



# **UCLC Survey on Legislative Priorities for Civics Education**

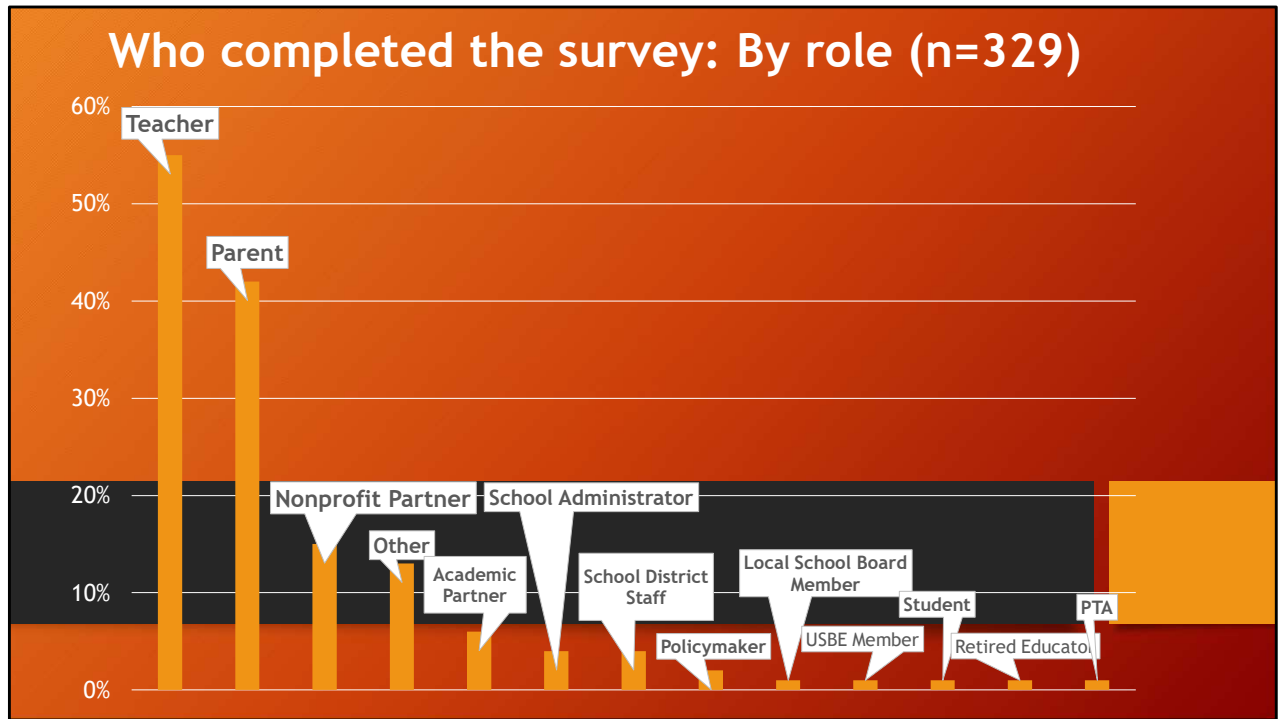
## **Final Results & Analysis**

Brief analysis or context (by Judi Hilman, Co-Facilitator of the Utah Civic Learning Collaborative and member of the HCR15 Work Group) is included in the notes.



## Survey Purpose

The Utah Civic Learning Collaborative invited civics education stakeholders to help prioritize recommendations and ideas developed by the HCR 15 Workgroup (co-chaired by Rep. Lowry Snow and Jason Perry of the Hinckley Institute of Politics) for improving civic teaching and learning in Utah.



The survey was distributed through the UCLC (members and recruits or people we imagine would have a stake in improving civics education); through lists of teachers (elementary and secondary) who ever attended a civics education conference since 2018; through the social studies leaders list maintained by the Utah State Board of Education. Those invited to complete the survey could pass the link on to anyone else—and evidently they did. Responses were still coming in at a good clip when we stopped taking responses on December 22. Given everything going on around the holidays, including a Covid-19 surge, we feel okay about the response (n=329). Note that respondents could choose more than 1 category, but most were teachers, followed by parents.

## Survey Input: Common Themes

- Professional Development and simulations programs (ex. We The People, Project Citizen, Mock Trials) come out on top from several angles.
- Teachers want support for facilitating discussion of sensitive topics & current events and training students to counter misinformation.
- Proposals to give school districts resources to innovate at the local level come out strong from several angles.
- We find strong interest in building civic learning angles into all grades and subject areas.
- Hands-on civic learning experiences have value in building civic dispositions.

