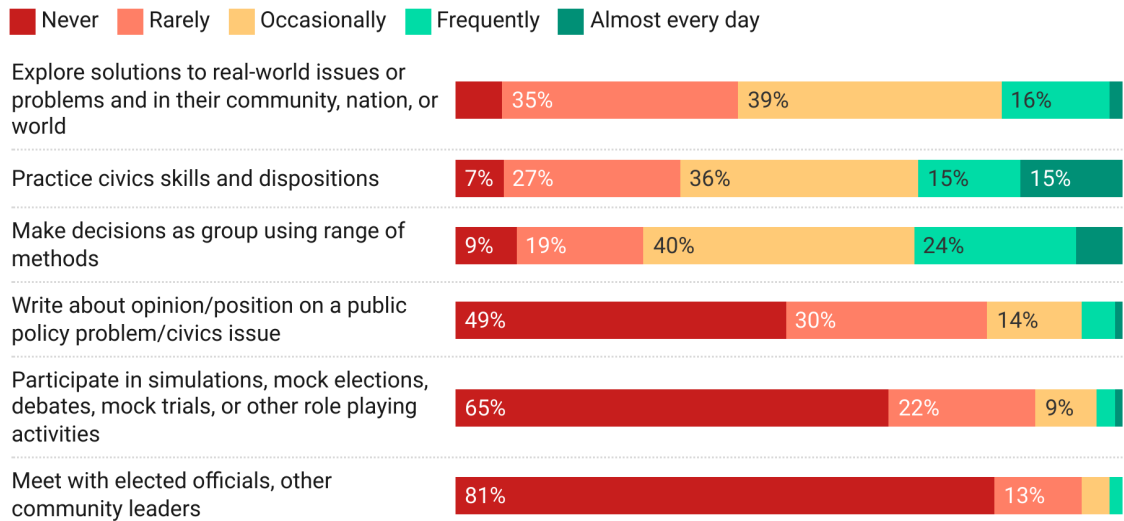
These results show that as students advance through the school system, teachers increasingly incorporate a wider range of discussion methods into civics education. While elementary teachers focus primarily on introducing real-world issues and current events, middle and high school educators engage students more frequently in discussions about controversial issues and democratic values. However, even at the high school level, there is still room to expand the use of discussions around democratic values and controversial topics, which are essential for preparing students to participate meaningfully in civic life.

Civics Skills Methods

Figures 9 - 12, which illustrate how civics skills are taught across grade levels, reveal a clear progression in the frequency of various civics activities as students move through the school system. The survey asked teachers how often their students engaged in six different civic skills activities, and the results show that while the use of these methods increases in higher grades, some activities are rarely used, even at the high school level.

FIGURE 9

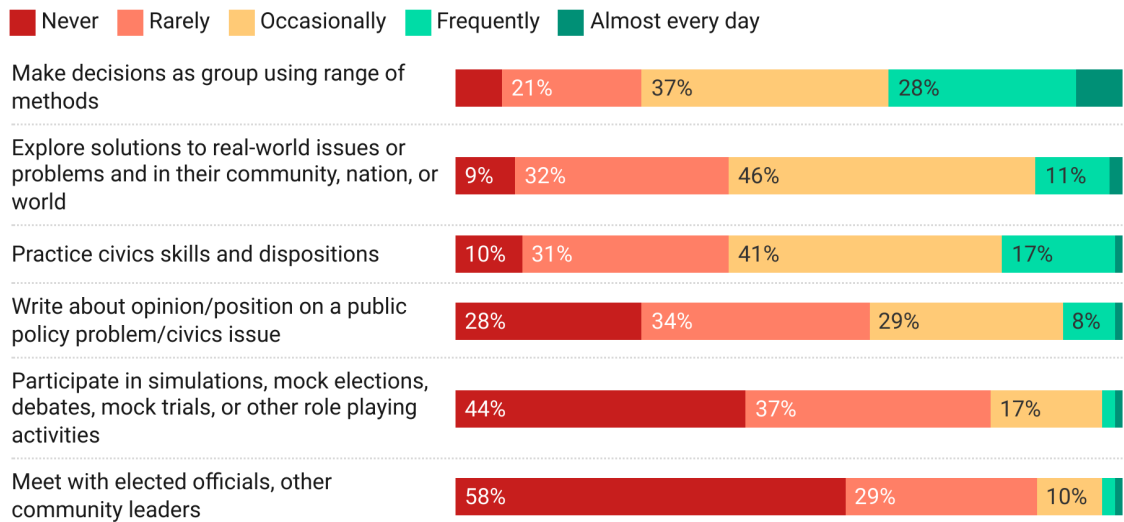
Civics Skills Methods, Grades K - 2



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FIGURE 10

Civics Skills Methods, Grades 3 - 5



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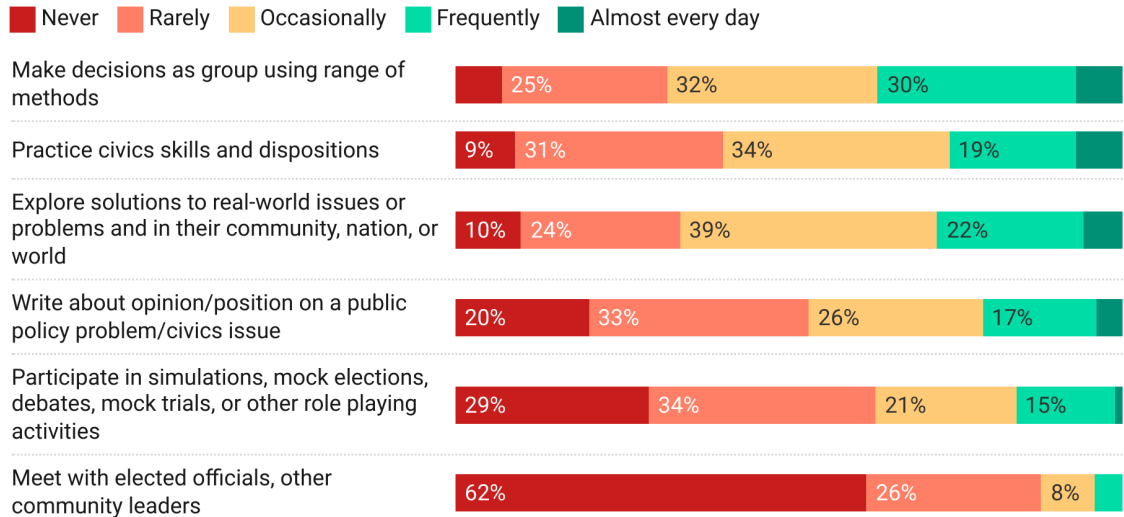
As Figure 9 shows, in grades K - 2, the most frequently used methods are making decisions as a group and practicing civics skills and dispositions, with 31% and 30% of teachers, respectively, reporting frequent or almost daily use of these activities. Other methods, such as writing about civic issues and participating in simulations like mock elections, are far less common in these

early grades. Particularly striking is the infrequent use of meetings with elected officials or other community leaders, with 81% of teachers saying they never incorporate this activity.

