

MEMORANDUM

To: Arlington School Board

From: Social Studies Advisory Committee (SSAC)

Date: January 30, 2020

Subject: Recommending Year Report 2019-2020

Recommendation #1: External equity audit to review curriculum and resources

The SSAC believes that to support the continued efforts of the county to increase equity, an external audit must be performed, especially in the subject of social studies.

Rationale

Recently APS, like the education community as a whole, has become more aware of the implications of teaching America's youth history that tells "the whole story." In fact, a draft for new equity policy for APS states: "Arlington Public Schools is committed to educational excellence for all students embedding equitable practices in all aspects of the school community." The draft goes on to list equitable practices to be: "resource allocation," "inclusion," and most relevantly, "curriculum" that should breed "high quality, inclusive, culturally relevant, and responsive experiences." Culturally relevant and responsive education takes into account existing cultural norms and preferences and strives to create educational experiences that will be engaging for all students in a classroom.

Unfortunately, the SSAC has encountered and noted many cases where culturally relevant and diverse instruction has not been provided, as well as cases where students do not feel that the history or current situation of one group (often their own cultural group) was correctly acknowledged or received adequate attention.

This problem does not have a single cause. Instead, a variety of factors contribute to the current situation where equity in our schools is far from optimized. Because of this, the SSAC believes that a wide ranging, objective equity audit is necessary to better understand the scope of the problem in order to remediate it. APS should ensure that each student receives a comprehensive, multi-faceted view of history and current events. Many other school systems have seen the need for equity audits and conducted them. APS's decision to hire a Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer shows that

this department is also prepared to review and eliminate inequitable practices and improve equity in curriculum.

Implications of the Equity Audit

An ideal equity audit would require the following:

1. Resources

Resources in the classroom must take into account the variety of different students in the classroom. This portion of the audit would consist of looking at everything from physical textbooks to posters around the classroom. Most textbooks that are chosen by the county have been selected to represent a wide degree of diversity. However, certain secondary resources employed by the teachers may benefit from refinement. For example: posters that only indicate one ethnic group or that show certain ethnic groups in stereotypical situations.

Another equally important equity issue is resources for English Learner students. It must be ensured that these students still have access to not only the same options and quality of education, but also the same perspectives as other students. An audit would investigate equity issues in the EL system.

2. Curriculum

Curriculum is perhaps the aspect which would benefit most from an audit. The audit would take a look into how each student is assessed. Every student should be held to the same standards and these standards should favor no group.

As for the curriculum itself, the audit would take a look into multiple factors. Curriculum must draw attention to every group and their contribution to the field in question. Lessons should include the perspective of people from various genders, cultural groups, sexual identities, and much more. The audit would further look into activities of teachers to help them represent a wide variety of perspectives and groups.

Curriculum should also take an active role in opposing inequitable behavior. The audit would ensure that issues of sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination are addressed by all teachers. When these forms of discrimination are dealt with, curriculum should be in pace to explain to students the need to counter the effects of this behavior as well as its detrimental effects on society. Curriculum will also be evaluated to ensure

that students who are not present in the classroom (EL, special needs, different tracks) are acknowledged and interact with other students. In conclusion, the audit would look at the curriculum and ensure that not only all groups are acknowledged, but past injustices are outlined and explained objectively. Curriculum must never put one occupation, ethnic group, gender or anything else above another.

3. Classroom Environment/Tracking

This portion of the audit would focus on how students are treated not only by teachers but by the school system as a whole. The audit would look into the levels of classes offered by the county and ensure that all groups are represented or have the full chance to be represented (as this committee now believes is not currently the case).

Offering advanced courses is not enough: Counselors and teachers must be prepared to offer support to gifted students who lack said support at home. The audit would ask whether or not students are regularly assessed by objective measures to determine tracking. Equity audits in the past have questioned whether or not certain actions were taken due to parent recommendation versus objective assessment. Enriched courses such as those offered in the AP and IB programs are particularly important and all students should be encouraged to pursue these programs.