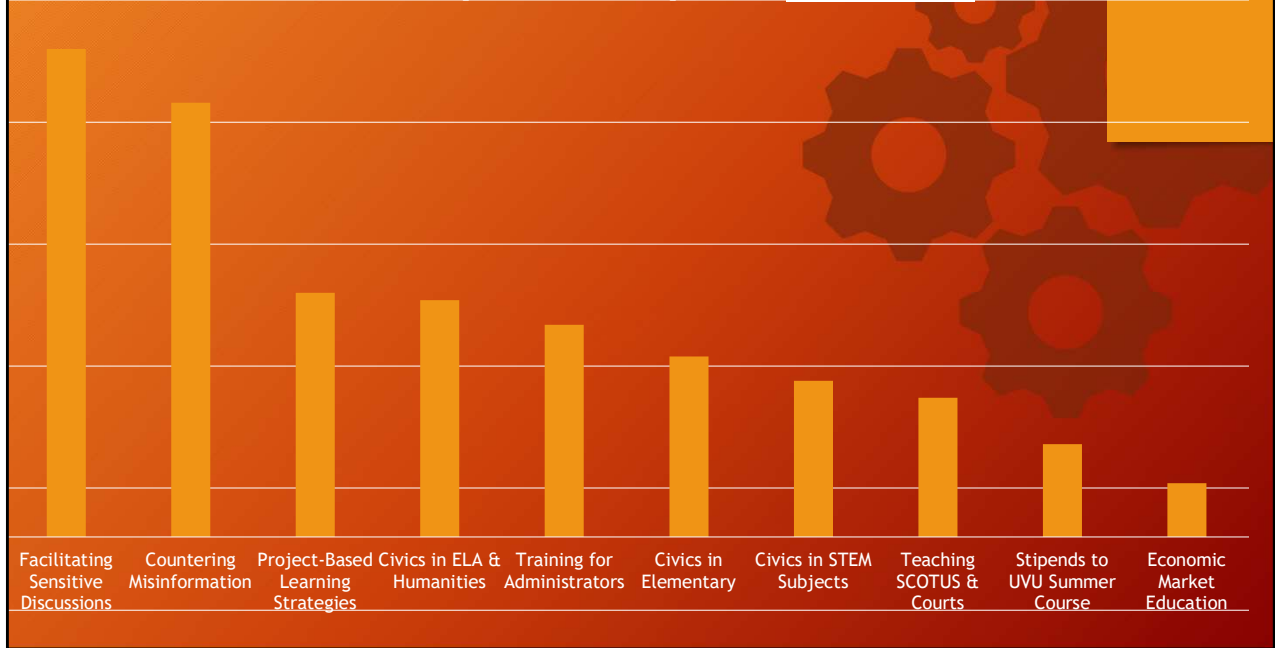
We purposely asked about priorities from different angles to check into consistency. And we found consistent interest in professional development and simulations programs. Educators want help facilitating discussions of sensitive topics or current events and tools for teaching students how to counter misinformation. Respondents generally share the vision at USBE: to include civic teaching angles at every grade level and subject area.

## Who's in the "OTHER" Category? (Examples)

- Retired teachers
- Concerned citizens
- Librarians
- Grandparents
- School Counselors
- Division of Indian Affairs
- School Board candidates
- Hope Street Fellows
- Still others

