Good Ideas for Enhancing Civics Education K-12 and Colleges/Universities¹

*From 2017 FCA Summit Table Rounds*

The wide range of ideas generated in Table Round discussions fell into the following overall themes:

A. Teaching students about basic civics and public service:
   - K-12: offers more chances for kids to be in service to others in school. Can start out very young as Japanese schools kids do, taking turns serving each other lunches, cleaning classrooms, everyone does it. Teaches them service.
   - Find a way to offer civic education for parents along with children.
   - Find link, if possible, between civics literacy and employment.
   - Introduce civics in kindergarten on basic information (based on the idea of a past project for kindergarten students to learn about other countries.
   - Starting in 1st grade, ask what type of community do you want to live in? Asking that question helps introduce civics.
   - Teach that public service is a privilege and should be the primary motivation, not promoting self-interest.
   - Communicate the basic structure of the political process - even educate parents of the basics to help communicate it to kids.
   - Include components of the political system in the curriculum so citizens understand how government is supposed to function and can make informed choices.
   - Good law aids good activity but the variation in viewpoint of diverse counties may lead to uneven implementation - need to create an experience for kids to understand the process - get students to think through the implications of the process.
   - See what students like—video games?
   - Provide incentives for students to choose education as a major (e.g. Polk State Lakeland Collegiate is partnering with FL Southern College to launch a civic education course with panels and guest speakers.
   - Use storytelling - exemplars of civic virtue (Matches the 19th century tradition of public education to use stories to teach values)

¹Thanks to David Klement, Executive Director, Institute for Strategic Policy Solutions, St. Petersberg College, who compiled the “good ideas” generated at Summit roundtables for each of the 4 civic practice areas.
• Use transcript notations to document student civic engagement and service done. This can help students as they move to higher education and jobs
• Expand civic education to civic re-engagement with older adults

B. Public Service and Civic Engagement for Students
• Offer students opportunity to practice civic engagement, as in Model City Government, Model UN, Model Legislature. They need practice, not just theory, to really learn.
• Consider using a service learning model to create student experiences focusing on identifying source problems live poverty. Cross disciplinary is key. Engage the public and independent sectors.
• Elementary level community based projects. Develop an age based curriculum with a community partner.
• Encourage young people to get involved in government.
• Service learning is great, but need next step of immersion in practice opportunities (practicum).

C. Curriculum development and quality of educators
• Integrate into existing courses rather than stand-alone course
• Generation Citizen curriculum action civics
• Build projects into coursework.
• Work more hand-in-hand with academic side of house.
• Include civic engagement in all academic areas through cross curriculum - create more interdisciplinary curriculum
• Have to make it in the interest of the student to engage at the college level - need reason to participate beyond making it a requirement
• Under mandate of civics education, make it part of school grade/GPA.
• Implement HB 7069 through existing General Education (AMHX020 & POSX 041) courses.
• Can we inspire changes in AP, IB, general government curriculum to introduce local government concepts?
• Focus on faculty but need to also include adjunct teachers and grad students in incorporating civics into their courses.
• Tap into the work of the Florida American Planning Association on a curriculum on community planning (high school version completed)
  • APA national has some tools as well
  • Talked about using transportation safety/complete streets initiative/how to advocate for better transportation
• Examine the role of civic education in education overall, and incorporate it into College of Education requirements and practices.
  • Concern about attracting and retaining quality people into teaching given increasing regulation
• Be careful about posing so many hard standards that there is little room for soft skills and creativity in teaching
• More before and after data to understand what works.
• Projects in other classes could include civic engagement topics.
• Need to improve incentives to be an educator - to choose education as a major in college - the teacher can make all the difference in a class
• Include civic engagement in all academic areas through cross curriculum - create more interdisciplinary curriculum
• Changing the mindset of our society with regard to skilled trades versus college education, and how we inculcate civic engagement in all contexts
• Universities give info to Tufts who runs student turnout/voter registration (NSLVE- They run data on student turnout and voter registration. This report could be part of measuring post education success
• Incorporate civic engagement as a major in all areas of study (interdisciplinary area of study).
• We need to expand sources we use to measure success of civic engagement (e.g. NSLVE (National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement).
• Need to promote integrated models of civic education into existing curriculum
• Need measure of success of civic advance post education.
• Need to expand focus of civic education to older adults and need civic “reengagement”

D. Critical thinking
• Need to teach how to critically think.
• Learn how to discuss and engage with diverse perspectives on issues and discuss constructively.
• Need training on how to respect different opinions even those we don’t agree with.
• Need to create robust curriculum to think critically and engage in constructive respectful discussions.
• Have to make it in the interest of the student to engage at the college level - need reason to participate beyond making it a requirement.
• Students need to also learn soft skills such as professionalism.
• A barrier may be how receptive a K-12 school is to students engaging in community issues
• Social media is biased, need to learn how to analyze information and think critically, need to teach these skills in schools.

E. Intergenerational and inter-cultural
• Need to create process to encourage and incentivize intergenerational opportunities so we can learn from each other.
• Intergenerational engagements can also be between closer together age groups not just young and old. Like high school age to college age interactions, etc.
• Mentoring opportunities are needed and should be encouraged and incentivized.
• Need to connect up and have interactions between the haves and have-nots (engagements between classes including middle, working, wealthy).
• Develop curriculum with community partners - make it age-based
• Private college partnering with public college to offer class in high school - expand the 7th grade experience.
• Connecting K-12 to college education, to skill education, to seeing themselves as having futures and roles in the community
May need to do this for the teachers, guidance counselors, vice principals and principals

- Can we create service opportunities for middle schoolers, too?
- Need to include the private sector, too - private sector needs to be impressed that they have a stake and need to put in resources to making good citizens - encourage private sector to fund experiences especially in lower-income areas.
- Money at both levels is vital.
- Parental responsibility lacking, it has been divested to the education system. Need both working together

F. Local government as civic resource and model

- Leaders don't have the training, education, skills, qualifications needed to be effective. Need to ensure that leaders that get elected have the needed skill sets to build consensus and represent their constituents equitably and have good civic motivations for seeking election.
- Accountability is key.
- Public office is public service, and qualify based on skill sets.
- Educate yourself on what you are voting for, know what you are actually voting for is really civic duty not just showing up and voting.
- Need to focus on local government, too, not just state and federal
  - Municipal toolkit is available for teachers through Florida League of Cities. may need to make this better known.
  - Note that the benchmark requirements have a very limited number of local/state standards
  - Need to identify where these connections are being well made
- Need to provide teaching for teachers to teach about local government

G. Miscellaneous:

- Create a civic engagement learning pipeline bringing private sector employers to the table to connect civic learning into the talent pipeline definition. (include collecting before/after data).
- Establish a loan forgiveness program for students who are involved in a considerable amount of civic engagement
- Way to teach kids to be good citizens is to give them authority — student government authority.
- Teach advocacy skills, which are transferable