CALIFORNIA DEMOCRACY SCHOOL

APPLICATION GUIDE

For California Elementary, Middle, and High Schools

Application Guide

2026 - 2027

Application Deadline: February 11, 2027

https://www.lacoe.edu/CaliforniaDemocracySchool

Los Angeles County Office of Education

Purpose
The goal of the California Democracy Civic Learning Award program is to recognize elementary, middle, and high schools that are providing high-quality civic learning for all students as part of an integrated or stand-alone curriculum across one or more grade levels. The goal is not a single event, club, or lesson. It is to ensure that students in at least one grade level gain the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to participate in democracy for life.

Award Criteria

To earn the award, a school must demonstrate that civic learning is integrated into its ecosystem. The components of high–quality civic learning can be integrated and implemented in any subject area. The components are:

1. Formulate an inquiry about a current problem or issue
2. Research and analyze multiple perspectives about potential causes and solutions
3. Participate in a civil dialogue to understand different perspectives
4. Reach an informed conclusion
5. Engage in civic action designed to positively impact the problem or issue

Application
Applicants provide evidence in three areas:

- **Background**: The process of implementing civic inquiry into your school, the decisions you made in designing the program, and any context not evident during a site visit. Explain the planning, curriculum choices, collaboration, and professional learning behind the work. How was instruction designed to reach all learners? Which professional development did teachers receive? How were families and the community kept informed?

- **Measuring Civic Outcomes for Students**: How did students approach their civic investigation? How much of the topic was student, versus teacher selected? How did students grow civic knowledge and skills such as weighing perspectives and deliberating, and in dispositions such as civic responsibility? Which tools were used to measure growth? Describe how student successes were celebrated and how students were supported through difficulties.

- **Measuring School Climate/Culture and Sustainability:** What changes this work has brought to your school environment? How have families and the community been involved, and how has that support been tracked and reported? What are the systems that make civic learning last? How do you plan to sustain and grow this work through curriculum, professional development, assessment, and partnerships?

As you complete this application, think about the big picture: the projects your students do, the curriculum, training, assessment, and partnerships that make that work possible for every student, every year.

All applications must be completed at the time of submission. Late applications will not be considered.

Award Process
Schools across California are invited to apply for the California Democracy School Award. Once applications are received and reviewed based on the scoring rubric, schools will be contacted to prepare for a site validation visit. Schools that meet the required criteria will be honored at the LA county civic showcase. HSS representative will present recognition at your local school board meeting.

Evidence
Applicants must submit evidence that supports responses in the three parts areas of the application: Background, Measuring Civic Outcomes for Students, and Measuring School Climate/Culture and Sustainability.

Evidence may include, but is not limited to:

- **Background**: planning agendas, meeting notes, collaboration schedules, curriculum maps, unit plans, lesson plans, professional development agendas and sign-in sheets, differentiation materials and scaffolds, or family/community communications.
- **Measuring Civic Outcomes for Students**: student inquiry questions, research notes and source analyses, civil dialogue or deliberation protocols, student conclusions or position statements, documentation of civic action, rubrics, pre/post surveys, reflections, portfolios, capstones, and assessment results.
- **Measuring School Climate/Culture and Sustainability**: school climate or family surveys, showcase attendance records, partnership agreements, school board or school site council approvals, adopted curriculum documentation, professional development plans or policies.

Please note: Before including photos or videos in which students' faces are visible, review and follow your district's policies on student privacy and media release. Make sure you have the required parental/guardian permission on file for any student shown, or blur or crop images to protect student identities where appropriate. Media releases may be requested by evaluators.

Available Supports
Throughout the certification process, our unit is available as a resource. Technical assistance is offered to help with questions, clarify requirements, and support continued alignment with program standards. Schools in need of additional support, such as in-depth implementation or capacity-building work; contracted services are available. Schools are encouraged to contact our unit for guidance.