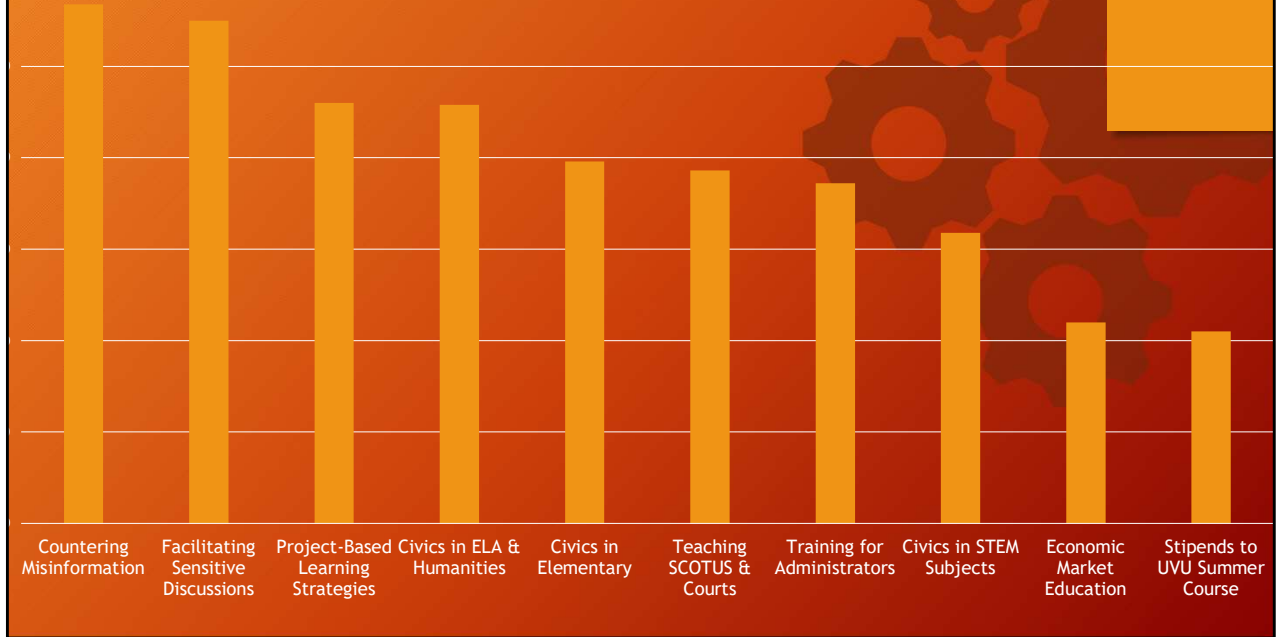
Word got out about this survey—and we were pleased to have input from such different perspectives, including citizens involved at the local school board level, grandparents, and diverse communities.

## Professional Development Topics: HIGHEST PRIORITIES



Here we can see how the first two professional development topics (facilitating discussion of sensitive topics and countering misinformation) stand out from the rest.

## Professional Development: HIGHEST or HIGH PRIORITY



Countering misinformation jumps to the top if we look at highest or high priority. Civics in elementary and Teaching SCOTUS & the courts do better in this view.

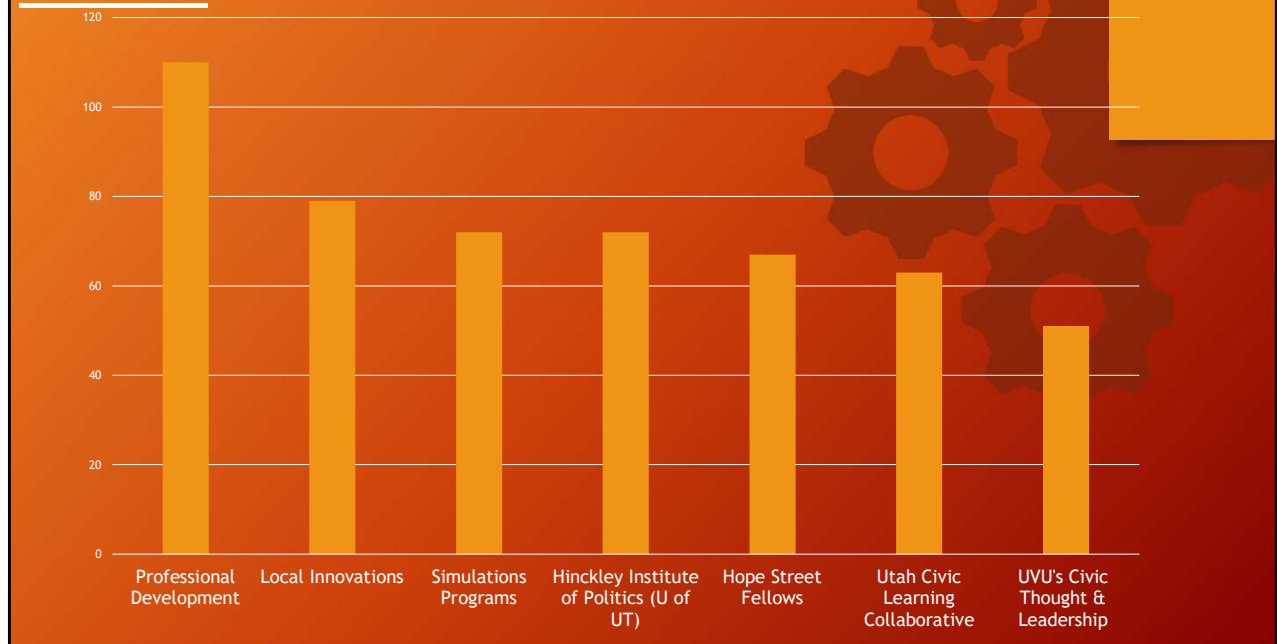
## Suggestions for Other PD Topics (selections)

- Accessing primary sources
- Teach the Constitution and Foundational Documents (7)
- How to be a global citizen
- Geography education
- How the Legislature passes laws
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion; history of racism (12)
- Training in critical thinking
- Ways to get involved in community
- Civic engagement at city and county level (3)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment Rights for Students
- Voting rights; ease of voting (4)
- Conflict management

Plenty of good ideas came together here and affirmation for many of the priorities in the current USBE Social Studies Core Standards for Secondary and draft Elementary Core Standards for Social Studies. The subjective responses on several questions provide much food for thought, a reminder of the value of engaging different stakeholders.

