

Dept. of Public Instruction: Active citizenship is what we need

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An understanding of civics – of the rights and duties of citizens – is essential to a well-functioning democracy. That means the effective teaching of civics is also essential. We want our children to grow up to be engaged citizens, to be critical consumers of information, to be actively involved in the civil discourse of this state and nation, to understand and participate in the processes of government, and to vote. Let's strengthen our commitment to civics education in Wisconsin by honoring the process of democracy, and the independent and nonpartisan nature of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. We do this by creating the Wisconsin Civics Advisory Council.

The Wisconsin Civics Advisory Council will harness the collective knowledge of DPI, thought leaders, legislators, parents, and most importantly of all, the educators who are in the classroom who teach these lessons and reach our students every single day. Tasked with developing high quality instructional materials and professional development, as well as making recommendations to DPI and the legislature on any policy changes that would strengthen students' learning of civics, this council will be able to tap into the riches Wisconsin has to offer: the state, local, and tribal histories found within our borders; the historical sites and museums that call Wisconsin home; and the movements that began in halls of power and around dining room tables across our state. This work stands strongly within our charge at DPI to advance public education and libraries in our state, and I look forward to being a part of leading this work and implementing the Wisconsin Civics Advisory Council's recommendations.

What could be more central than civics education in a state that holds the birthplace of the Republican Party, passed the first workers' compensation law to be upheld by the Constitution, and was the first state in the nation to ratify the 19th

Amendment affirming the right to vote for women? What could be more dedicated to the Wisconsin Idea than a strong, well-considered, bipartisan workgroup on civics? What could be more important than securing that the future leaders of our state and our country receive a civics education that is as rigorous, inclusive, and as thorough as possible? We accomplish this through the Wisconsin Civics Advisory Council.

After all, it was Wisconsin's own Robert La Follette who, during his 1924 presidential campaign, said, "America is not made. It's in the making... Mere passive citizenship is not enough." We know our children understand this. They are engaged. They are hungry to learn more about civics. It is up to this agency to lead and to work with our school boards to ensure our children grow up to be well-informed and active citizens. That is how we move Wisconsin forward.