

Ohio Council for the Social Studies

Position Statement: The Use of the Naturalization Test for Measuring Student Civic Learning

Approved by the Board 2018

The Ohio Council for Social Studies (OCSS), the state's largest professional coalition of social studies teachers, strongly opposes House Bill 544 co-sponsored by Representative Kyle Koehler (R-79) and Representative Al Landis (R-98). The mission of OCSS is predicated on preparing and supporting teachers as they work to prepare youth to undertake the most important office in The United States—the Office of Citizen. Research demonstrates that civics education has been marginalized in many states under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Civic Mission of Schools, 2003; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008) and as such, we deeply appreciate and applaud the sponsors' commitment to reinvigorating and strengthening civic education nationally; however, we do not believe this bill is right for Ohio and its youth. In fact, we are not alone, as similar legislation in states such as Florida, Indiana, Wisconsin, and New York has been voted down by social studies and civic teachers on grounds that it detracts from strong college and work ready state and local civic standards and assessments.

House Bill 544 proposes giving students the choice to replace Ohio's required high school American Government State Exam with the civic component of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Test. OCSS is requesting that government leaders, parents, business leaders, teachers and anyone else expecting Ohio high school graduates to become informed and active democratic citizens in our state also oppose this bill.

The current American Government Exam is based on Ohio's American Government Standards. Every high school student in Ohio must take the course and its accompanying end of course exam. This validated and reliable state exam sets the expectation that students to be college and work ready. The exam already holds students accountable for understanding our country's founding documents, including in depth understanding of the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution as well as the structures of both the national and state government. Of equal importance

is student responsibility for knowing their roles and responsibilities as participants in our democratic process.

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Test is a multiple choice test that holds new citizens accountable for memorizing basic facts about the United States. This test is designed for non-citizens who wish to become citizens, and after a careful review of published test items, we have determined it is equivalent to what Ohio students are taught in the the fourth grade. We argue that this low bar, namely requiring a 4th grade civic competency, is not good enough for Ohio's youth and its communities, especially since our current American Government standards and state assessment demand a great deal more of our youth. At a time when we should be preparing students to compete in the global economy, OCSS believes we should be raising civic education standards versus lowering them. Key points of our rationale for opposing this bill include:

- The current American Government Exam is based on homegrown development of rigorous new learning standards that promote college and work readiness. Local educators, parents, professors, and stakeholders from across the state have worked hard to create strong local standards for Ohio's youth that are amongst the best in the nation. These local standards, adopted by our State Board of Education, serve as a blueprint for new high quality performance assessments that are administered at different intervals in schools. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) notes that Ohio is one of only eight states in the nation to have standardized tests in place specifically in civics/American government, and one of only two that require passage of this test for graduation (CIRCLE, 2012).
- Tests like the U.S. Citizenship and Naturalization test that promote low-level/superficial knowledge steal quality instructional time away from implementation of Ohio's strong civic standards, which promote real-world civic engagement and community service (see the OCSS *Assessment Systems and Testing Position Statement*). Research finds that student-centered and inquiry oriented instructional approaches engage students more and bolster student civic learning versus those teacher centered approaches focused on rote memorization (IEA Civic Education Study, Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2004; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald & Schulz, 2001). Assessments should be aligned with teaching, such that they include attention to the higher-order learning outcomes described in the research as well as in Ohio's standards.
- There is no evidence that implementing this test would result in greater civic engagement (Feinberg and Doppen, 2010; Hess, 2015; Levine, 2015; Winke,

2011). The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Test is not an adequate measure of civic learning, because it measures only memorized content and not actual understanding or implementation. It is too easy to pass and would require little study or instruction.

- Ohio's existing American Government standards and graduation exam already demand youth understand basic principles of U.S. Government and pertinent founding documents. Much of the material measured on the 100-item Naturalization Test is already contained in the Ohio's American Government standards. Further, the Ohio standard focus on helping students understand how the American people govern themselves at the national, state, and local levels of government. These standards also demand Ohio's youth to engage in societal problems and participate in local government. These state level American Government standards require students learn how the Ohio Constitution (1851) complements and interacts with the federal structure of government. Ohio's youth learn how to engage in and make their voices heard in state government and in their communities.
- The US Citizenship Test is out of alignment with Ohio's rigorous homegrown American Government standards. The U.S. Naturalization and Citizenship Test was designed for U.S. immigration purposes, not for our Ohio high school graduates. If this legislation is passed, it will mean requiring the Ohio Department of Education to replace an existing rigorous, validated, reliable, and closely-aligned test with one that is far inferior.