As students move into grades 3 - 5 (Figure 10), there is an increase in the frequency of all civics skills activities. For example, making decisions as a group becomes a more central activity, with 35% of teachers using it frequently or almost every day. However, writing about civic issues and simulations remains less common, with many teachers either rarely or never incorporating these methods. The lack of engagement with elected officials or community leaders continues to be a challenge, with 58% of teachers reporting never using this method.

FIGURE 11

Civics Skills Methods, Grades 6 - 8

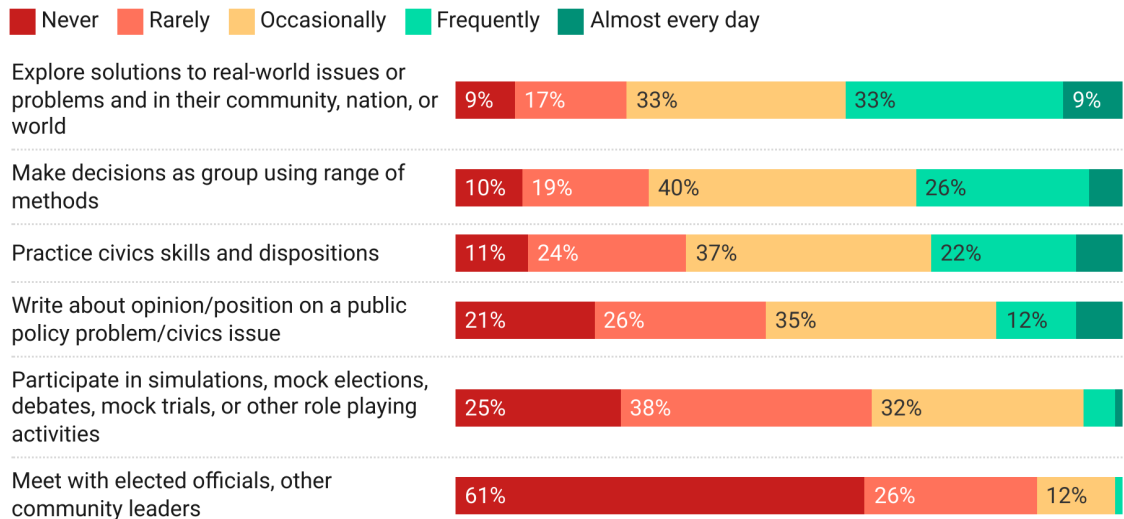


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In grades 6 - 8 (Figure 11), the trends observed in earlier grades continue, with making decisions as a group and exploring real-world issues being the most frequently used methods. By this point, 27% of teachers report that they frequently or almost daily engage students in real-world problem-solving. Methods like writing about public policy issues and participating in simulations also see moderate use. Still, the involvement of community leaders remains low, with 62% of teachers saying they never incorporate this into their teaching.

FIGURE 12

Civics Skills Methods, Grades 9 - 12



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As Figure 12 shows, by grades 9 - 12, students are more frequently engaging in activities like exploring real-world problems, which becomes the most commonly used method, with 42% of teachers reporting frequent or almost daily use. Making decisions as a group and practicing civics skills and dispositions also see significant use. However, even at the high school level, there is still relatively infrequent use of methods like simulations/mock elections and meetings with elected officials, with 61% of teachers reporting they never facilitate such meetings. This suggests that while students engage more deeply with civics as they age, there is still an opportunity to connect them with real-world civic processes and leaders.

Overall, the data show that while teachers increasingly use more complex civics skills methods as students progress through grade levels, there are still gaps in implementing certain key activities, particularly simulations and direct engagement with community leaders, that could further enhance students' civic learning experiences. Addressing these gaps by expanding the use of hands-on civic experiences could further enrich students' civics education and better prepare them for active participation in civic life. The findings suggest additional support and professional development to help teachers incorporate these methods more frequently across all grade levels.

Techniques Teachers Have Found Most Effective

The survey asked teachers to share the strategies and techniques they have found most effective in engaging students in civics education. While the

responses to this open-ended question were not quantified in this report, a preliminary qualitative analysis revealed several key categories of teaching strategies that educators reported as being particularly impactful.

One of the most common approaches teachers cited was relating civics to real-world situations. Educators found that using current events, news articles, and videos helped students connect civics concepts to their own lives and communities. Teachers reported increased student engagement and interest in civics education by making issues relevant and starting discussions or projects with real-world problems.

Another effective method identified was project-based learning, where students engage in solving real-life problems or participate in simulations of civic processes, such as mock trials or debates. Allowing students to choose topics of personal interest and develop projects around those subjects further deepened their involvement and understanding. Class discussions and debates, including techniques like Socratic Seminars and Philosophical Chairs—a structured discussion technique—were also highlighted as important for fostering critical thinking and dialogue on current events and civic issues.

Teachers also emphasized the power of interactive and multimedia approaches. Incorporating digital media, visual aids, and arts integration strategies—such as drama and visual arts—helped make civics concepts more engaging and accessible. Additionally, connecting lessons to students' personal experiences encouraged them to voice their opinions and reflect on issues that mattered to them. Sharing personal stories and examples was seen as a way to make abstract civic concepts more tangible.

Finally, hands-on activities and simulations were reported as particularly effective in helping students understand civic processes. Teachers described organizing role-plays, mock elections, field trips, and community service projects, providing students with direct, real-world civic experiences. These methods increased student understanding of civics and allowed them to see the practical impact of civic engagement in their communities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This survey reveals a consensus among teachers and administrators on the importance of civics education in preparing students for active participation in our democracy. Yet it also highlights key challenges that impact the effective delivery of this content, including limited classroom time, insufficient resources, and a lack of ongoing professional development. Addressing these barriers is crucial to ensuring that civics instruction fully equips students with the knowledge and skills they need to engage meaningfully in civic life.

One key takeaway from the survey is the opportunity to better align the prioritization of civics education between individual classrooms and school-wide initiatives. While many teachers emphasize civics in their own classrooms, they perceive that it receives less attention at the institutional level.

A second key point is the need for high-quality, civics-focused curricular materials, especially in the early grades when students begin to understand civic life. Providing these resources can empower teachers to deliver engaging and meaningful lessons, helping to build a strong foundation of civic knowledge in students from a young age.