Also important to the classroom environment is the teacher's dynamic with the student as well as the classroom structure. Are students seated homogeneously? Not just with their own friends who may have similar ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds? Are teacher's expectations consistent for all groups? Are all students able to participate? Are the teacher's efforts with parents equal for all groups?

4. Professional Development

The equity audit would measure the resources and advice given to teachers for instruction. Teachers in our public school system have an obligation to set aside personal beliefs in order to achieve a fair classroom setting, and although the county hires wonderful teachers who attend numerous training programs, nothing can be overlooked.

Teacher attention is very important to every single student. The equity audit would look into whether or not every student gets similar attention from teachers, especially when it comes to area of student leadership. All students should be encouraged to become leaders, and activities should reflect this. Furthermore, teachers should be familiar with

the neighborhood they teach in as well as the backgrounds of their students. If teachers do not have access to resources to help them achieve these goals, they must be provided.

5. Administration

The audit would review the methods used by the administration at individual schools and APS at large. Firstly, audits look at the organization and availability of information pertaining to equity by administration, for example test scores, information on harassment, and information on course enrollment. In addition, the audit will review the outreach methods used at APS and how the information about different programs and classes is disseminated to all families in the county, especially those with ESL and special needs.

The audit will also look into the involvement of parents and community members, to make sure that everyone has a chance to participate in making the schools better. Parents who work long hours should not have less influence simply because they cannot attend as many meetings as other parents. The audit will look into the administration's understanding with the historical significance of the communities of which they are a part. Furthermore, the system of tracking complaints by parents and others will be reviewed. The audit will review the actions the administration typically takes in response to various complaints, and also review the equity statements made by the administration and determine whether they have been followed. The audit will look into who contributed to each statement (school board, teachers, parents, etc); in other words, who was involved in defining the administration's policy.

Audits also look into the administration's ability to self monitor equity (be it through complaints, policy flags, or a special office). Lastly, equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers will be reviewed. Are certain teachers gravitating towards classes with certain demographics or socioeconomic background?

Strategic Plan Alignment

The plan set forward by the committee aligns directly with the core value of equity in the APS strategic plan. The plan defines this value as:

Equity: Eliminate opportunity gaps and achieve excellence by providing access to schools, resources, and learning opportunities according to each student's unique needs.

Our recommended plan directly aims to support the shared value of equity. An equity audit would also further several other goals established in the strategic plan including objectives 3, 5, 10, 21, and 22 as well as indirectly affecting many more.

3. Historically overrepresented and underrepresented groups accessing services will be proportionate with student need and demographics.

5. At least 80% of students with disabilities will spend 80% or more of their school day in a general education setting.

10. Disproportionality in suspension rates by race/ethnicity, students identified with a disability, and English Learners will be reduced and overall suspensions will not increase.

21. At least 90% of family and community engagement activities build the capacity of staff and families in capabilities (skills and knowledge), connections (networks), cognition (understanding) and confidence (a Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family School Partnerships).

22. At least 95% of APS families will respond favorably on student and family engagement on the Your Voice Matters survey.

This committee believes that an equity audit could have a monumental impact on the ability of the schools to meet all of these objectives. An external audit will provide accountability which will cement what this administration is doing correctly and bring what could be done better to everyone's attention, thus strengthening the relationship between community and administration. As for less advantaged groups, equity audits have proven to be the best vehicle for providing students with the perspective necessary to be active members of the community as well as comfortable, confident, high achieving students.

Budgetary Implications: Approximately \$15,000; possibly shared with the Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer and/or the Office of Equity and Excellence. If budget constraints preclude a full audit, intermediate options might include:

Tier 1: In-house sharing and expansion of existing resources for improved equity, such as individual teachers' course materials and projects.

Tier 2: Develop an online tool similar to the [Culturally Responsive Framework](#) used by Fairfax County Public Schools, providing a consistent framework for teachers to use in evaluating inclusive materials and classrooms.

Tier 3: Equity audit more narrowly focused, for instance on classroom resources and environment or targeted at the elementary level.

Committee vote: 8 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain

Recommendation #2: As part of the APS professional learning opportunities, provide a series of professional development courses focused on the goal of building student skills for active democratic civic engagement.