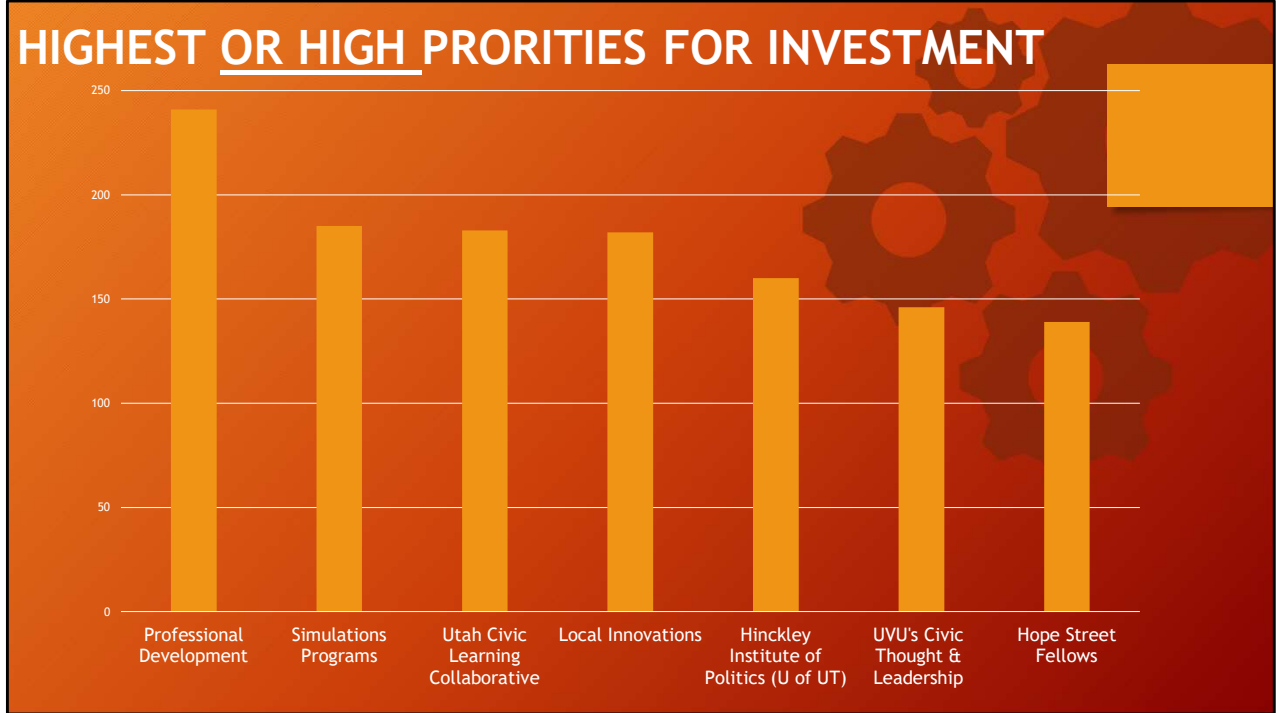


## HIGHEST PRIORITIES FOR INVESTMENT/APPROPRIATIONS



Again, professional development is in a class of its own. Local Innovations (Rep. Johnson's proposed legislation) approach slightly leads the rest of the pack. The Hope Street Group Utah Teacher Fellows improves education and teacher retention by providing specialized in-service and training in the following areas: 1--Building a sustainable network of teacher leaders; 2--Creating networks of exemplary teachers and then providing training to improve effectiveness in working with colleagues and policymakers; and 3--Gathering data from Utah teachers to inform policymakers at all levels. UVU's Civic Thought and Leadership Initiative is less than one year old, which might clarify its standing in this survey.