Professional development also stands out as an area for improvement. Both teachers and administrators recognize the need for more civics-specific training. By expanding access to regular professional development opportunities, teachers can stay current with the best practices in civics instruction, including strategies for engaging students with current events and encouraging critical thinking about democratic values.

It is important to remember that teachers are already using effective strategies, such as connecting civics to real-world issues, using project-based learning, and incorporating interactive activities like debates and discussions. Supporting these methods with resources and training will ensure that these successful approaches are consistently implemented across all grade levels.

There are exciting possibilities for strengthening civics education in HIDOE schools. By making targeted investments in resources, expanding professional learning, and ensuring school-wide prioritization, Hawai'i can better prepare students to become informed, engaged citizens who actively contribute to a democratic society.

2. Independent Schools

Hawai'i is home to many independent schools with strong civic engagement programs. To gain insight into how these schools approach civics education, PACE collaborated with the Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) and the Davis Democracy Initiative at Punahou School. The survey, conducted between December and April 2024, was distributed by HAIS over email to the heads of independent schools across the state, who then forwarded it to the relevant administrators and teachers at their institutions.

The survey included tailored questions for administrators and teachers, recognizing their distinct roles in civics education. The final sample, though smaller than the respondent pool from HIDOE schools, consisted of 27 administrators and 61 K - 12 independent school teachers. Notably, a significant

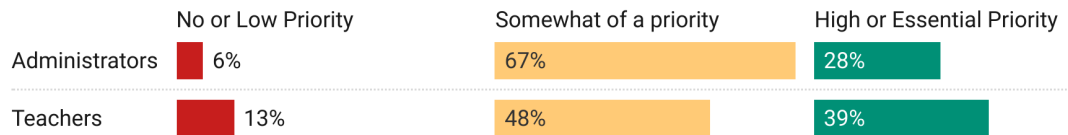
portion of responses came from a single independent school, which may limit the generalizability of these findings.

Priority of Civics Education

This section explores the perceived priority of civics education within independent schools, comparing the views of teachers and administrators. Understanding how both groups prioritize civics is crucial for identifying gaps in focus and developing strategies to elevate the role of civics within these institutions.

FIGURE 1

Perceived Priority of Civics Education



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Figure 1 shows that while only 6% of administrators see civics as a low priority, most (67%) consider it somewhat important, and 28% view it as a high or essential priority. Teachers, however, present a more varied perspective: 13% rate civics as a low priority, 48% see it as somewhat important, and 39% consider it a high or essential priority, notably higher than administrators. This disparity suggests that teachers who work directly with students may place more emphasis on civics, whereas school leadership could see it as less central to overall priorities. This gap offers a valuable opportunity for greater alignment between teaching staff and school leadership to ensure that civics education is given the emphasis it deserves in shaping informed, active citizens.

Challenges to Civics Education in Independent Schools

In this section, we examine the major challenges that administrators and teachers in independent schools face when implementing civics education. Understanding these obstacles is crucial to improving the teaching and integration of civics into the broader educational experience.

TABLE 1

Top Three Answers for Each Group About "Major Challenges" Facing Civics Education

Check all that apply

	Administrators: "What are the challenges in implementing civics education in your school?"	Teachers: "What are the major challenges you face in teaching civics education in your classroom?"
1	Lack of time in the curriculum 50%	Students lack foundations 44%
2	Lack of training for teachers 44%	Not my major areas of interest/expertise 38%
3	Limited funding 28%	Competing content 33%

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Table 1 highlights the distinct challenges administrators and teachers face in implementing civics education. For administrators, the top concern is lack of time in the curriculum, with 50% identifying it as a primary issue. This is followed by insufficient training for teachers (44%) and limited funding (28%), pointing to structural constraints like tight schedules and limited resources that hinder the effective delivery of civics education.

Teachers, however, face a different set of challenges. The most commonly reported issue is that students lack foundational knowledge (44%), which makes it harder to teach civics effectively. A sizable number (38%) of teachers indicate that civics is not a primary area of interest or expertise, and 33% struggle with competing curriculum demands.

These differing perspectives show that while administrators focus on system-wide issues like time and resources, teachers are more concerned with classroom realities, such as student readiness and content overload. Addressing these challenges will require targeted professional development for teachers and greater institutional support to ensure that civics education is given adequate time and resources in the curriculum.

Professional Development Needs and Opportunities

This section addresses the availability and participation in professional learning opportunities focused on civics education within independent schools.

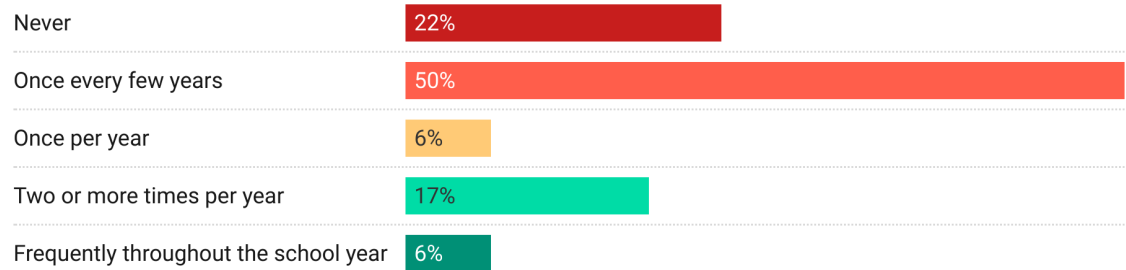
Professional development is a key factor in enhancing the effectiveness of civics

instruction, and these charts reveal significant gaps in both the provision of and participation in such opportunities.

FIGURE 2

How often does your school provide professional learning opportunities focused on civic education?

Administrators for independent schools



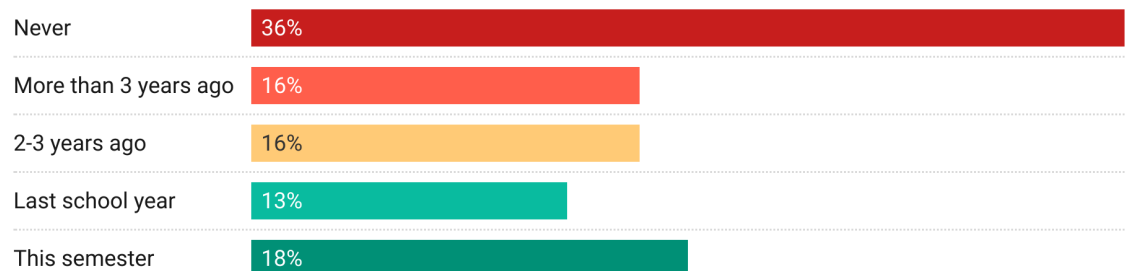
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Figure 2 reveals a sizable gap in professional development opportunities for civics education among independent schools. Half of administrators report that these opportunities are offered only once every few years, with 22% indicating that their schools never provide such training. Only 6% of administrators say civics-related professional learning occurs frequently throughout the school year, while 17% report it happens two or more times per year. This suggests that civics professional development is not a regular focus for teacher training in many schools.

