

# Frequently Asked Questions:

## *New Illinois Civics Course Requirement*

*In August 2015 HB 4025, a bill that would expand the state graduation requirements to include a semester long stand-alone civics course, was signed into law. The law states that civics courses must “help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives”.*

### **When will the requirement go into effect?**

The new law will apply to freshmen entering high school in the 2016-17 school year. These students will be required to pass a dedicated civics course in order to graduate. However, many schools are opting to begin offering the course now. Currently there are 31 CPS schools, 54 teachers that are offering the course in CPS.

### **What courses will count as fulfilling the new state law?**

Currently, schools may use a civics or AP Government course to satisfy the requirement. The course may not be a unit of study embedded, for example in a US History course. Discussion is ongoing regarding additional courses that may qualify, including within the IB program course of study. Currently only the following course codes may be used:

Honors Civics - 213101H/2H

Civics - 213101R/2R

Significantly Modified Civics - 2131010S/20S

Advanced Placement Government and Politics: United States - 272201A/2A

### **Who can teach civics?**

Civics course instructors must be certified 9-12 social studies endorsed teachers.

### **What does the civics course need to include?**

The law specifically states that a civics course must address government institutions; discuss current and controversial issues; and include service learning and simulations of the democratic process. ISBE has also stated that courses should be aligned to new state social studies learning standards. The new Illinois learning standards for social science can be found at [http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/social\\_science/pdf/ss-stds-eff012716.pdf](http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/social_science/pdf/ss-stds-eff012716.pdf)

### **Is there a recommended curriculum for the new civics course?**

Provided it meets the requirements of the law, schools are welcome to choose the curriculum that best meets their need and instructional program.

However, in anticipation of the new requirement, CPS Social Science and Civic Engagement department has created a **FREE** curriculum that meets the requirements of the law and draws from best practice in the field. This curriculum, ***Participate: A Civics Course for Chicago's Youth***, includes lessons and resources from Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago, Facing History and Ourselves, Mikva Challenge, Stanford History Education Group, Teaching Tolerance and other respected civic and social studies education organizations. In order to gain access to the curriculum schools must participate in the free, Professional Development that accompanies the course. We are currently piloting the course in 30 schools in CPS. Interested schools should contact Liz Robbins [erobbins1@cps.edu](mailto:erobbins1@cps.edu).

**Do schools have to offer a whole year of civics or can they pair civics with another course?**

The law requires only a semester-long stand-alone course. Of those schools currently participating in the pilot civics program, approximately half have chosen to offer it as a year long course with the other half opting to pair civics with a variety of courses including personal finance/economics, law, or other course.

**Does it matter in what grade the civics course is taught?**

Schools are free to place the civics course where it makes sense in their course sequencing for social studies. As a reminder, CPS requires that students graduate with three years of social studies course credit including 1 year of world studies, 1 year of US history, and now, 1 semester of civics.

**Does the new civics course count as meeting the state's Constitution requirement?**

As is currently the practice, schools may determine where it best fits to include study of the US and Illinois state constitutions. Some schools may continue to include the unit of study in their US History classes while others may opt for inclusion in civics. However, if the civics course is chosen as the course in which students will complete the study of the Constitution, schools should opt for the year long version of the course to provide ample opportunity to cover the required components of the civics course as well as the Constitution.

**What professional development supports will be available to teachers of civics?**

The Department of Social Science and Civic Engagement will be providing a summer institute and ongoing professional development workshops to instructors utilizing the *Participate: A Civics Course for Chicago's Youth* curriculum. Contact Liz Robbins, [erobbins1@cps.edu](mailto:erobbins1@cps.edu) for more information. For schools offering the AP Government course, we are currently piloting a new AP Government curriculum, which incorporates many of the practices laid out in the legislation. Schools interested in participating should contact Mark Klimesh, [mklimesh@cps.edu](mailto:mklimesh@cps.edu).

**What will happen to students who transfer in from out of district schools, including Charter schools, which are not required to adhere to the new law?**

All CPS students will be encouraged to take the Civics course offered at their school so that they may participate in the rich and robust learning experience the course will offer. However, students who find that they need Civics and are unable to access the course in their regular schedule (or students who need to recover the credit), may qualify for an online version of the course. Please email [cpsonlinecourses@cps.edu](mailto:cpsonlinecourses@cps.edu) for more information as the need arises.

**Will charter, contract and alternative schools be required to offer a civics course?**

The new civics requirement amends Article 27 of the School Code and is applicable to contract and alternative schools. Charter schools, while not mandated to follow Article 27 provisions, need to ensure students who graduate from its schools meet college admissions criteria. Thus while charter schools are not required by law to follow any of the state's high school course requirements, may still need to provide the high school courses if these courses are necessary for college admissions.

***For further questions regarding the CPS supported civics course, professional development and related supports contact Liz Robbins, Civics Instructional Specialist, at [erobbins1@cps.edu](mailto:erobbins1@cps.edu). For information on additional civic engagement programming and supports available to schools please feel free to contact Jessica Marshall, Director of Social Science and Civic Engagement, at [jmarshall2@cps.edu](mailto:jmarshall2@cps.edu) or 773-531-6391.***