Please note, that although we acknowledge that the term “citizen” may feel exclusionary to some non-US citizens in Arlington, we will continue to use it in this recommendation because of its prominent role in state-level directives. For the purpose of this recommendation, we define “citizen” as a member of the local community, regardless of legal status.

Rationale

This is a critical time for American democracy. Many in the United States and around the world are beginning to lose faith in democratic values and institutions. A recent article in the *Journal of Democracy* warns that there are multiple signs the US could be experiencing “democratic deconsolidation”, a situation where democracy and its institutions are no longer broadly supported (Foa and Mounk, 2017). Other evidence echoes this concern. An annual Gallup poll conducted since 1973 found continued declines in confidence in government branches (President, Congress, Supreme Courts) as well as related institutions, such as news sources and public schools (Gallup, 2019). A 2016 survey showed only 52% of respondents had “faith in American democracy” (Persily and Cohen, 2016). While a Democracy Fund Voter Study Group poll found that 86% of Americans believe democracy to be a “good” or “very good” system, there was still ample evidence of support for authoritarianism (Drutman, Diamond, Goldman, 2017). Respondents ranked as “good” or “very good” the alternative government options of “a strong leader who does not need to bother with Congress or elections” (24%) and “army rule” (18%). Growing support for non-democratic governmental structures is deeply concerning, particularly since democracy, by its very nature, requires the broad support and participation of the governed population.

In addition, many Americans believe that the many aspects of American democracy in practice are severely lacking. Although the majority of respondents to a Pew Research Center survey agreed upon 23 essential identified components of democracy as “very important”, the majority of respondents felt only that 8 out of 23 components were implemented well in the US (Pew, 2018). In another Pew Research Center survey, a large majority of respondents said they believed political debates had become more negative and less respectful, fact-based, and issues-focused (Pew, 2019). Freedom House’s “Freedom in the World 2018” report showed a sharp decline in political liberties in the US, mainly due to “partisan manipulation of the electoral process, bias and dysfunction in the criminal justice system, and growing disparities in wealth, economic opportunity, and political influence” (Freedom House, 2018, “Overview”). Clearly, there is a great need for community members prepared to rebuild the social trust and engage in investing in the democratic system. However, these engaged community members are unlikely to materialize without concerted effort.

One of the fundamental goals of investing in a public education system is to prepare students for the demands of democratic citizenship. Fulfilling this charge has implications that benefit not only individual students, but the country (and world) as a whole. The skills of democratic citizenship go far beyond understanding the basic structure of the US government or the history of the US. While not all APS students are US citizens, all will have a need for the skills of democratic citizenship – forming and sharing opinions based on an analysis of valid information, engaging in cooperative dialogue with other community members, respecting the civil liberties of all, considering the perspectives and needs of other community members, actively problem-solving social challenges, and taking action for a common good. Each of these skills, similar to the skills of literacy and numeracy, needs to be developed over time in multiple contexts. These learning goals are not “add-on” skills that need to take a backseat to other foundational skills, such as reading or math. These skills are basic needs for all individuals living in the United States if we want to have a healthy democracy and society. Therefore, it is essential that **all** teachers understand how to help students develop these skills.

According to the standards set out in the Virginia Department of Education Profile of a Graduate, graduating students must “build connections and value interactions with others as a responsible and responsive citizen (community engagement and civic responsibility);” and the Virginia General Assembly sets out the 5 Cs “critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and **citizenship**.” Despite this emphasis on the importance of graduating students ready to take roles as active citizens, there is virtually no component of the 2018 APS Learning Framework that

focuses on community involvement, civic engagement, and the many aspects of modern-day active citizenship. We suggest that teacher professional development (PD) in citizenship would be an important part of a comprehensive APS approach to democratic civic education.

Suggested Areas for Professional Development Courses

Two areas of the APS Learning Framework especially lend themselves to PD courses on citizenship and democratic civic education.