2026–2027 CALIFORNIA DEMOCRACY SCHOOL AWARD TIMELINE	
Call for Applications	Fall 2026
Application Deadline	February 11, 2027
Completion of Site Validation	End of March, 2027
Civic Showcase Location TBD	May, 2027

Submit applications by email by 5:00 p.m. on February 11, 2027, to:

HistorySocialScience@lacoe.edu

For more information, please contact, Elaina Garza, Coordinator III, History-Social Science, Los Angeles County Office of Education, (562) 922-6994 or Garza_Elaina@lacoe.edu

Application Guiding Questions

Guiding questions are meant to prompt thinking but may not encompass the full scope of the civic learning program. Additionally, questions may be asked that are not applicable to the school's application; this will not preclude a school from becoming a California Democracy School. Respondents are encouraged to provide details that will help the raters understand the development, scope, and impact of the civic education program. All applications must be completed at the time of submission.

Part 1: Background

Preparation and planning

- What steps did you and your team take to prepare for this work?
- Who collaborated on planning and how?
- What professional learning in civics did teachers receive before or during this work? What was its focus, and how often did it occur?

Curriculum and design decisions

- What curriculum, units, or resources did you use? Is civic learning taught as a stand-alone course or integrated into an existing subject?
- In which grade level and course(s) does this work take place, and how do you ensure every student in that grade level participates?
- What decisions did you make in designing the project or assignment, and why? What constraints shaped those choices?

Reaching all learners

- How was instruction differentiated for Multilingual Learners, students with IEPs or 504 plans, and students who need additional support or challenge?
- What scaffolds, supports, or entry points helped all students participate fully?

Communication and context

- How were families and community members informed about this work?
- What background or context should reviewers know that may not be visible during a site visit?

Part 2: Measuring Civic Outcomes

The civic investigation

- How did students choose their issue or question? To what extent was the topic student-selected versus teacher-selected?
- How did students research and analyze multiple perspectives on the causes of and possible solutions to their issue?
- What did civil dialogue look like in your classroom? How did students practice listening, deliberating, and working toward consensus?
- How did students reach an informed conclusion, and what civic action did they take?

Growth in knowledge, skills, and dispositions

- To what extent have students grown in their civic knowledge, skills and dispositions.
- How did students' sense of civic responsibility and public duty grow? What evidence shows this?

Assessment

- What tools did you use to measure student growth?
- How do you determine whether students have mastered civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions?
- What did the results show?

Successes and challenges

- What successes did students experience, and how were they celebrated?
- What challenges came up during the process, and how were students supported through them?
- What would you change or strengthen next time?

Part 3: Measuring School Climate/Culture and Sustainability

Impact on the school

- What changes, if any, has this work brought to your school's climate or culture? How have you seen it in students, staff, or schoolwide practices?
- How have families and community members been involved, and how has their support grown?
- What structures or tools do you use to measure and report school and community support (surveys, attendance at showcases, partnerships)?

Systems to make it last

- Has the civic learning curriculum been formally adopted, either as a stand-alone course or integrated into an existing course?
- What policies or plans ensure teachers continue to receive civic learning professional development, including new staff?
- How is student civic learning consistently measured and reported?

Looking ahead

- How do you plan to sustain and grow this work over the next five years?
- Do you plan to expand civic learning to additional grade levels, courses, or subjects?
- What partnerships, resources, or support will you need to keep this work going?

California Democracy School Award Scoring Rubric

Part 1: Background			
	Excellent (5)	**Approaching (3)**	**Incomplete (1)**
Preparation and collaboration-	Clearly describes the steps taken to prepare, who collaborated (teams, departments, administrators, partners), and how planning was coordinated.	Describes some preparation or collaboration, but roles or steps are unclear.	Little or no description of preparation or collaboration.
Curriculum and design decisions-	Identifies the curriculum, resources, or lessons, the grade level and course(s), and whether civic learning is stand-alone or integrated. Explains design decisions and constraints and shows how every student in the grade level participates.	Identifies curriculum, resources, or lessons and grade level, but rationale is limited, or it is unclear whether all students in the grade level participate.	Curriculum, resources, or lessons and grade level, or participation of all students is not described.
Reaching all learners–	Describes specific differentiation, scaffolds, and supports for Multilingual Learners, students with IEP/504 plans, and students needing additional support or challenge.	Mentions differentiation in general terms with few specific strategies or student groups addressed.	Differentiation is not addressed.
Professional learning -	Clearly describes the type, focus, and frequency of civic learning professional development teachers received.	Mentions professional development, but type, focus, or frequency is unclear.	Professional development is not addressed.
Family and community communication	Describes a clear plan and specific methods used to inform families and the community members about the civic learning work.	Mentions communication with families or the community, but methods are vague or limited.	Communication with families and the community is not addressed.