## HIGHEST OR HIGH PRORITIES FOR INVESTMENT

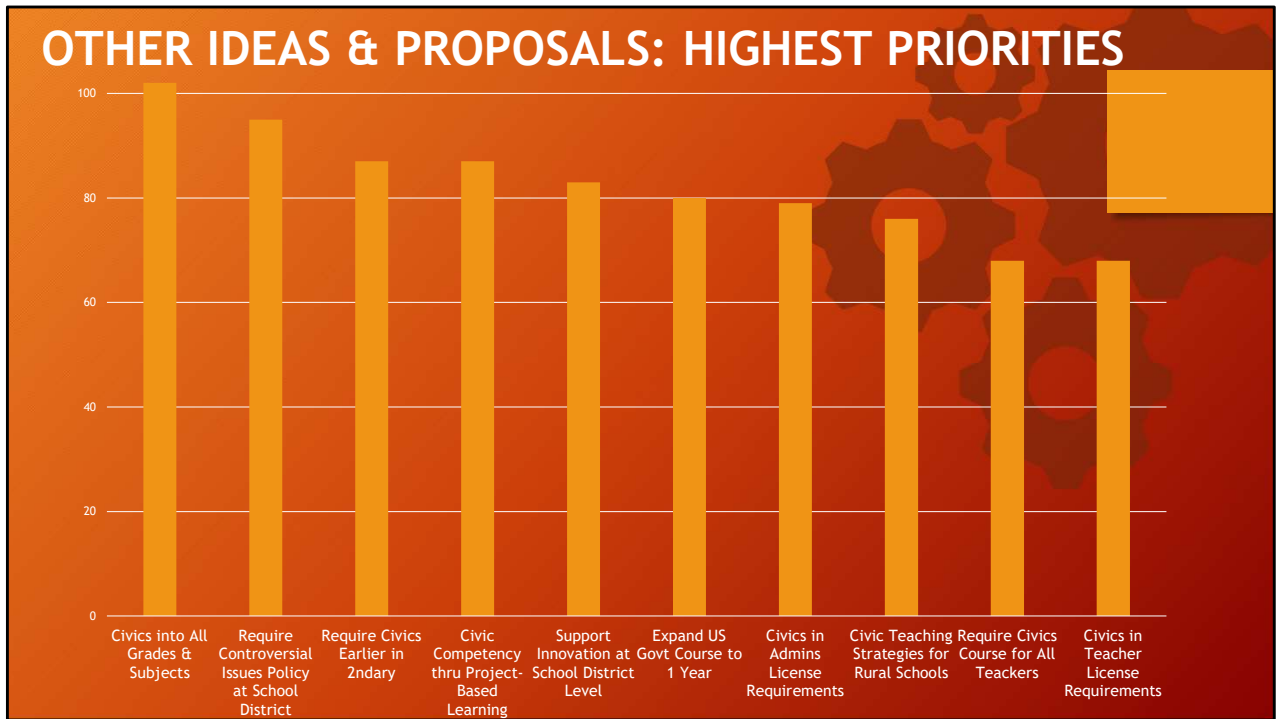


Again, professional Development stays way on top. Simulations jumps higher in this view, as does \$ for the UCLC. Hinckley Institute switches places with UVU's Civic Thought and Leadership Initiative.

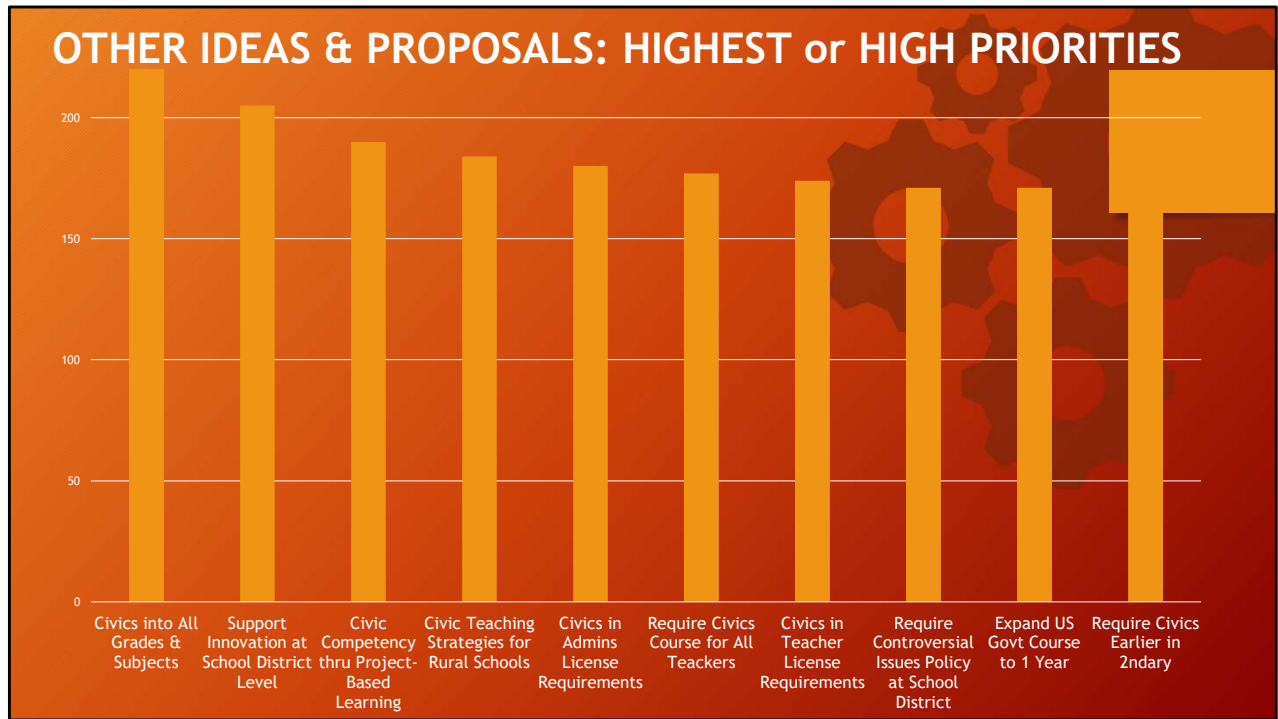
## Other Investment Priorities (Suggestions)

