

# EDUCATING FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

## A ROADMAP FOR EXCELLENCE IN HISTORY AND CIVICS EDUCATION FOR ALL LEARNERS

The **Educating for American Democracy (EAD)** initiative provides national guidance that states, local school districts, and all educators can use to transform teaching of civics and history to sustain our constitutional democracy and meet the needs of a diverse 21st-century K–12 student body. The initiative includes a **Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy** and accompanying documents that give suggested educational strategies and suggested content for history and civics at every grade level—along with strategies for implementation in schools—so that each state, district, or school educator can fit into the needs of their own, unique communities. The EAD initiative is committed to providing instructional strategies and content for all learners to ensure that excellent history and civic learning opportunities are delivered equitably throughout the country.



## Why EAD?

**Trust in institutions and investment in communities are declining with time.** The Civics Deserts report from the National Conference on Citizenship highlighted concerning civic decay. The public's trust in key institutions and leaders such as the media, branches of government, and volunteering declined by over 15% between 2005 and 2015.

**Lack of knowledge on the part of youth is a pervasive problem.**

Only 24% of 8th graders scored proficient in the 2018 NAEP in Civics exam, the results of which were released April 2020. In 2018, nearly three-fourths of eighth-grade students report low to moderate levels of confidence in their civics-related knowledge and skills.

**Lack of foundation for civic friendship and unity threatens our country.** According to a January 2021 CBS News poll, 40% of Democrats and over half of Republicans tend to think of the other party as "enemies," rather than "political opponents". A majority of Americans identify other Americans as the greatest national threat.

**Lack of access to high quality civic education exacerbates national social and economic gaps.** According to analysis by Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg at CIRCLE, students from systemically disadvantaged communities, including low-income and Latino/a/x students, scored much lower on NAEP civics exams and reported less exposure to critical civic education products such as simulations, debates, and discussions.

## Why EAD and Human Rights Education (HRE)?

**HRE reinforces civil society and provides a strong basis for "civic friendship" across ideological differences.** The essence of Human Rights theory and practice and the foundation for both content and methodology in Human Rights Education is recognition of the equality and inherent dignity of persons, without references to their differentiating characteristics. While we acknowledge and seek to understand differences of race, ethnicity, religion, gender identification, age, ability/disability, economic circumstances, etc., the fact that such differences exist does not make any of us less worthy or less entitled to the benefits of participation in an inclusive, democratic society.

**Human Rights are inherent in all persons.** They do not need to be earned and are not granted to us by governments or other social institutions. When "rights" are treated more as "privileges," the holders of privilege often feel they risk loss of their human value when the value of groups in which they do not participate are strengthened. However, respect for human rights is not a zero-sum game; the realization of human rights benefits everyone in society. The human rights lens, applied to difference, seeks both to build equity among individuals and groups and to ensure that no artificial barriers impair participation by anyone (or any group) in the fruits of our inclusive democratic society. A core purpose of the U.S. Constitution, according to the Preamble, is to "promote the general welfare." When that "general welfare" is not equitably available to some members of society, threats to fundamental human rights are present and need to be resolved to realize the ideals of our democratic republic and its Constitutional democracy.



## What Can **Students** Do?

- Deepen your engagement with our constitutional democracy by learning how to recognize and exercise human rights and civic responsibilities.
- Engage in student government, in-school activities, community engagement initiatives, and other practices that strengthen understanding of your human rights and civic responsibilities as well as those of your peers, , family, and community members.
- Become aware of the various legal, political, educational, and societal mechanisms for protecting those rights.



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## What Can **State Policy-Makers** Do?

- Set ambitious goals to ensure that all students have access to opportunities for excellent civic and human rights learning opportunities.
- Adopt social studies standards that align with **EAD** and incorporate robust standards addressing universal human rights.
- Require EAD and human rights education training as part of educator preparation or licensure requirements.
- Integrate the Civic Learning Plan data within state accountability systems as a component of school performance indicators.