FIGURE 3

When was the last time you participated in professional learning opportunities focused on civic education?

Teachers in independent schools



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Similarly, the data on teacher participation reflects this lack of access. Figure 3 shows that 36% of teachers have never participated in civics-focused training. Only 18% engaged in such training during the current semester, and 13% did so in the previous school year. Notably, 16% reported not having had civics-related training in over three years.

This gap between the availability of professional development and actual teacher participation highlights the need for more consistent and accessible civics training. Increasing the frequency of these opportunities will better equip teachers to deliver effective civics education and ensure a stronger emphasis on civics across the curriculum.

TABLE 2

All answers for each group about teacher professional development needs

Check all that apply

		Administrators	▼ Teachers
1	Making connections between students' interests and beliefs and civic action	67%	59%
2	Pedagogy of effective civic education (e.g., best practices, engaging student voice, etc.)	61%	51%
3	Service learning	33%	43%
4	Media/News literacy	50%	41%
5	Assessments for student understanding of civics education concepts, skills, and dispositions	61%	25%
6	Understanding how government works	39%	21%
7	Campaigns and elections	33%	21%

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Table 2 highlights key areas where teachers in independent schools need more professional development, as both administrators and teachers reported. There

is broad agreement on the importance of connecting civics education to students’ interests, beliefs, and civic action, with 67% of administrators and 59% of teachers emphasizing this need. The second priority is improving pedagogy for effective civics instruction. A majority of administrators (61%) and teachers (51%) agree that training on best practices—especially those that engage student voice—is essential.

Nevertheless, there are notable differences in priorities between the two groups. For instance, 61% of administrators see assessments of civics concepts and skills as a key area for development, but only 25% of teachers agree. This suggests a disconnect between the emphasis on evaluation from an administrative standpoint and the day-to-day concerns of teachers. Additionally, 43% of teachers prioritize professional development in service learning, compared to 33% of administrators. This indicates that teachers may place greater value on hands-on, practical approaches to civics, while administrators may focus more on traditional instructional methods and assessments.

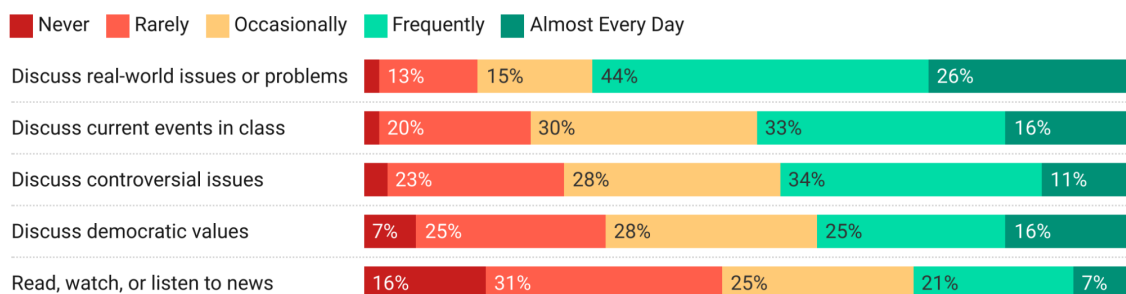
There are also discrepancies in areas such as understanding government functions and electoral processes, where administrators (39% and 33%, respectively) show more interest compared to teachers (21% for both). This may reflect differences in how civics education is conceptualized, with administrators prioritizing formal political processes while teachers focus on more immediate, practical applications in the classroom.

Civics Education Strategies and Techniques

This section reviews the various discussion methods and civics skills techniques used across all grade levels in independent schools, offering insight into the strategies employed to engage students in civics education.

FIGURE 4

Discussion Methods, All Grades



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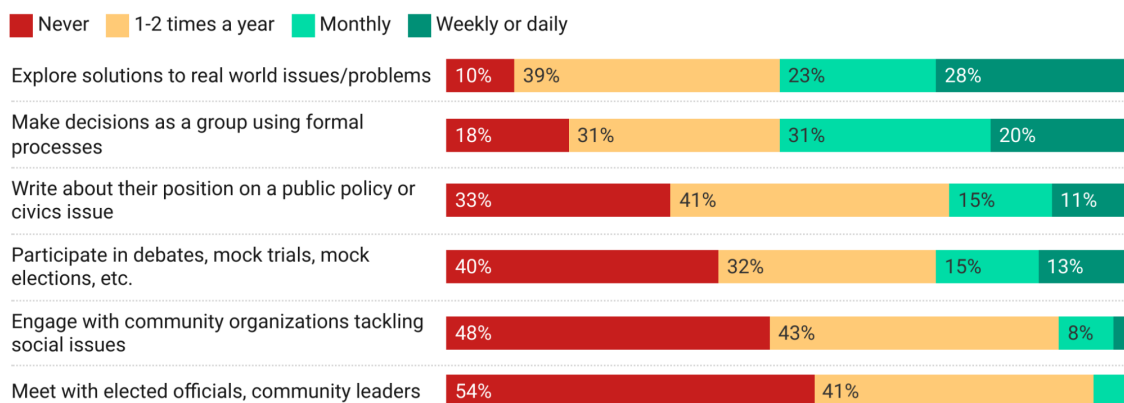
Figure 4 shows that the most common classroom strategy is discussing real-world issues or problems, with 44% of teachers reporting they do so frequently

and 26% doing so almost daily. This real-world focus helps students relate civics to their lives, encouraging engagement. Similarly, discussions of current events are also prevalent, with 33% of teachers incorporating these frequently and 16% doing so daily, reinforcing that staying informed about current events is integral to civics education.

Discussions of controversial issues are less common than one might expect. Only 11% of teachers engage with these topics daily, while 34% do so frequently. Discussions about democratic values are also less common, with only 16% of teachers addressing them daily. The practice of engaging with news in the classroom varies widely. While 28% of teachers do so frequently or daily, 16% never incorporate news and may be missing opportunities to connect civics lessons to real-time events.

FIGURE 5

Civics Skills Methods, All Grades



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Figure 5 looks at the civics skills techniques teachers are using in independent schools. Exploring solutions to real-world problems is common, with 28% of teachers engaging students in these activities weekly or daily. Making decisions as a group using formal processes is another relatively frequent activity, with 20% of teachers using it weekly or daily, which helps students understand governance and collaboration.

However, writing about public policy or civic issues is less frequent: only 11% of teachers include it weekly or daily, and 41% only 1–2 times a year. While debates, mock trials, and elections are effective tools, they are used occasionally, with merely 13% of teachers engaging students in these activities weekly or daily.

