



March 10, 2021

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Thomsen and Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

We, the undersigned, strongly support the *Civics Education Act* (SB 513), which guarantees civics education for all Oregon students. We urge you and your committee members to advance this important legislation.

Civics education is essential to our democratic society. Without a basic fundamental understanding of what lies at the core of our Republic, a government of the people, by the people and for the people will be impossible to sustain. As Chief Justice John Roberts recently wrote:

“Civics education, like all education, is a continuing enterprise and conversation. ***Each generation has an obligation to pass on to the next, not only a fully functioning government responsive to the needs of the people, but the tools to understand and improve it.***”

We are not effectively providing those tools to your youth:

- Only 25% of Americans can name all three branches of government; nearly one-third of Americans are unable to name any.
- **Only 24% of high school seniors test at or above a proficiency level in civics.**
- Seventy-five percent of Americans born in the 1930s believed it was essential to live in a democracy. Only about 30% of Americans born in the 1980s believe that today.

These statistics are evidence of our failure to educate recent generations about the fundamentals of our democracy and how to engage effectively within it. While this is a national crisis, Oregon may be even further behind as it is one of only eleven states that do not require a civics education class for graduation. We must do a better job to prepare our youth to live within a democracy.

The *Civics Education Act* is a simple response to these problems. It provides that every Oregon student will receive one semester of civics education before they graduate. The bill does not increase the number of credits that students will need to graduate. It simply ensures that one semester out of the three years of social studies currently required for graduation will be dedicated to learning about democracy.

The bill also does not require development of new academic content standards as the Oregon Department of Education already provides strong standards for civics and government education. It simply ensures that all students will receive a solid grounding in those standards, giving them the knowledge and capabilities to effectively engage in their roles as citizens and community members.

Research shows that students who receive quality civics education are more likely to vote, discuss politics at home, complete college, and develop skills that lead to employment. They are also four times more likely to give back to their communities through volunteering and working on community issues and are more confident in their ability to speak publicly and communicate with their elected representatives.

A recent [article](#) from the *Sisters Nugget* highlights the lasting impact civics education can make on high school students. High school teacher Gail Greaney used the 2020 election as the backdrop for a focus on civics education. Students in the class spoke of lifelong impacts of the class and the understanding of American government that they took from it.

One student said, “I definitely see this class impacting my future, both in the basic understanding I’ve gained for the foundations of American politics and government and through the skills and tools I’ve learned for being an active and engaged member of society.”

This is a subject that unites Americans. One recent survey shows that a significant majority of both Republicans and Democrats believe that civics education for K-12 students “would have the most positive and meaningful impact on strengthening the American identity.”

The Civics Education Act will prepare our students and protect our democracy. Please ensure all Oregon students receive a quality civics education and support *The Civics Education Act*.

Businesses and Organizations

Advanced Competitive Strategies, Inc.
American Association of University Women of Oregon
Bliss Holistic Health
BridgeWorks Capital LLC
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Business for a Better Portland
C&E Systems
Classroom Law Project
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Oregon State Grange
Oregon Trial Lawyers Association
Paula Manley Consulting
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Elected Officials/Government Officials

Brad Avakian - Former Commissioner of Labor and Industries
Claire Hall - County Commissioner, Lincoln County
Elizabeth Farrar Campbell - County Judge, Gilliam County
Henry Heimuller - Columbia County Commissioner
Joe Buck - Mayor of Lake Oswego

Knute Buehler - Former State Representative
Michael H. Simon - U.S. District Judge, U.S. District Court (D. Or.)
Pam Knowles - PPS Board Member 2009-2017
Patti Adair - Commissioner, Deschutes County
Sam Palmer - Commissioner, Grant County

High School Educators/Students

Alisa Harvey - Social Studies Teacher, Sunset High School
Angela DiPasquale - Teacher, Grant High School
Carolyn Jones Christoferson - Retired Teacher
Christina Kennedy - Bend-LaPine Schools teacher
Emma Jones - Student
Gillian Sullivan-Bing - 8th Grade Humanities Teacher, Stoller Middle School
Helen M Crandell - Retired Educator
Jo Rossman - AAUW, Retired Beaverton Teacher
John Barnes - High School Social Studies Teacher

John W. "Jack" Lundeen - Former teacher, retired lawyer, and father
Leah Alper - High School Student
Linda J. Harris - Retired PPS Assistant Superintendent
Lynn Horihn - High School Social Studies Teacher
Sherry Fishman - Retired educator/therapist
Stephen Griffith - Retired lawyer and volunteer teacher
Teri J Geist - Retired School Principal
Tina Hanselman - Middle School Teacher
Yena Perice - High School Student, Cleveland High School

College and University Faculty/Staff

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Classroom Law Project is a non-profit organization of individuals, educators, lawyers and civic leaders building strong communities by teaching students to become active citizens

www.classroomlaw.org | 620 SW Main St, Suite 102, Portland, OR 97205 | (503) 224-4424

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