## What Can **Families** Do?

- Introduce your children to civic activities, from community service to voting.
- Discuss human rights issues and factors that may affect how individuals and members of different groups benefit from societal and governmental policies and participate in democratic institutions.
- You can engage and collaborate on civic activities together with the students in your family such as volunteering, tabling, etc.
- Build relationships with the educators of your students and understand your school policies, community members, and other administrators, and families.
- Support passionate yet respectful discussions of current events at the table.
- Explore your own family's heritage and how that has changed over time.
- Critically assess media sources together with your child.

## What Can **School and District Leaders** Do?

- Adopt and purchase curricula that emphasize the inquiry-based, interdisciplinary approach advanced by EAD.
- Recruit and support staff with a commitment to the school and district's civic engagement- mission and human rights values.
- Forge outside partnerships with families, community leaders, museums, libraries, and other organizations that can support high quality, inclusive civic learning
- Engage in self-evaluation of schools within the District, including participation by school administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members. Amnesty International and Human Rights Educators USA have resources for assessing the fairness, equity, and human rights friendliness of school districts.
  - Engaging in this kind of self-evaluation can strengthen students' sense of empowerment and provides an ideal environment for administrators, educators, and all participants to learn and practice civil friendships across ideological differences. A process grounded in respect for human rights assures that no one's concerns can be dismissed or marginalized.
  - Recognizing the human rights of all does not diminish the rights of any (but may have some effect on privileges that are not equitably shared with all.)



# What Can Educators Do?

## Actions to Promote Excellence for All

- Join professional learning communities, including PLCs of human rights educators focused on support, sharing resources, and mentoring to promote a continuous cycle of improvement and courageous engagement in dialogues and discussions that result from teaching the EAD Roadmap. Affirm diverse identities and provide inclusive instruction and examples.
- Incorporate human rights into your teaching and learning practices.
- Communicate clear expectations and express support and care for students.
- Provide opportunities for students to deepen and synthesize learning.
- Differentiate and scaffold instruction to ensure accessibility for all learners.

## Actions to Promote Growth Mindset & Capacity Building

- Gather formal and informal student feedback on their learning experiences to understand individual needs and strengths.
  - Engage in self-reflection to identify and address implicit biases and practices that may interfere with some students' learning processes.
  - Learn about activities to cultivate student motivations to improve and develop a growth mindset.
- Develop student-centered teaching and learning strategies that model respect for human rights.

## Actions to Promote EAD Classrooms & Schools

- Seek to learn more about students and their families and strive to build relationships with and among students and their families.
- Be mindful of how structural, institutional, and other factors may influence the rights and privileges of your students and affect student engagement in school-based opportunities.
- Help students engage productively with disagreements and solve conflicts.
- Support students to **process** emotionally difficult events using modes of expression such as dialogue, writing, and creating art.

## Actions to Help Practice Constitutional Democracy & Agency

- Facilitate opportunities for students to interact with community leaders, initiatives, and issues.
- Provide students the opportunity to practice democratic skills in the classroom and to demonstrate an understanding of their human rights implications.
- Facilitate opportunities for students to take informed action in their communities.

## Actions to Help Practice Inclusive, Participatory Constitutional Democracy

- Employ a human rights lens to evaluate the fairness, inclusiveness, and openness of institutions, policies, laws, economic arrangements, educational set-ups, etc.
- Utilize content from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related human rights documents to evaluate our domestic polity, economy, society.

## Actions to Reflect, Assess, and Improve

- Assess students' civic skills and agency.
- Seek out student feedback to facilitate self-reflection and growth in meeting the needs of all students.



## What can you do **right now?**

Attend EAD and HRE webinars and events, including those promoted by HRE USA, share the EAD Roadmap and Pedagogy Companion on social media, submit resources and discuss what implementing EAD at your school would look like.

**Start the discussion about why civic and history education are instrumental for our democracy.**



HRE USA Photos courtesy of Human Rights Educators USA.