The least common activities are engagement with community organizations or meetings with elected officials, with 48% and 54% of teachers, respectively, never including these experiences in their teaching. This suggests that while

valuable, these hands-on civic activities may be difficult to implement due to time or logistical constraints.

The data show that while real-world discussions are frequently incorporated into civics education, there is inconsistency in the use of other strategies, like controversial issue debates, writing exercises, and community engagement. Strengthening these applied civics skills, particularly through writing, debates, and real-world involvement, could greatly enhance students' civic understanding and ability to participate effectively in democratic processes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This survey of independent schools in Hawai'i shows civics education's strengths and challenges. While many teachers emphasize the importance of discussing real-world issues and current events, gaps remain in the prioritization of civics education between teachers and administrators. Teachers tend to see civics as a higher priority than administrators, suggesting a need for better alignment to ensure consistent emphasis across schools. In addition, both groups face distinct challenges, with administrators focused on structural issues like lack of time and funding and teachers concerned with students' preparedness and competing content in the curriculum.

To address these challenges, schools could prioritize regular, accessible professional development in civics education and allocate more time and resources for it in the curriculum. Increasing hands-on civics activities, such as debates, community engagement, and meetings with elected officials, could help deepen students' understanding and foster greater civic participation.

3. Opportunities to Enhance Civics Education in HIDOE and Independent Schools

The surveys conducted across HIDOE and independent schools reveal several shared challenges and distinct opportunities for growth in civics education across Hawai'i. Despite the variations in resources and curriculum flexibility between public and private schools, one of the most frequently identified needs is the increased allocation of time and support for civics education. Both teachers and administrators from public and independent institutions pointed to insufficient time in the school day, limited professional development, and a shortage of civics-focused resources as major barriers. These issues must be addressed to ensure students receive the civic knowledge and skills necessary to engage fully in democratic life.

Prioritizing Civics: Addressing Time Constraints in the Curriculum

One of the most urgent areas for improvement is allocating time for civics education. Teachers from both public and private schools reported that civics often gets pushed aside due to other curricular demands. In many schools where competing subjects like math and reading take precedence civics education often struggles to find its place. Policymakers and educational leaders should work to ensure that civics is given sufficient time within the school day. Schools should be encouraged to prioritize civics alongside other core subjects, recognizing that fostering civic awareness and engagement is as critical as developing academic competencies.

Empowering Educators: Expanding Professional Development Opportunities

Equally important is the need for enhanced professional development opportunities for educators. The survey findings indicate that HIDOE and independent school teachers would benefit from more regular and accessible civics-focused training. Currently, many teachers lack the ongoing support necessary to effectively teach civics, particularly when it comes to engaging students in complex civic discussions or encouraging critical thinking about democratic processes. By investing in professional development that equips teachers with innovative pedagogical strategies and current civics content, educators can be better prepared to foster civic engagement in their classrooms. This training should focus on delivering content and developing interactive teaching methods, such as debates, simulations, and service-learning projects, that bring civics education to life.

Building Better Tools: Developing Civics-Specific Resources

Another critical area of need is targeted resource development, particularly at the elementary level. Both public and independent school teachers reported a shortage of civics-specific materials that are relevant and tailored to Hawai'i's unique cultural and historical context. To address this, educational stakeholders should prioritize high-quality, locally relevant materials. Resources that integrate Native Hawaiian perspectives and focus on Hawai'i's role in national and global issues would enrich civics instruction and help students connect more meaningfully with civic concepts.

Bringing Civics to Life: Promoting Real-World Civic Engagement

A key recommendation is to promote active civic engagement within schools that encourage student voice. While many educators understand the importance of teaching about government and democracy, the surveys revealed that opportunities for students to participate in real-world civic processes are often

limited. Schools should be supported in offering project-based learning experiences that allow students to engage directly with civic activities, such as community service projects, debates, and mock elections. Providing students with opportunities to meet elected officials, visit local government offices, or work with community organizations can help them see the practical applications of their civics lessons.

A Path Forward: Collaborative Efforts for Stronger Civics Education

To address the challenges identified in the surveys, such as insufficient instructional time, limited professional development opportunities, the need for more local resources, and the need for more hands-on learning experiences, Hawai'i should adopt a comprehensive, collaborative approach to strengthening civics education. No single stakeholder can resolve these issues alone.

Policymakers can play a pivotal role in this process by shaping educational standards and curricula. They must prioritize civics education by ensuring it is given adequate time in the school day, especially in HIDOE schools where civics often competes with other core subjects like mathematics and English Language Arts. Policymakers can also provide the necessary funding to support teacher training programs, resource development, and extracurricular civic engagement initiatives.

Educators themselves must be the key drivers of any change. They are on the front lines, shaping how civics education is delivered in classrooms. Teachers need access to regular, high-quality professional development that equips them with innovative teaching strategies to make civics relevant and engaging for students. Schools should encourage educators to participate in these training opportunities and collaborate with each other to share best practices, discuss challenges, and develop a shared commitment to improving civics instruction.

Nonprofits and community organizations can contribute by providing valuable resources and hands-on learning opportunities. Many civic organizations are already involved in supporting youth engagement in public life through service-learning projects, community outreach programs, and partnerships with schools. Expanding these initiatives can help bridge the gap between theoretical civics education and real-world civic participation. Nonprofits can offer students the chance to meet with local leaders, visit government offices, and engage in community service. These activities provide practical experiences that deepen students' understanding of democratic processes and responsibilities.

Community partnerships are particularly critical in Hawai'i, where the cultural context is unique, and the educational system must reflect the state's diversity. Collaborating with Native Hawaiian organizations and cultural institutions will

help ensure that civics education in Hawai'i is academically rigorous and locally relevant.

Finally, parents and families are an integral part of this collaborative effort. By encouraging civic participation at home, families can reinforce the importance of civics education. Schools should create opportunities to engage parents in the conversation about civics education and provide them with resources to help continue civic learning outside the classroom.

Addressing the challenges outlined in the surveys requires a broad, inclusive effort from all stakeholders. By increasing instructional time, providing targeted professional development, creating culturally relevant resources, and promoting active civic engagement, Hawai'i can build a more robust civics education framework that reflects the state's values and prepares students to be thoughtful, active participants in democracy. By collaborating with policymakers, educators, community organizations, and families, we can create a civics education system that equips students to participate in the democratic process, advocate for their communities, and shape the future of Hawai'i.

Section II: Current Civics Standards and Instructional Activities

This section examines how civics education is implemented across a range of educational settings in Hawai‘i, including the Hawai‘i Department of Education (HIDOE), independent schools, the University of Hawai‘i (UH) system, and community organizations. Each plays a critical role in shaping students’ civic knowledge, skills, and engagement to prepare them to become active participants in our democracy.