- School to Home Social Studies Family Engagement Discovery Hunts
- Educate parents; Parents need to understand (social studies) is something done by professionals, and not a conspiracy to steal their children away from them
- Media literacy (2)
- Speech and debate in schools (2)
- Special Education
- involvement of youth in school district policies and community government..
- Teaching about caucus system and legislative sessions
- Equity and inclusion initiatives (2)
- Field trips to the Capitol
- Social-emotional support of students
- Teacher salaries

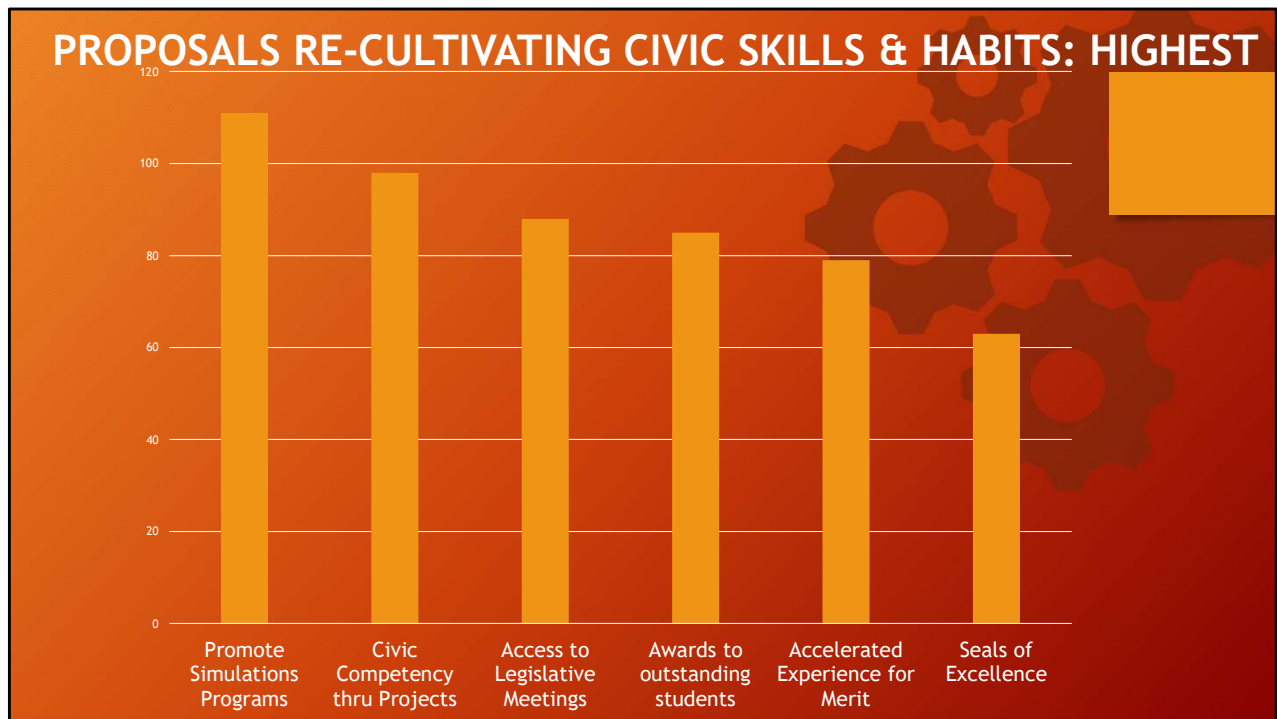
Plenty of good ideas and angles here. Similar points are combined. We will publish the entire list of subjective input separately—this is a sample.



