AMERICAN CIVIC ILLITERACY

• **Just 26%** of Americans can name all three branches of government
  - 2016 survey by The Annenberg Public Policy Center at UPenn

• **70%** of Americans do not know that the Constitution is the supreme law of the land.
  - 2011 Newsweek survey
CIVIC ILLITERACY OF RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATES

2015 ACTA Survey

• ≈50% did not know senators are elected to six-year terms & representatives to two-year terms.
• Less than 50% knew that presidential impeachments are tried before the U.S. Senate.
• Almost 60% failed to identify a requirement for ratifying a constitutional amendment.
• 60% thought Jefferson was the “Father of our Constitution.” Only 28% correctly identified Madison.
• 40% didn’t know Congress has the power to declare war.

Less than 20% of American college graduates could identify the effect of the Emancipation Proclamation in the 2012 version of the survey.
"Despite huge increases in the formal educational attainment of the US population during the past 50 years, levels of political knowledge have barely budged. **Today’s college graduates know no more about politics than did high school graduates in 1950.** [Recent research indicates] ... the more knowledge citizens have of political principles and institutions, the more likely they are to support core democratic principles, starting with tolerance ... All other things being equal, the more knowledge citizens have, the more likely they are to participate in public matters.”

“Good citizens need to be knowledgeable about politics, history, government, and current events. … On all of these measures, there is evidence of a profound gap between many non-White, immigrant, and especially low-income youth and adults, on the one hand, and White, native-born, and especially middle-class or wealthy youth and adults, on the other.”

CRISIS IN CIVIC EDUCATION: AS VIEWED BY SCHOLARS

Author: Henry Giroux
Summary/Abstract: “The scourge of civic illiteracy undermines a formative culture capable of creating the informed and critical citizens necessary in a robust democracy....The question regarding what role education should play in democracy becomes all the more urgent at a time when the dark forces of authoritarianism are on the march in the United States.”
The loss of quality civic education from so many of our classrooms has left too many young Americans without the most basic knowledge of who our forefathers are, or what they did, or the significance of the founding documents that bear their names. Too many children are ignorant of the sheer effort, the risks and sacrifices made by previous generations, to ensure that this country survived war and depression; through the great struggles for civil, and social, and worker's rights.

It is up to us, then, to teach them. It is up to us to teach them that even though we have faced great challenges and made our share of mistakes, we have always been able to come together and make this nation stronger, and more prosperous, and more united, and more just. It is up to us to teach them that America has been a force for good in the world, and that other nations and other people have looked to us as the last, best hope of Earth. It is up to us to teach them that it is good to give back to one's community; that it is honorable to serve in the military; that it is vital to participate in our democracy and make our voices heard.”

-President Barack Obama
“Citizens who are less knowledgeable about the judiciary are more likely to believe that judges are biased and less likely to believe that courts act in the public interest.”

“The practice of democracy is not passed down through the gene pool. It must be taught and learned anew by each generation of citizens.”

-Justice Sandra Day O’Connor

In 2009, Justice O’Connor founded iCivics, a non-profit that seeks to revitalize civics education through technology
“One thing [universities] must not do is to believe that freshmen come to college with an adequate knowledge of American history and government. The evidence of the NAEP tests and the evidence of the civic illiteracy of college graduates are compelling and conclusive. It is dishonest for a college or university to pretend that its students do not need further coursework in a subject so crucial to the future of this nation ... To begin, every college and university should require at least one course in the history of America, the workings of its free institutions, and the core documents that illuminate our principles of government.”
RECENT FLORIDA LAW

• Requires college graduates to prove their knowledge of the basic principles of American democracy, the U.S. constitution and other founding documents and landmark Supreme court cases.

• Naturalization test was deemed too easy by Florida higher education leaders and so a more advanced version is under development.
Each institution of higher education is responsible for creating and administering a civics test that must be passed before graduation. Exam must be 50 to 100 questions and similar to those on the U.S. Citizenship test.
PROPOSED INDIANA LAW

• Senate Bill 132 would require high school seniors to pass a civics test before graduating high school. Passed Senate last week.
• Exam would be based on U.S. citizenship test.
PROPOSAL

Require passage of a civics test based on the naturalization test to earn a degree from Purdue University.
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

• Is there a better set of questions or standards than the naturalization test?
• What score would be the most appropriate minimum passing score?
• Should international students be excused?