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Contact: Brady Delander
303.299.3622 or 720.309.1502

bdelander@ecs.org

Civic Education Guidebook Spotlights Classroom Examples of Proven Civic Learning Practices, Policy and Research

DENVER – How do we help America’s schools produce more students who emulate the civic engagement practiced by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?

As the nation reflects on the work of the civil rights leader, the National Center for Civic Learning and Engagement is releasing a [guidebook outlining six proven practices for civic learning](#).

The guidebook is aimed at educators and offers effective models of civics and service-learning that they can incorporate into the classroom and community.

Civic education – including social studies, citizenship and service learning – is often overshadowed by more frequently tested subjects such as language arts and math, said Paul Baumann, NCLCE director.

Yet student achievement in civics, as demonstrated by performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, has declined in recent years for high school seniors.

Lisa Guilfoile, co-author of the guidebook, said that has raised concerns for civic education advocates and generated the question: “What are we missing?”

“This guidebook serves as a resource – a ‘what’s next?’ – for teachers and other education leaders who want to put these practices in place but are not sure how to begin,” Guilfoile said.

Rather than trying to find time in a packed school day, the guidebook details successful efforts to incorporate civic learning into any subject area. Highlights include:

- Students and staff share decision-making power in a California high school, deciding how classrooms are managed – and prompting students to take responsibility for their behavior.
- A chemistry teacher in Chicago engages students in discussions about sodium hydroxide, a key ingredient in hair relaxers, and how its use affects African-American girls’ perceptions of beauty.
- In a Seattle high school, teachers – along with elected judges – work with students who serve on juries and mete out sentences to their peers who have admitted to low-level offenses.

“Use this guidebook as a menu of sorts,” Baumann said. “Look to see what offerings are available across the field, and then choose which items are best suited for your circumstances.”

[The Education Commission of the States](#) was created by states, for states, in 1965. We track policy, translate research, provide unbiased advice and create opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another.

[The National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement](#) is an institute within ECS that seeks to support state policymakers in establishing civic learning and engagement programs for pre-K through postsecondary students.