1. Firstly, within the “Innovate” framework there is a specific section on the Profile of the Graduate, which, as mentioned above, includes citizenship as a core tenet. However, the only vaguely relevant PD course to citizenship is “incorporating the 5 Cs.” We suggest developing and offering a standalone course on preparing students for active and transformative citizenship (discussed in Appendix B). This course could include components on community engagement, building social trust, developing skills to understand across differences, and an exploration of different methods employed to impact a democracy. This course would not be limited to Social Studies teacher teaching “civics” but is envisioned as a deep-dive into the way every teacher should be supporting the development of active civic participation.
2. Secondly, under the “Connect” framework, “Curriculum” area, we suggest the development of mini-courses for each subject area detailing how citizenship themes can be incorporated into specific subject content. For example, a statistics class could include an analysis of statistics use and misuse in public policy debates. An English classroom is the perfect place to discuss respectful dialogue and persuasive speech. Health classes could discuss the role of the US, Virginia, and Arlington governments in developing policies that encourage a healthy population. Science classes provide an ideal opportunity to understand how science can be used to inform and develop policies and initiatives. It is important to support teachers to help students understand how their subject deeply impacts the life of this nation.

Strategic Plan Alignment

The strategic vision of the APS 2018-24 Strategic Plan reads:

To be an inclusive community that empowers all students to foster their dreams, explore their possibilities, and create their futures.

We believe that this vision requires the system to graduate students prepared to take an active role in creating their futures through democratic participation. Building these skills of civic engagement is particularly important for students who are part of groups whose opinions are underrepresented in decision-making. The strategic plan recognizes the importance of empowering all individuals to take an active role in defining the future of Arlington, of Virginia, and of the United States as evidenced by the core values of:

Inclusivity: *Strengthen our community by valuing people for who they are, nurturing our diversity, and embracing the contributions of all students, families, and staff.*

Stewardship: *Manage our resources to honor the community's investment in our schools; create safe, healthy, and environmentally sustainable learning environments; support civic and community engagement; and serve current and future generations.*

In addition, democratic civic involvement also necessitates **Partnerships** with the local community, one of the key goals of the 2018-24 Strategic Plan. Performance objective #21 is particularly realized through the proposed PD.

*At least 90% of family and community engagement activities **build the capacity of staff and families in capabilities (skills and knowledge), connections (networks), cognition (understanding) and confidence (a Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships).***

This also supports the core value of:

Collaboration: *Foster partnerships with families, community, and staff to support the success of our students.*

Finally several of the identified strategies are relevant to this recommendation:

*Provide growth and leadership opportunities for all staff by providing meaningful, **high quality, and relevant professional learning opportunities.***

*Embed global competencies, critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and **citizenship into curriculum and instruction.***

Foster effective and meaningful collaboration among and between resources in APS and the community, including APS programs and services, student, parent, and teacher organizations, County government agencies and

programs, non-profit organizations, businesses, advisory groups, and community groups.

*Provide training and resources for staff and families to **create meaningful partnerships** that support student success and well-being.*

Budgetary Implications: none (professional development can be developed in house)

Committee vote: 8 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain

Past Recommendation #1: Increased focus on global education and citizenship

Status: Embedded global and citizenship resources have been added to curriculum documents and were increased during curriculum work (Summer 2019). The Social Studies Office has also promoted professional learning opportunities that teachers can participate in to increase their lens on global education. We have suggested that a citizenship course, aligned to the Profile of a Graduate, be added as a professional learning option for teachers that would help them develop ways of embedding real life citizenship scenarios into their content.

ACI Ranking: Student Achievement 3.6, Eliminating Gaps 3.1, Whole Child 3.2, Interdisciplinary 3.5, Alignment with Priorities 3.4, Consistency 3.2, Mitigates 1.7, Budget 3.6, Research Alignment 3.2, Total 3.2

Past Recommendation #2: Support Performance Assessment Tasks (PATs) in social studies instruction and devote necessary resources to continue developing them

Status: The Social Studies Office has reviewed the offerings and increased the options for Performance Assessment Tasks. Professional learning sessions around the creation of PATs and how to embed the assessment into instruction have been offered.