1. Hawai‘i State Department of Education

As one of 43 states that require a civics course, Hawai‘i mandates that students in HIDOE schools take four years of high school social studies, including the semester-long class titled Participation in a Democracy. This requirement is part of a broader effort to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for active participation in civic life.

Since the revision of its social studies standards in 2018, Hawai‘i has embraced a more hands-on and inquiry-based approach to civics education. This shift aligns with the national [College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework](#), which promotes critical thinking, real-world application, and active engagement. The updated [Hawai‘i Core Standards in Social Studies](#) (HCSSS) strongly emphasize inquiry-based learning that encourages civic activities.

Hawai‘i’s current civics education is rooted in the belief that a strong democracy depends on the active participation of its citizens. The HCSSS provides a comprehensive framework for teaching civics to guide students from kindergarten through high school. These standards integrate inquiry skills and disciplinary concepts that encourage students to ask critical questions, gather and evaluate evidence, create well-supported arguments, and take informed action.

At the heart of this curriculum is the goal of fostering civic responsibility, democratic values, and an understanding of the rights and duties of citizenship. Teachers are encouraged to connect classroom lessons to real-world applications to help students see how democratic principles are lived out in their communities and society. This focus on practical engagement reflects Hawai‘i’s commitment to producing knowledgeable students and active and informed citizens.

Civics Education Standards by Grade Level

Civics education in Hawai‘i is structured across all grade levels with distinct standards at each stage, ensuring students build progressively deeper understanding and engagement with democratic principles. At the elementary level, students learn about foundational concepts such as the roles of community and government. They also explore civic virtues, with a focus on fairness, respect, and the responsibilities of citizens within their communities. These lessons establish a foundation for understanding the basic structures and functions of governance and the significance of civic values.

As students move into middle school, the curriculum delves further into the principles of U.S. democracy. They are introduced to the Constitution, government structure, and civic participation, and they explore how justice and equity play critical roles in maintaining a healthy democracy. The aim is to strengthen students’ ability to think critically about civic engagement and their role in society.

In high school, civics education culminates with a semester-long civics and government course, which is a requirement for all students in Hawai‘i’s public school system. This course, “[Participation in a Democracy](#),” prepares students for active citizenship by teaching them about civic and political institutions, civil liberties, and civic engagement. Students are guided through the functions of government, the separation of powers, and the role of civil discourse in a democracy. They learn the mechanics of how laws are made and how to engage with elected officials, advocate for causes, and participate in democratic life.

Building on this foundation, HIDOE has recently introduced the [Hawai‘i Schools of Democracy](#) initiative, which recognizes high schools that demonstrate an outstanding commitment to civic engagement and culturally relevant learning experiences. Mililani High School and Maui High School were the first schools to receive this recognition. Subsequently, Kalani High School and Kailua High School have also earned this distinction. These schools have gone above and beyond in shaping the next generation of informed and active citizens by fostering a school culture emphasizing student agency and diverse learning opportunities. The program encourages schools to implement innovative approaches to civics education and supports developing student leadership and civic responsibility.

Opportunities for Growth

To further enhance the curriculum, Hawai‘i’s civics education would benefit from expanding opportunities for experiential learning. While the existing framework emphasizes civic responsibility, expanding hands-on experiences to take part in even more mock elections, internships with local government, or

community service programs could deepen their understanding and involvement. Additional areas for improvement could include creating more robust community-based learning programs. Greater collaborations with civic organizations, government offices, and community groups would offer students immersive experiences in civic participation. Finally, the introduction of assessments that require students to demonstrate their civic knowledge through practical projects could further solidify their understanding of democratic principles and their application in real-world contexts.

By building on its current civics education curriculum and integrating these enhancements, Hawai‘i can ensure its students are not only informed about democratic processes but are also equipped to take on active roles as leaders and engaged citizens within their communities.

2. Independent Schools

Hawai‘i’s independent schools provide a rich and diverse range of civic engagement initiatives, emphasizing experiential learning, leadership, service, and cultural responsibility. These schools integrate civic learning into the broader educational experience and aim to provide students with the tools to become active and informed citizens.

Civic Engagement Through Experiential Learning

One of the core elements of civics education in independent schools is experiential learning, where students engage directly with civic processes. At Punahou School, programs such as the [Davis Democracy Initiative](#) and Kids Voting Hawai‘i allow students to participate in mock elections, debates, and discussions on social and political issues. These activities give students hands-on experience with democratic practices, fostering an understanding of their role as active citizens.

Similarly, Hawai‘i Preparatory Academy (HPA) provides community-based learning projects that link academic concepts to local governance and sustainability efforts. These real-world projects teach students how civic responsibility connects with broader community goals, reinforcing that engagement with government and citizen participation is critical to improving society.

Service Learning and Civic Responsibility

Service learning is another key theme in the civics education frameworks at many independent schools. At ‘Iolani School and Seabury Hall, community service is a critical component of student development. At ‘Iolani, students participate in local and global service projects, tackling social and

environmental issues and helping them understand how civic duty extends beyond the classroom. Similarly, Seabury Hall’s curriculum incorporates service learning as an essential tool for fostering social responsibility, encouraging students to address environmental stewardship and community health issues.

Hawai‘i Baptist Academy (HBA) hosts the Hearts of Service initiative, which involves students in community service projects that range from local environmental efforts to international humanitarian work. Through these activities, HBA helps students develop a sense of civic duty, global citizenship, and leadership qualities.

Cultural Advocacy and Stewardship

Cultural advocacy plays a central role in civic engagement at Kamehameha Schools, where students are encouraged to take on leadership roles in preserving Native Hawaiian rights and promoting environmental stewardship.

Kamehameha’s civic engagement programs are rooted in Native Hawaiian values, particularly the concept of *mālama ‘āina*, or caring for the land. Students learn to view civic responsibility through the lens of environmental and cultural advocacy, contributing to initiatives that protect the land and ensure justice for Native Hawaiian communities.

The school’s commitment to Native Hawaiian rights also includes teaching students about the history of governance and land rights in Hawai‘i. This cultural advocacy model provides students with the skills to be leaders in both civic and cultural spheres, fostering a deeper understanding of their responsibilities to the community and the environment.

Leadership Development and Political Advocacy

Leadership development is a major focus at independent schools like Punahou and Mid-Pacific Institute. [Punahou’s Democracy Fellows Program](#), for instance, will give students opportunities to work alongside public officials, gaining practical experience in leadership and governance. Students at Mid-Pacific are similarly encouraged to participate in leadership councils and organize school-wide initiatives, allowing them to practice civic engagement in real-world contexts.