Ohio's youth deserve high quality, rigorous, aligned, and locally developed assessments that include higher-order items (see *OCSS Assessment Systems and Testing Position Statement*). Outside of requiring students to learn basic principles in American Government, Ohio's civic assessments and standards expose students to equally important local and state government, instill local civic participation, and promote successful readiness for college, career, and civic life. While we acknowledge students must have a firm and robust understanding of both U.S. and Ohio Government, we also argue that youth must gain valuable experience debating, deliberating, presenting, and performing their roles and responsibilities as citizens. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Test is void of Ohio and local government topics, and prioritizes rote level memorization over critical thinking and performing/mastering competencies. We feel that if passed, our state would be actually be weakening its civic standards and assessments.

Below are a few samples from the US Citizenship test, the current Grade 4 Ohio State Test, and the current Ohio High School American Government test.

US Naturalization and Immigration Test proposed for High School

- How many amendments does the Constitution have?
 - 12
 - 27
 - 35
 - 42
- We elect a President for how many years?
 - 4
 - 12
 - 8
 - 5
- What is the name of the President of the United States now?
 - Obama
 - Ford
 - Clinton
 - Bush
- What do we call the first ten amendments to the Constitution?
 - The Bill of Rights
 - The Ten Commandments
 - The Bill of Lading
 - The List of Ten

See the rest here:

<http://civicseducationinitiative.org/take-the-test/>

4th Grade Ohio Social Studies Test

An American citizen speaks to a local community group about her opinions of United States

foreign policy.

Which First Amendment right is this citizen exercising?

1. freedom of speech
2. freedom of religion
3. freedom to petition
4. freedom of the press

Grade 4: Government 15, EOY Practice Test, Question 1

Identify the rights and responsibilities of a citizen of the United States.

Move each action into the correct column in the chart.

Grade 4: Government 15, PBA Spring 2015 Test, Question 1

Different documents played important roles in the development of the United States' democratic form of government. Which document provided for the establishment of the executive branch of the United States government?

1. Bill of Rights
2. Northwest Ordinance
3. United States Constitution
4. Declaration of Independence

Grade 4: Government 20, EOY Practice Test, Question 18

Identify **two** branches of the U.S. government. Then, explain **one** responsibility of each branch.

Type your answer in the space provided.

Grade 4, Government 21, PBA Practice Test, Question 4

Current Ohio High School American Government Exam

Federalism is one of the basic principles established in the U.S. Constitution.

Describe how government in the United States reflects a federal structure.

Type your answer in the space provided.

Content Statement 5, American Government EOY Practice Test, Question 8

Prior to the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, Federalists and Anti-federalists argued over the basic principles and limits in the role of the government. The quotations shown reflect those arguments.

Use your knowledge of Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists to identify which group held each of the positions shown.

Click on the "Federalist" or "Anti-Federalist" heading above each quotation.

Content Statement 6, American Government EOY Practice Test, Question 14

In the case *Gibbons v. Ogden*, the Supreme Court was asked to resolve a dispute over which part of government has the power to regulate navigation rights in rivers between states. The Court ruled that Congress had the power to regulate interstate commerce.

1. Identify the method was used to determine that Congress has the power to regulate interstate

commerce.

1. Determine the key principle of government that was involved.
2. Identify the result for our system of government.

Click on the box you want to select in each column.

Content Statement 7, American Government EOY Spring 2015 Released Items, Question 12

According to the Ohio and U.S. constitutions, which responsibility is held by both the state of Ohio and the federal government?

1. raising taxes
2. declaring war
3. printing money
4. forming international treaties

Content Statement 19, American Government EOY Spring 2015 Released Items, Question 1

Your city is debating whether to install a skateboard park on city-owned land. You want to support the park.

Which method would be effective in helping to determine public policy on this decision?

1. Participate in the governor's re-election campaign.
2. Send an email to your U.S. senators expressing your point of view.
3. Attend the meeting of the city council and present the benefits of a park.
4. Organize a letter-writing campaign to members of the Ohio General Assembly.

Content Statement 22, *American Government EOY Spring 2015 Released Items*,
Question 2

In response to public concern about downtown parking availability, a city's mayor appoints a panel of traffic engineers, transportation officials and citizens to study the issue. Six months later, the panel published a 30-page report documenting its findings.

Which factor will contribute to the credibility of the report as a source on the topic?

1. the length of the report
2. the cost of the report to the city
3. the number of tables and charts in the report
4. the qualifications of the contributors to the report

Content Statement 3, *American Government EOY Spring 2015 Released Items*,
Question 3

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