ACI Ranking: Student Achievement 3.3, Eliminating Gaps 3.1, Whole Child 3.1, Interdisciplinary 2.7, Alignment with Priorities 3.2, Consistency 3.1, Mitigates 1.6, Budget 3.3, Research Alignment 2.8, Total 2.9

Committee Members: Heidi Gibson, Cragg Hines, Heather Keppler, Amina Luqman-Dawson, Anne Paris (Chair), Noah Portner, Ginny Ramos, Paula Cordero Salas, Kerri Hirsch (Staff Liaison)

Appendices

Appendix A: ACI Rubric Criteria

	Recommendation 1: <i>Equity audit to review curriculum and resources</i>	Recommendation 2: <i>Professional development courses on active democratic civic engagement</i>
Critical Need: The recommendation addresses an identified area of critical need or a key area for improvement.	YES -- Equity has been identified as a crucial area for study and improvement at APS.	YES -- Despite its prominence in the VDOE Profile of a Graduate and “5 C’s,” citizenship receives very little attention in APS curriculum.
Proven Solutions: The recommendation proposes an evidence- or research-based solution; once implemented, it has a high probability of success.	YES -- an audit will provide unbiased data grounded in best practices and give a roadmap for developing an inclusive and culturally relevant curriculum.	YES -- professional development is a reliable method of raising teachers’ awareness of neglected areas of the curriculum.
Consistency: The recommendation supports or improves consistency across the school division.	YES -- inconsistency across schools will be one of the issues addressed by the audit.	YES -- will lead to more focus on civic engagement across locations, groups, and grades.
Equity: The recommendation supports or improves equity across the school division. It addresses providing access to schools, resources, and learning opportunities according to each student’s unique needs.	YES -- Equity is the prime focus of the audit. Advances the goal of each student feeling a part of the topics and content in the curriculum.	YES -- Improved attention on citizenship increases opportunities for students from all backgrounds to participate fully. Without intervention, civic participation largely depends on normative environment, perpetuating the same groups taking the lead in decision-making for the community.

<p>Academic Growth: The recommendation supports the achievement of at least one year of academic growth for individual students each year</p>	<p>YES -- students who feel seen and included by the curriculum will be more engaged.</p>	<p>YES -- Community engagement and civic responsibility are recognized components of academic achievement by the VDOE.</p>
<p>Achievement, Opportunity and Excellence Gaps: The recommendation directly addresses closing an identified gap, particularly in a traditionally underserved population.</p>	<p>YES -- An equity audit will directly address those populations whose experiences and cultures are under-represented in the curriculum -- students of color, immigrants, EL students</p>	<p>YES -- A focus on citizenship will elevate academic achievement and empowerment opportunities for underserved populations.</p>
<p>Social and Emotional: The recommendation supports students' social and emotional learning and needs.</p>	<p>YES -- Supports students' emotional need to be seen and included in the curriculum and the development of self and social awareness.</p>	<p>YES -- Promoting active civic participation empowers students, provides opportunities for active learning, and encourages social awareness and responsibility in students, as well as building relationship skills.</p>
<p>Other Strategic Plan/Priority Alignment: The recommendation advances or supports achievement of other objectives in the current Strategic Plan and/or addresses a current School Board priority.</p>	<p>YES -- Aligns with the goals of new Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer and new APS equity policy.</p>	<p>YES -- supports the core value of collaboration to foster partnerships with families, community, and staff to support the success of our students.</p>
<p>Budget: The recommendation is sufficiently important or meritorious that it is worth the associated cost, even in a challenging budget environment.</p>	<p>YES -- Equity is currently a high priority for APS, and appropriately so. It is important to tackle these issues with enough resources to make a difference.</p>	<p>YES -- no budget impact</p>

APPENDIX B:

Why, what, and how of citizenship and civic education

Why: Changing situations, changing needs

Today's citizens and community changemakers face significant hurdles to active civic engagement and informed decision-making.