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Part 2: Measuring Civic Outcomes for Students			
	Excellent (5)	**Approaching (3)**	**Incomplete (1)**
Civic inquiry cycle	Shows that all students in the grade level completed all five components: formulated an inquiry, researched multiple perspectives, participated in civil dialogue, reached an informed conclusion, and took civic action. Explains how topics were selected (student- vs. teacher-selected).	Most components are described, but one or more are weak or missing, or it is unclear whether all students completed the full cycle.	Few components are described, or the work is a single event or activity rather than an inquiry cycle.
Civic knowledge	Describes specific civic knowledge students gained and clearly connects it to the CA History–Social Science Standards and Framework.	Describes civic knowledge, but connections to the Standards and Framework are general or limited.	Civic knowledge or Standards and Framework connections are not described.
Civic skills	Describes how students learned and practiced evaluating sources, analyzing different perspectives, engaging in civil dialogue, and using deliberative processes to reach consensus.	Describes some civic skills, but practice of dialogue or deliberation is limited or unclear.	Civic skills are not described.
Civic dispositions	Describes work completed to grow students' appreciation of public duty and civic responsibility, with evidence of growth.	Describes dispositions with limited evidence of student growth.	Dispositions are not addressed.
Assessment of growth	Describes the tools used (e.g., rubrics, pre/post surveys, reflections, portfolios, capstones), how growth of knowledge, skills, and dispositions is determined, and what the results show.	Identifies assessment tools, but how mastery is determined or what results showed is unclear.	Assessment tools or results are not described.
Successes and challenges	Describes student successes and how they were celebrated, challenges and how students were supported, and reflects on what could be strengthened.	Describes successes or challenges, but not both, or with little detail on support or reflection.	Successes and challenges are not addressed.

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Part 3: Measuring School Climate/Culture and Sustainability			
	Excellent (5)	**Approaching (3)**	**Incomplete (1)**
Impact on school climate and culture	Describes specific changes in school climate or culture, with examples from students, staff, or schoolwide practices.	Describes general or anticipated changes with few examples.	Impact on school climate or culture is not addressed.
School and community support	Describes how families and community have been involved, and the structures or tools used to measure and report that support (e.g., surveys, showcase attendance, partnerships).	Describes family and community involvement, but how support is measured or reported is unclear.	Family and community support are not addressed.
Curriculum, units and resources	Clearly identifies the curriculum, units, or resources used, explains why they were selected, and describes how they are used to engage all students in the grade level in high-quality civic learning.	Identifies the curriculum, units, or resources used, but the explanation of why they were selected or how they are used is limited.	The curriculum, units, or resources used are not identified or explained.
Sustained professional development	A policy or plan is in place to ensure ongoing civic learning professional development, including new staff.	Professional development is planned, but no policy or plan ensures it continues.	No plan for ongoing professional development is described.
Accountability	Student civic learning is consistently measured and reported through an adopted measure (e.g., senior projects, capstones, portfolios, common assessments, graduation requirements).	Student learning is measured, but not consistently or through an adopted measure.	No system for measuring and reporting student learning is described.
Sustainability	Describes a clear plan to sustain and grow the work over five years, including possible expansion to other grade levels or subjects and the partnerships and resources needed.	Describes intentions to sustain the work with a few specific steps or resources identified.	No plan for sustaining or growing the work is described.

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