

# Materials and Resources in Support of Act 35 of 2018 Assessment of Civic Knowledge

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**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
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## **Pennsylvania Department of Education Support for Act 35 of 2018 Assessment of Civics Knowledge**

The Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights are the documents that express the principles and philosophy of government of the United States of America. These “Charters of Freedom” have given guidance to each generation of Americans to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution.

Each person born in the United States is a citizen. Others become citizens through a voluntary legal process which requires meeting certain criteria: having basic knowledge of U.S. government, U.S. history; and verbally committing to uphold the Constitution. With this commitment, the new citizen becomes part of “We the People.”

The American Experiment in government began in 1787 with a radical new concept of the people choosing how they are governed. Education of the people is a critical success factor of this government. Thomas Jefferson expressed, "An **educated citizenry** is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people." The foundation for an educated citizenry has long been established in the support of public education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Several state documents outline how Pennsylvania’s students acquire knowledge around U.S. civics topics.

Chapter 4 Title 22 of the Pennsylvania Code

### **§ 4.11. Purpose of public education.**

(b) Public education prepares students for adult life by attending to their intellectual and developmental needs and challenging them to achieve at their highest level possible. In conjunction with families and other community institutions, public education prepares students to become self-directed, life-long learners and responsible, involved citizens.

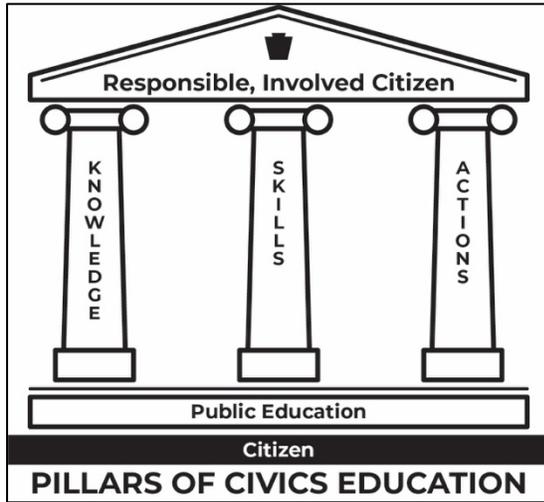
Act 35 of 2018, the entirety of which is available in Appendix A, was passed by the General Assembly and signed by Governor Tom Wolf in June 2018.

Beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, each school entity shall administer at least once to students during grades seven through twelve a locally developed assessment of U.S. history, government and civics that includes the nature, purpose, principles and structure of U.S. constitutional democracy, the principles, operations and documents of U.S. government and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.”

Act 35 continues with responsibilities of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to include among other things, providing school entities with resources which will support the implementation of Act 35. Several

State Academic Standards for Civics and Government, Economics, Geography and History (approved by the State Board of Education) guide school entities in developing a strong curriculum that includes civic knowledge. The academic standards provide the foundation for meeting the purpose of public education as specified in Chapter 4 of the Public School Code of 1949. The implementation of the developed curriculum; the modeling of civic behavior by educators, administrators, and community members; and opportunities for students to participate in civic endeavors are part of a quality civic education program.

## Quality Civic Education Programs



Research from respected organizations in civic engagement conclude that quality civics education programs have three strong pillars:

1. **KNOWLEDGE** - a fundamental understanding of the structure of government and the processes by which government passes laws and makes policy
2. **SKILLS** - abilities necessary to participate as active and responsible citizens in democracy
3. **ACTIONS** – activities of citizens that include voting, participating in community meetings, volunteering, communicating with elected and appointed officials, signing petitions

### Pillar 1: Knowledge

The knowledge pillar underscores planned instruction to support student understanding of concepts of the Academic Standards. Assessment focuses on the four critical components of civics education:

- Principles and Documents of Government
- Rights and Responsibilities
- How Government Works
- International Relationships

### Pillar 2: Skills

The skills pillar seeks to have students engage in active civic participation: applying the knowledge gained in the first pillar. At the school level, students participate in student council/school governance, extracurricular activities, mock trials and similar simulation activities, service learning, and various clubs and organizations. Opportunities for civil discussions, discourse, and debate also provide opportunities to hone skills.

Another important aspect of skills development is the need for tolerance and acceptance of others. Anti-bullying initiatives and programs such as Positive Schoolwide Behavior Support (PBIS) are critical components in the schoolwide setting.

### Pillar 3: Actions

Responsible and involved citizens take an active role through a myriad of actions and dispositions:

- Acceptance of diversity
- Involvement in the community
- Military service

- Voting in elections
- Assuming responsibility for choices
- Respecting rule of law
- Political attentiveness
- Government service – local, state, and national
- Respecting those who serve the common good
- Educator professional development

By incorporating all three pillars in a civics program, students acquire the knowledge behind the meaning of “We the People.” They have an opportunity to operate as a citizen, experience citizenry and understand that the government of the United States is theirs. This encourages each generation to “secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity.”

## **Guidance for Program Success**

A quality civics program includes the following components:

- Developing a robust curriculum based in the Pennsylvania Academic Standards populated with quality resources curated by the Department of Education
- Providing professional development in the areas of Civic Knowledge, Skills, and Actions for all educators
- Modeling responsible involved citizenship daily in classrooms, schools and community
- Supporting an active student government
- Involving/exposing students with community programs at each grade level

## **Resources**

PDE has assembled a group of national, state, and local experts in civic education. This Civics Advisory Council provided guidance on building a program and providing a collection of vetted, quality resources. PDE, in consultation with the Civics Advisory Council, has created this toolkit, available online in the Standards Aligned System ([www.pdesas.org](http://www.pdesas.org)) and the PDE website [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov) in accordance with Act 35.

Note: Generally, the descriptions that follow reflect narratives provided by the website providers.