At Saint Louis School, “servant leadership” is central to the civics education framework. Students are taught that leadership is about service to others and are given opportunities to lead community service initiatives and participate in student government, reinforcing that leadership is a key component of civic responsibility.

The civics education programs at Hawai‘i’s independent schools are designed to foster well-rounded, civically engaged students who are prepared to lead their

communities. By emphasizing a blend of academic knowledge, hands-on experience, and cultural responsibility, Hawai‘i’s independent schools work to ensure that their students are prepared to be thoughtful, engaged citizens who contribute to the betterment of their communities.

3. University of Hawai‘i System

The UH System has made a modest but meaningful commitment to civics education by embedding civic responsibility across its academic programs, policies, and initiatives. Board of Regents Policy 5.213 explicitly links general education to the development of civic-minded students, emphasizing the importance of fostering “lifelong learners, effective workers, and ethical citizens.” This approach demonstrates UH’s commitment to preparing graduates who will actively contribute to their communities and engage with the broader democratic society. The UH System participates in the [College Learning and Democracy Engagement Coalition](#) (CLDE) on behalf of the UH campuses and is committed to continuing the conversation about how to better integrate civic engagement into higher education. Finally, the [UH System strategic plan](#) acknowledges the critical need to foster student success with the explicit goal to “educate more students, empowering them to achieve their goals and contribute to a civil society.”

General Education and Community Engagement

UH Mānoa’s [Office of Civic and Community Engagement](#) and UH Hilo’s [Center for Community Engagement](#) reflects a similar commitment to integrating civic learning across the university’s multiple campuses. The Board of Regents Policy 7.201 also promotes the importance of civic learning through student organizations, stating that these activities are crucial for “empowering students to be responsible leaders in civic duties, community service, or professional matters” and that they help prepare students to “become informed, responsible citizens who engage in, and continue to make contributions for the betterment of humanity and improvement of our communities.”

This commitment aligns with [UH Mānoa’s Institutional Learning Objectives](#) for undergraduates, which include fostering an understanding of civic responsibility, ethical behavior, and stewardship of the natural environment. These objectives emphasize the importance of contributing to the local and global community, promoting equity, and respecting cultural diversity.

A notable strength of UH’s approach is its integration of Hawai‘i’s unique cultural and historical context. The UH System is deeply committed to its role as an indigenous-serving institution, and this commitment is reflected in its

civics education efforts. Through initiatives like the Hawai‘i [Papa O Ke Ao Plan](#), UH focuses on fostering community engagement rooted in Native Hawaiian values and traditions. This place-based approach to civics education enriches students’ understanding of civic learning and encourages them to reflect on their roles within their communities.

Opportunities for Growth

Like many universities nationwide, UH faces challenges in prioritizing civics education, which is often overshadowed by other focus areas such as STEM and workforce preparation. Yet UH has opportunities to integrate civics education more fully across its curriculum. Institutions like Tufts University and Stanford University offer models for advancing civic learning. For instance, Tufts’ [Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life](#) serves as an interdisciplinary hub dedicated to civics education and engagement, showcasing how universities can centralize their efforts around civic responsibility. Similarly, [Stanford’s Haas Center for Public Service](#) provides numerous opportunities for students to engage with civic issues through service learning, internships, and community-based research.

As UH continues to refine its civics education offerings, there is potential for growth. The current general education redesign offers an opportunity to ensure that all students, regardless of their major or campus, have access to meaningful civics education experiences. By continuing to emphasize the importance of civic responsibility, UH can position itself as a leader in producing graduates who are not only career-ready but also prepared to take on the responsibilities of citizenship.

4. Nonprofit and Community-Based Enrichment Programs

Nonprofit and community-based enrichment programs in Hawai‘i provide critical support for civics education, complementing formal education systems and addressing gaps in teaching the principles of democracy, civic responsibility, and leadership. These programs engage students in diverse ways, from leadership development and community service to increasing civic knowledge and empowering young people.

Leadership Development

Many nonprofit programs in Hawai‘i aim to cultivate leadership qualities in young people, preparing them to become active participants in their communities and broader society. These programs often employ experiential learning techniques, such as service projects, simulations of government

processes, and mentorship, to help youth develop practical skills and a sense of civic responsibility.

The [After-School All-Stars](#) program offers students structured after-school activities beyond the classroom. Through various team-based projects and community service initiatives, participants are encouraged to take on leadership roles, which helps them gain confidence in their abilities to effect positive change.

Similarly, the [Scouting America: Aloha Council](#) provides young people with numerous opportunities to develop leadership skills through its merit badge system. Scouts engage in activities that require them to research local governance, meet with elected officials, and participate in community service, blending learning with hands-on civic engagement. The [Girl Scouts of Hawai'i](#) take a similar approach by offering badges related to democracy, public policy, and community service.

At the YMCA of Honolulu, the focus on leadership development is similarly strong, particularly through the [Youth & Government program](#). This initiative immerses students in a simulated legislative process, allowing them to draft, debate, and pass mock legislation. The program mirrors the workings of the state government, giving students an in-depth understanding of how laws are made while cultivating public speaking, negotiation, and leadership skills.

These leadership-focused programs share the common goal of preparing young people to become active, informed citizens. Their success lies in their ability to connect theoretical knowledge with practical experience, giving participants the confidence and skills necessary to engage in civic life.

Community Engagement

Another core theme that emerges from Hawai'i's nonprofit sector is the emphasis on community service and engagement. Programs focusing on community involvement teach participants about the importance of civic duty and offer practical ways for them to contribute to their local environments.

The Rotary Club of Honolulu emphasizes the importance of community service, particularly through its youth leadership programs. One such program, the [Rotary Youth Leadership Awards](#), is designed to give high school students the tools they need to become community leaders. Participants engage in service projects that address local needs, such as food insecurity or environmental conservation while developing leadership and organizational skills.

At [KUPU](#), the connection between community service and environmental stewardship is particularly strong. KUPU's programs, such as the [Hawai'i Youth Conservation Corps](#), engage young people in hands-on projects aimed at preserving Hawai'i's natural resources. Participants work on conservation

efforts across the islands, learning about environmental science and the civic responsibilities associated with sustainability.

Civic Knowledge

While leadership and community service are critical, another key element of civics education is the direct instruction of civic knowledge: how government works, what rights and responsibilities citizens have, and how individuals can participate in civic processes. Several programs in Hawai'i are dedicated to this kind of educational enrichment, filling gaps often left by formal education systems.

The [King Kamehameha V Judiciary History Center](#) (JHC), part of the Hawai'i State Judiciary, offers diverse civics education resources to improve students' grasp of the judicial system and its significance in democracy. These resources encompass lesson plans, interactive activities, and educational videos that focus on essential topics such as the structure of the judiciary, the significance of the rule of law, and notable court cases. Additionally, the Center offers mock trial activities, enabling students to engage in simulated court scenarios while learning about legal processes and decision-making.