It's nice to see this recognition that civics can be taught in every subject area and at every grade level. One of the recommendations subcommittees is recommending that we actually drop the idea to legislatively require LEAs to have controversial issues policies. Given how different these issues look from one community to the next, we are instead recommending that the USBE publish or highlight model policies and protocols. Right now Utah requires one semester of civics in the senior year. We see a number of states considering extending civic learning into earlier grades, and so the knowledge and civics dispositions can build from earlier to later years.

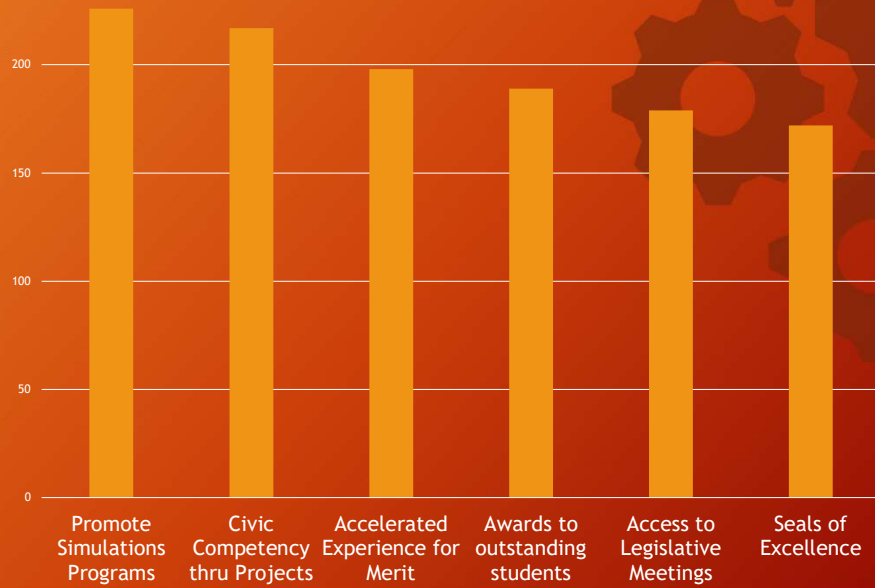


Bringing civic learning into all grades and subjects stays on top in this view. Local innovation approach (Rep. Dan. Johnson) jumps higher as does the idea to emphasize civic teaching in rural schools. The rest of the proposals are not that different from each other.



Simulation programs stands out on this question about the best way to build civics skills and habits. What's nice about this program is its proven and ready to implement at the school or classroom level. Project-based learning or experiential civics (this includes academic service learning, where the service includes reflection and ties to academic study of the issues that give rise to the need for service. Not sure why seals of excellence comes out at the bottom. Maybe because it needed to be defined. In the comments we see hesitation about the "self-selection problem" where recognition programs tend to cater to students that would be civically engaged and successful no matter what they do.

## PROPOSALS RE-CULTIVATING CIVIC SKILLS & HABITS: HIGHEST or HIGH PRIORITIES



The options come out about the same here in this broader view of highest or high priorities.

## Further Thoughts or Ideas for Improving Civics Education (selections)

- All the recommendations are worth supporting, but many require further conversation and definition within the context where they would be offered.
- Quality civics education should be taught by deeply committed, well-educated, fair-minded teachers who value high student engagement.
- The heart of civics begins in the home; cleaning up your room, doing chores, reconciling with siblings. I suggest that before you go to outside organizations for influence and expertise that you start with the students and their families.
- What ever we do to improve civics ed teachers must be consulted.
- Administrators should promote and support participation in Simulation Programs. Students gain skills they will use throughout their lives.

These additional comments were so thoughtful, we decided to publish many of them here. Respondents really took the time and care to share their rich insights. We will give the respondents opportunity to get involved in the UCLC and look forward to finding ways for them to weigh in on future discussions around the HCR 15 work group. The full list of comments will be published separately. That first comment really resonates. Given all the demands on educators these days, they really need to know what they're getting into—expectations need to be very clear. We see strong interest in civics learning in the context of the home. This came through in the comments, though a concrete priority was not really offered.