These include, but are not limited to:

- The increasing polarization of the American public
- The rise of rapid information and disinformation via technology makes it difficult to focus and to feel confident in truth
- A broad feeling of dissatisfaction with politics and the political process
- Changing social norms may bring discomfort through lack of familiarity and understanding or dissonance with existing beliefs
- Stratification and inequality in the US system means some groups have disproportionately less power and may feel disaffected from the system
- Serious, long-term problems (e.g. climate change) can make individuals believe they are unable to affect change
- Some cultures and places do not have a tradition of democratic participation and civic involvement
- Lack of identification with the values embodied by democracy or lack of knowledge about the nature of those values
- Changing, transient communities can lead to a lack of social cohesion and willingness to invest in a community that doesn't seem like "yours"
- Uncertainty due to rapidly shifting economies and worries over workforce preparation can mean increasing focus on the individual rather than social good
- As the possibility of virtual communities widen due to technology, the need to engage with the physical local community diminishes
- Increased movement and migration pulls new cultures into contact with each other; understanding the perspective of the "other" may be more challenging
- Perceived lack of time or knowledge
- Disengagement with the classic stories used to introduce American democracy (e.g. white, male founding fathers wrote documents over two centuries ago)
- Difficulty in balancing the needs and opinions of groups occupying different physical and cultural spaces

What: Goals of teaching civics and citizenship

There are a number of different ways of thinking about the ideal community member civic and citizenship education is trying to develop. Two stand out as being most relevant.

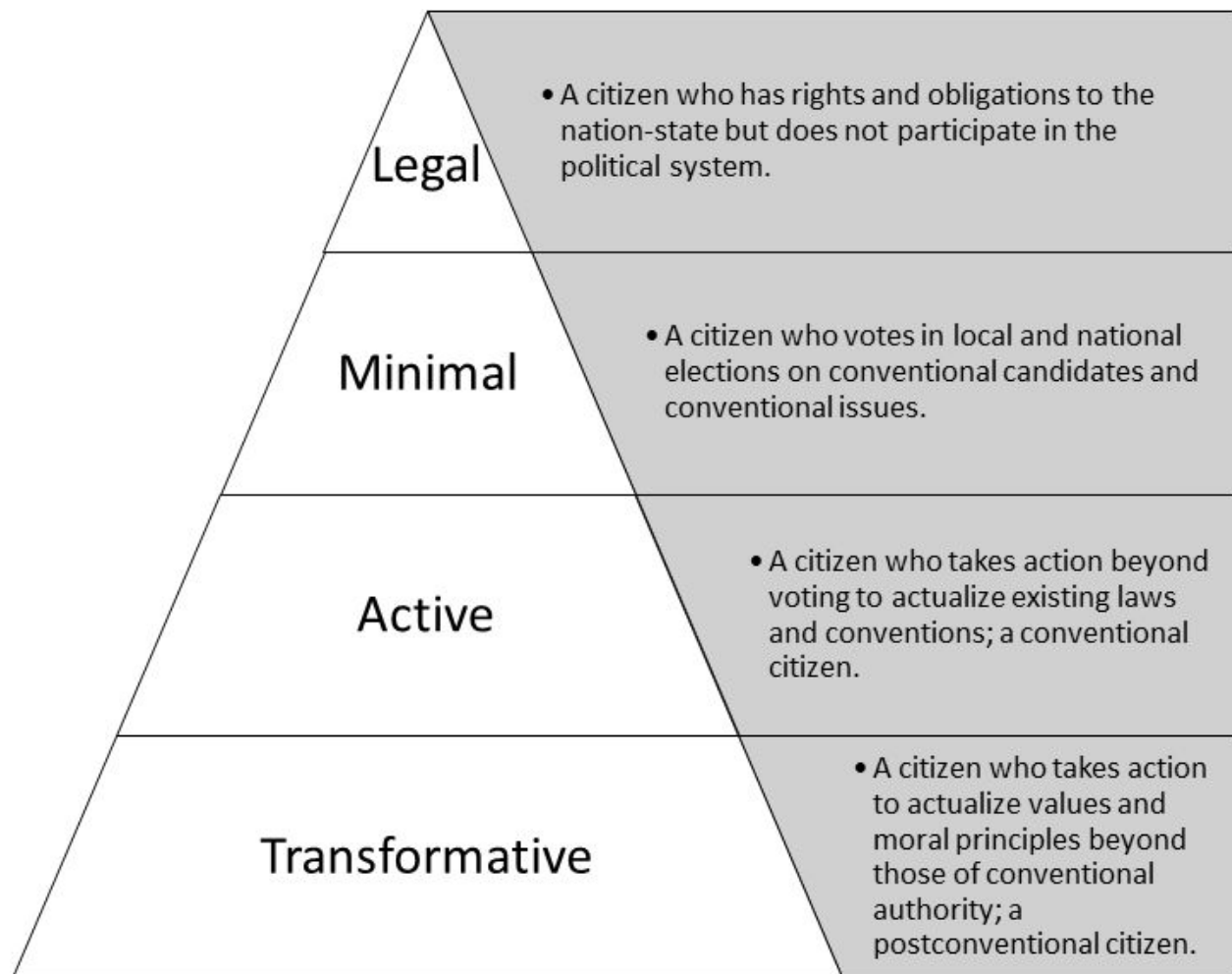
First of all, the typology of Westheimer and Kahne (2004) identifies three types of desirable citizens:



