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Background: Civic Education and Service Learning in Illinois

On June 28 and 29, 2018, the Commission will convene in Chicago, IL to meet and engage with local leaders and the American public to engage and gain better understanding of military, national, and public service topics. Civic education and service learning have become important subjects of interest to the Commission. The purpose of this document is to provide the Commissioners with information on civics education and service learning legislation and initiatives in Chicago.

Civic Education

In 2015, Illinois enacted a law that will require all high school graduates, beginning with the Class of 2020, to complete a semester-long civics course. This course must “focus on government institutions, the discussion of current and controversial issues, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process. School districts may utilize private funding available for the purposes of offering civics education.”¹

Illinois also requires instruction in “American patriotism and the principles of representative government” and requires students to pass an examination on these subjects to graduate.²

Learning standards in Illinois for K-12 social science include civic education outcomes for elementary, middle, and high-school students, such as: “identifying core civic virtues (such as honesty, mutual respect, cooperation, and attentiveness to multiple perspectives) and democratic principles (such as equality, freedom, liberty, respect for individual rights) that guide the state and nation” in grade 4), “compare the means by which individuals and groups change societies, promote the common good, and protect rights” in middle school, and “evaluate the opportunities and limitations of participation in elections, voting, and the electoral process” in high school.³

(Community) Service Learning

Illinois does not have a statewide service requirement, does not include service-learning in state standards or frameworks, and does not explicitly permit districts to adopt a service requirement for high school graduation.

Illinois state law grants school districts discretion to establish a **volunteer service credit program** under which students can earn credit toward graduation through performance of community

¹ 105 ILCS 5/27-22.a.4. See also, HB 4025 (Public Act 99-0434).
<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=099-0434>. Accessed June 21, 2018.

² 105 ILCS 5/27-3.

³ Illinois State Board of Education. “Illinois Social Science Standards.” June 2017. P. 13-14.
<http://documents.mccormickfoundation.org/pdf/K-12-SS-Standards-6-2017.pdf>. Accessed June 21, 2018.

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service.⁴ The amount of credit given for program participation cannot exceed the amount given for completion of one semester of language arts, math, science, or social studies.

Illinois's Community Service Education Act recognizes that **community service education** programs educate students about the value of civic involvement, and that students, citizens, civic groups, businesses, and community organizations benefit from these programs.⁵

Illinois state law states school districts that choose to maintain a **community service education** program **may receive money from the state** in the form of grants, as well as from other public and private sources.⁶ The law allows the establishment of a not-for-profit organization to support of the program. In addition, school districts are allowed to collect fees from voluntary participants.

Illinois was a recipient of the **Learn and Serve America** grant program facilitated by CNCS. In 2011, federal funding for Learn and Serve America was discontinued.⁷

⁴ 105 ILCS 5/27-22.3.-cCourses of Study- Special Instruction. <https://law.justia.com/codes/illinois/2013/chapter-105/act-105-ilcs-5/article-27>. Accessed June 22, 2018.

⁵ 105 ILCS 60/5 - Community Service Education Act. <https://law.justia.com/codes/illinois/2016/chapter-105/act-105-ilcs-60/>. Accessed June 22, 2018.

⁶ 105 ILCS 60/90 (Public Act 94-904)- Community Service Education Act. <https://law.justia.com/codes/illinois/2016/chapter-105/act-105-ilcs-60/>. Accessed June 22, 2018.

⁷ Serve Illinois. Service Learning. <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/serve/Pages/learning.aspx>. Accessed June 22, 2018.