## Further Thoughts or Ideas for Improving Civics Education (Selections)

- Offer more opportunities for students to develop compassion through humanitarian projects, programs, curriculum, and learning initiatives in schools.
- We need a digital and media literacy course requirement. Better ability to evaluate and disseminate information will help them be better actors in civic engagement.
- Geography MUST be a requirement for a full year, because Geography has a lot of civics imbedded into the curriculum.
- The trick I feel like right now is finding a balance of putting in the time and effort any of these initiatives would allow. Any teacher--me included--will totally agree that civics is a HUGE priority and needed, but so is about 1,000 other things.
- I am not ok with giving teachers license to discuss politics in school. I do not want to create a generation of social justice warriors.

Media literacy comes up in several places. And again, we hear that teachers have too much on their plates. There is some nervousness about teachers discussing politics in the classroom, calling for an abundance of caution.

## Further Thoughts or Ideas (continued)

- I'm very concerned about legislative efforts to limit teachers' ability to teach controversial topics and current events. Requiring that all curriculum materials be vetted 30 days prior to use limits ability to teach.
- Include local and county government in civics education so students don't get through school thinking that the legislature, governor, and courts are where everything happens that affect their lives.
- Guidelines for discussing controversial topics should be VERY specific. Parents should be given the class syllabus and references for source material.
- Civics education needs to be accessible to all students, not just the academically motivated or excellent.

...An abundance of caution about teaching politics or current events must be balanced with a more thoughtful approach to supporting teachers in having discussions of politics, which is at the heart of civic life. Here we can see focus on equity—lots of comments get at this angle.

## Further Thoughts or Ideas (continued)

- Reduce class size
- Support for doing is key to helping kids develop a habit of lifelong service.
- The kindergarteners generally love and accept each other. As they age, they are taught to recognize differences and judge those differences. Focus on unity, community, positive ways to interact...
- Voting needs to be a focus starting in elementary. We need graduates who vote. We need to emphasize its importance, empower them by showing them how to do it, and inform them on the processes.
- Controversial topics policies should support respectful debate and discussion, not censorship!

Comments frequently note that students learn by doing. A nod here to school culture and a focus on inclusion.

## Further Thoughts or Ideas (continued)

- Rather than having legislators and policy makers afraid of imaginary boogie-men like Critical Race Theory (I've been a social science high school teacher and USU instructor for 25 years and have never witnessed CRT being taught), policy makers should focus on enhancing opportunities for students, educators, and other stakeholders.
- Education is process of working through difficult problems. If we overlook controversial issues of society, many societal problems will not be solved and simply continue to be swept under the rug.
- Emphasize project based civics learning and create time in the school year schedule for it. For example, get students to "vote" on issues.

Insights on some of the thornier issues around civics and social studies teaching.

## Further Thoughts or Ideas (continued)

- Simulations programs are dangerous if they promote anti blackness, even if it's accidentally. Recently a school posted a photo, where you could lock up a friend, and the poster had a black man behind bars.
- I feel like the "merit" based ideas tend to privilege students who have financial and other advantages.
- Trauma Informed and Responsive spaces
- American Indian Tribal Government should be taught throughout the school year as part of the regular civics curriculum. State, County, and local municipalities interface regularly with tribal governments, and it is important for people to know how tribal governments fit in the U.S. federal system.
- It is imperative that civics education is taught through an equity lens.

A selection of comments related to equity angles.

## Further Thoughts or Ideas (continued)

- Have our teachers' backs. Teachers are willing to teach, but more and more we are afraid of saying anything that can get us in trouble.
- Whatever is implemented MUST have internal guards in place to prevent teachers from advocating for one political side (party) or the other.
- Please don't give teachers more to do, i.e. forcing them to submit lesson plans to school board members. Please.
- Adding requirements is a double edged sword for teachers whose plates are full, this must be in conjunction with reduced workload in many subject areas and assessments which have tripled in some LEAs.
- I believe that we should extend the civics class requirement to one full year but make the other half a We the People based class.

Perspectives on the pressures teachers face in teaching civics.

## Further Thoughts or Ideas (continued)

- Civics is often left out in the elementary schools because so much emphasis is put on test scores in reading, math, and science.
- Teachers need to learn how to deal with difficult topics and current events without resorting to the sound-bites of partisan rhetoric.
- The Civics Test is a waste of time and effort. It does not demonstrate that any student is prepared to be involved in the community.
- Encourage critical thinking by teaching our children to see both sides of an argument and make decisions based on facts.
- How will you know when it is improved? How will you know that initiatives are working? What are the desired ends? How do we distinguish better or worse civically-educated high school graduates?

That last comment is a helpful reminder that we need to think about our goals for improving civics education and how we plan to measure results.