

EDUCATE FOR CHANGE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESOURCES

Ready to take action to support civics education? We're excited to share additional resources and recommendations for teachers, students, and community members to ensure that every young Texan has access to a comprehensive, engaging civics education. While we work to strengthen civic learning standards through state and local policy, districts and schools can and should continue providing civic opportunities to students – particularly given the desire among young Texans to engage with the issues facing their communities. These resources serve as a jumping off point for teachers, administrators, and students as they work to provide a comprehensive civic education for all young Texans.



HOUSE BILL 3979 AND SENATE BILL 3

[HB 3979](#) is currently in effect and [SB 3](#) will take effect December 2, 2021. The Texas Council for the Social Studies has developed [guidelines](#) for teaching while HB 3979 is in effect. We encourage teachers and administrators to also consult with district leaders and the Texas Education Agency to continue promoting civic learning despite new restrictions imposed by the legislature.



QUESTIONS?

Contact CDF-
Texas' Youth
Civic Education &
Engagement
Coordinator at
[mstern@
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org](mailto:mstern@childrensdefense.org).



FOCUS ON DEPTH OVER BREADTH

Change the standards and TEKS implementation to promote deep and meaningful civics learning across subject areas.

- The State Board of Education is currently taking [applications](#) to serve on social studies Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) review working groups. Working groups will produce and present recommendations for changes to the Social Studies TEKS, which will then be reviewed and revised by the full board in late 2022. Teachers, parents, and other community members can apply to serve on these working groups and encourage strengthened civic education standards in the TEKS.

Stay tuned for further opportunities to engage with the TEKS review process!

- All teachers can incorporate civic learning into their classrooms! Consider [analyzing exit poll data in Math class](#), [practicing persuasive writing on a policy issue in Language Arts](#), or [discussing the role of art in powering social movements](#).



***SB 3** expands restrictions to include all subject areas, so teachers should be aware of guidance from administrators and district leaders.*

- The Texas Council for the Social Studies has collected [professional learning resources](#) for educators and administrators who want to deepen their social studies development.



***SB 3** requires the Commissioner of Education to develop a civics training program by the 2025-2026 school year to instruct teachers and administrators on how to comply with SB 3. The program must also include media literacy and strategies for incorporating civics instruction into other subject areas. CDF-Texas and partners will be tracking the development of this program to ensure that it serves teachers, students, and families - not partisan political interests.*



PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Provide more support for educators as they teach “hard history” and prepare them to lead difficult conversations.

- Teachers and students know that difficult topics will come up in the classroom as students often enter with questions and opinions about the news and their

personal experiences. Rather than censoring these conversations, teachers can use resources from [Learning for Justice](#) and [Facing History](#), among others, to learn more about facilitating [civil discourse](#) around [race](#), [gender](#), and other [critical conversations](#) in the classroom.



SB 3 requires teachers who choose to discuss “widely debated and currently controversial issue[s] of public policy or social affairs” to do so “objectively and in a manner free from political bias.” Check with administrators, district leaders, and TEA for additional guidance.

- [Subscribe](#) to CDF-Texas’ monthly civic education newsletter for additional resources and civics news across the state.



REFLECT STUDENTS’ COMMUNITIES

Explicitly include key historical figures from communities of color in the TEKS and curriculum.

- Organizations including [Learning for Justice](#) have created lesson plans that teachers can explore to diversify their curricula. For Texas-specific history, find educator resources from the [Bullock Museum](#) and the [Texas State Historical Association](#). The University of Texas at Austin also has [lesson plans](#) focused on immigration policy and practices in the United States.
- Every classroom has a unique group of students who bring different experiences and identities to the classroom. Teachers, students, and families can work together to identify the materials students need to be represented and engaged in the classroom.



PAIR KNOWLEDGE WITH ACTION

Support educators and schools to create active learning opportunities that allow students to implement civic learning in meaningful and tangible ways within their communities.

- Every Texas high school is required to provide eligible students with at least two opportunities to register to vote each school year. Learn more about the high school voter registration law [here](#) and order registration forms [here](#). Many high

high school voter registration law [here](#) and order registration forms [here](#). Many high schools partner with nonpartisan groups to help register students and provide information to first-time voters. Looking for a partner on a high school voter registration drive? [Contact us!](#)

- Introduce students to a range of civic activities, including voting, advocacy, activism, protesting, mutual aid, and volunteering. Every student should be empowered and informed to speak up on the issues they care about using the methods they prefer. Find interactive civic lesson plans from the Civics Renewal Network [here](#) or check out this award-winning [Digital Civics Toolkit](#).



SB 3 creates new restrictions on civic learning. However, it explicitly carves out exceptions that allow schools to provide community service projects, student communication with officials (provided that students are not influenced in the content of their communication), and programs that simulate governmental processes. These activities can help students apply civic lessons in their daily lives and become lifelong civic participants.



CONNECT LOCALLY

Encourage outside organizations and public officials to communicate directly with teachers and students about opportunities to engage locally.

- Encourage students to research and contact community organizations in their neighborhoods who work on issues they care about.
- Invite public officials from the local, state, or federal level to speak to students about their responsibilities and how students can make their voices heard.



CREATE A SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Promote meaningful civic education by modeling positive civic behaviors for students and encouraging youth civic engagement.

- [Texas Educators Vote](#) is a nonpartisan group that works with educators and schools to promote civic engagement in schools. They share reminders about upcoming voter registration deadlines and elections, as well as suggestions for

educators, administrators, and community members to model civic behaviors for students.

- Consider ways to model civic engagement beyond the election cycle. Schools can create opportunities for student leadership, host local elected officials on campus, and share community service opportunities with students.



TEA and district leaders must provide clear guidance for teachers and transparency for community members about implementing SB 3. We encourage teachers to work with students and community members to promote supportive schools for young Texans.



LISTEN TO COMMUNITIES

Center teachers, students, and families in future discussions about policies that affect civic education.

- Many schools and districts have introduced or strengthened diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at the urging of students and families. Students, families, and teachers must be partners in these programs to ensure that all students are safe and supported in their classrooms.
- Remember, a key opportunity to make your voice heard by the State Board of Education is coming up soon! See [page 2](#) for more details.
- Upcoming local and statewide elections will be another opportunity for Texas voters to choose pro-civics and pro-public education representatives. In particular, elections for school board members are vital for electing officials who support public education and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Make sure you are registered to vote at your current address, and check when your next opportunity to vote will be at vote411.org.

Follow [@cdfutexas](#) for more on the importance of school board races and information about the candidates!

- Advocate for comprehensive civics education in your school, district, and statewide. Contact your local, state, and federal lawmakers to tell them you support comprehensive civics education and oppose further restrictions on youth civic engagement. Check out our [letter to the editor guide](#) for more on advocating within your community.