1. The **personally responsible citizen** focuses on taking responsibility for his or her actions in the community (e.g. recycles, obeys laws, participates in community service opportunities);
2. The **participatory citizen** takes an active role in community civic and social life, involved in organizations and government at a local, regional, or national level (e.g. probably everyone on ACI);
3. The **justice-oriented citizen** believes one of the main duties of citizenship is to analyze, understand, and address social, economic, and political forces, particularly as they relate to social justice and systemic change (e.g. Suffragette movement) (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004)

Developing the skills and attitudes associated with all three types of citizens would appear to be a desirable goal for APS. However, there also can be a sense of

progression through different types of citizenship, as detailed by James Banks (2014) and recreated in the figure below.



(recreated from Banks, 2014)

Large scale social changes, such as the US Civil Rights Movement, are largely brought about through the work of transformative citizens. It should be the goal of APS to have every graduating student ready to take on the work of active, and ideally transformative, citizenship and civic involvement.

How: Challenges of teaching civics and citizenship in the US and how to address them

Finally, there are very real challenges to teaching civics and citizenship in the United States, including:

- Balancing diversity and recognition of unity in pluralistic values

- Understanding the ideas of cultural citizenship v. political borders
- How to educate citizens that may have varying identities and live in a variety of locations, both previously and in the future
- Ambivalence towards encouraging students to acquire attitudes and skills to function in a cultural group with which they do not identify
- Balance of cultural, national and global identifications
- Maintaining legitimacy of government while openly discussing faults, past and present
- Difficulty teaching children values improperly realized within the United States
- Discussing issues that may be emotional and controversial
- Classroom dynamics teach students a lot about participation and democracy (importance of using inquiry, open discussion, etc.), this may require new skills and attitudes for teachers
- Perceived lack of importance by students, parents, and staff
(drawn largely from Banks, 2014)

Recently, there has been a shift from using a civic education model, a method that is content-heavy and promotes civic knowledge and patriotism. Instead, the newer model of democratic citizenship education focuses on active participation in civic and citizen activities and developing key skills and competencies (Keating, 2016).

Key Competences/ Skills for Democratic Citizenship:

- Political literacy
- Critical thinking
- Conflict-free problem solving
- Public discourse and communication
- Intercultural communication
- Respect for democracy and human rights
- Tolerance and equality
- Solidarity and interdependence
- Belief in the importance of participating in one's community/ communities
- Digital and media literacy
- Empathy and perspective-taking

(drawn largely from Keating, 2016)

We note that many of these skills can be developed in a wide variety of content areas. Although one might generally expect to find the skills of political literacy largely developed within social studies courses, every other skill and competency should be

taught throughout across disciplines and ages. The broad reach of the skills and competences of democratic citizenship undergirds the rationale for widespread professional development in these areas.

Appendix C: References

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Other links and resources

Link to the [Virginia, We Need to Talk Presentation](#) given by two Arlington teachers at state conference for Social Studies, October 2019

Link to Fairfax County Public Schools' [Culturally Responsive Framework](#) tool for evaluating equity

[Link to the Civics SOL Standards](#)

[APS Professional Learning Framework](#)