As the Hawai'i State Coordinator for civics education initiatives run by the California-based [Center for Civic Education](#) (CCE), a national leader in civic education, JHC provides training, curriculum, and teacher support for CCE's [We the People](#) program, [Project Citizen](#), and [Project Community](#). We the People offers students a detailed understanding of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, Project Citizen encourages students to examine and engage in public policy issues affecting their communities, and Project Community integrates media literacy with hands-on engagement in public policy.

Another notable initiative is the Hawai'i State Judiciary's [Courts in the Community Program](#), an outreach effort that provides high school students with a unique, hands-on experience in understanding how the Hawai'i judicial system operates.

The [Hawai'i State Bar Civic Education Committee](#) also plays an important role in expanding civic knowledge. By offering educational resources and presentations on the legal system, the committee helps students and the broader public understand the role of the judiciary and the importance of the rule of law in maintaining a democratic society. [Get Ready Hawai'i](#), another key player in civics education, focuses on preparing young people to be active, informed citizens. The program encourages critical thinking about governance and civic participation through workshops, webinars, and educational materials.

Youth Engagement

Finally, several programs in Hawai'i focus on empowering youth to take active roles in shaping their futures and advocating for their communities. These programs provide leadership and civic knowledge and give young people the tools to make their voices heard in civic and political arenas.

At the [Hāmākua Youth Center](#), young people are given a platform to engage in civic discussions and participate in community development projects. [Nā Pua No'eau](#), a program at the University of Hawai'i, takes a culturally focused approach to youth empowerment. Targeted at Native Hawaiian students, the program blends traditional cultural knowledge with civic engagement. The [Lili'uokalani Trust](#) offers similar empowerment opportunities for Native Hawaiian youth, focusing on service learning and advocacy. The trust's programs emphasize the importance of civic action in protecting and advancing the interests of Native Hawaiian communities. On Maui, [Maui Hui Mālama](#) provides at-risk youth with mentorship and education designed to empower them to take control of their futures.

Nonprofit and enrichment programs in Hawai'i play a crucial role in supporting and enhancing civics education. Through leadership development, civic knowledge instruction, and youth empowerment, these programs help prepare the next generation of citizens to be active, informed, and responsible participants in their communities and beyond.

As additional resources become available, PACE will maintain an updated list of active programs that support civic engagement and civics education in Hawai'i that may be accessed on the PACE website and directly through the following link: [Civics Education and Engagement Programs](#).

Section III. Building on Success: Hawai‘i’s Approach to Civics Education

Hawai‘i has made meaningful progress in developing a civics education system rooted in its unique cultural and historical context. Nonprofit and school-based programs are also making strides by incorporating service learning, leadership development, and real-world civic engagement opportunities. These successes provide a strong foundation for further growth.

Targeted Professional Development

Despite these strengths, Hawai‘i faces a critical challenge in ensuring equitable access to high-quality civics education, particularly in elementary schools. Teachers have expressed a need for more civics-focused materials, especially in the early grades. Addressing these disparities will be essential to building a comprehensive and inclusive civics continuum that equips all students with the knowledge and skills to participate actively in democracy.

Both teachers and administrators have emphasized the importance of regular, civics-specific professional development. Expanding training on effective teaching strategies such as project-based learning, debates, and service learning would significantly enhance educators' ability to engage students. With ongoing professional development, teachers can stay current with best practices, ensuring that civics education remains relevant and impactful for students at all levels.

Expanding Hands-on Learning Opportunities

While service-learning and leadership programs are already part of many schools and nonprofits, there is a clear opportunity to expand experiential learning. Programs like mock elections, simulations, and meetings with elected officials provide valuable opportunities for growth through direct engagement with democratic processes. By increasing access to these hands-on experiences, students will gain a deeper, more practical understanding of civic participation, preparing them to engage fully in their communities and government.

Building Bridges: Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships

Collaboration between HIDOE, independent schools, and nonprofit organizations is critical to creating more opportunities for civic engagement. Strengthened partnerships will allow schools to expand service-learning, environmental stewardship, and leadership programs, providing students with more real-world experiences that connect classroom learning to their

communities. These strengthened collaborations will deepen the impact of civics education, fostering a generation of engaged, informed citizens.

Youth Empowerment and Civic Advocacy

Programs emphasizing youth leadership and empowerment have been highly effective, but there is an opportunity to focus more on civic advocacy. Teaching young people how to engage in policy advocacy, testify on legislation, and influence decision-makers will empower them to become agents of change in their communities. By expanding these initiatives, nonprofits, and schools can better prepare young people to take on active roles in shaping the future of Hawai‘i.

Ensuring Equity and Excellence in Civics

To close the gaps in civics education across Hawai‘i, stakeholders must work together to ensure that every student, regardless of background or school location, has access to the tools they need to participate meaningfully in civic life. By investing in civics education resources, expanding hands-on learning, and supporting high-quality professional development opportunities for teachers, Hawai‘i can build an inclusive, dynamic civics education system that prepares students to be leaders, advocates, and engaged citizens who contribute to the health and vitality of our democracy.

Innovative Resources and Approaches in Civics Education

The landscape of civics education is being transformed by groundbreaking resources and frameworks like [Educating for American Democracy](#) (EAD), which emphasizes an inquiry-based approach to civics that inspires students to ask tough questions and seek answers through research and classroom discussion. EAD’s innovative [Roadmap](#) and [Pedagogy Companion](#) weave history and civics together to help students cultivate civic honesty, celebrate democratic compromises, and inspire meaningful participation.

National nonprofits like [iCivics](#), the [Bill of Rights Institute](#), and state-level initiatives such as the [Illinois Civics Hub](#) and the [Lou Frey Institute](#) are developing comprehensive educational tools that not only teach the mechanics of government but also empower students to become active, thoughtful participants in their constitutional democracy. These resources are designed to be inclusive, vertically integrated across grade levels, and capable of inspiring a nuanced understanding of America's complex historical and contemporary civic landscape.

Charting the Future of Civic Engagement

The path forward for civics education in Hawai‘i is both challenging and promising. By embracing innovative approaches, strengthening partnerships, and committing to inquiry-based learning, Hawai‘i has an unprecedented opportunity to transform civics education from a traditional classroom subject into a dynamic, lived experience. The strategies outlined in this report—from targeted professional development to expanded hands-on learning and robust resource integration—represent a comprehensive approach to nurturing thoughtful and engaged citizens.

Civics education stands at the forefront of preparing young people not just to understand democracy, but to actively shape and sustain it. Together we can cultivate a generation of informed, passionate, and engaged citizens who are deeply connected to their communities and committed to the principles of democratic participation in Hawai‘i and beyond.

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