



Center for
Civic Education

From 60 years of *To the next 250 years of*
CIVIC EDUCATION **DEMOCRACY**

Annual Report | August 1, 2024–July 31, 2025



“True patriotism is built through knowledge, practice, and shared responsibility.”

Dr. Donna Phillips

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Quiet Patriotism. Democratic Practice.

Last year, my messages to the public underscored the role of patriotism, which grows from strong civic education. But not all civic learning is created equal. It must be immersive, sustained, and rooted in democratic experience and community.

That is why the Center for Civic Education exists.

When the Center was founded in 1965, the nation stood at an inflection point. Amid civil rights expansion and social change leaders recognized a simple truth: **Democracy depends on an educated citizenry, and schools and their teachers are central to that work.** For 60 years, the Center has carried that responsibility forward.

Today, we face another inflection point.

Despite challenging times for civic trust and for educators, classrooms using Center programs like We the People and Project Citizen continue to model democratic principles in action. Students build civic knowledge, practice civil dialogue, and learn how to participate thoughtfully in public life.

What has always set the Center apart is our commitment to both principles and practice of democracy. **We do not simply teach about democracy; we teach through it.**

Through its unparalleled national network of state partners and civics mentors, flagship programs, resources, and experiential democratic learning showcases and competitions, the Center supports educators with impactful professional learning, trusted and accessible resources, and a national community committed to generational democratic civic education.

During America's 250th anniversary, our mission remains the same: **to prepare citizens for self-government, one classroom at a time.**

I am deeply grateful to the educators, partners, supporters, board members, and staff who make this work possible. Together, we carry forward a mission that began in 1965 and remains essential today: strengthening democracy by educating the citizens who sustain it.

Dr. Donna Phillips, President and CEO



Vision

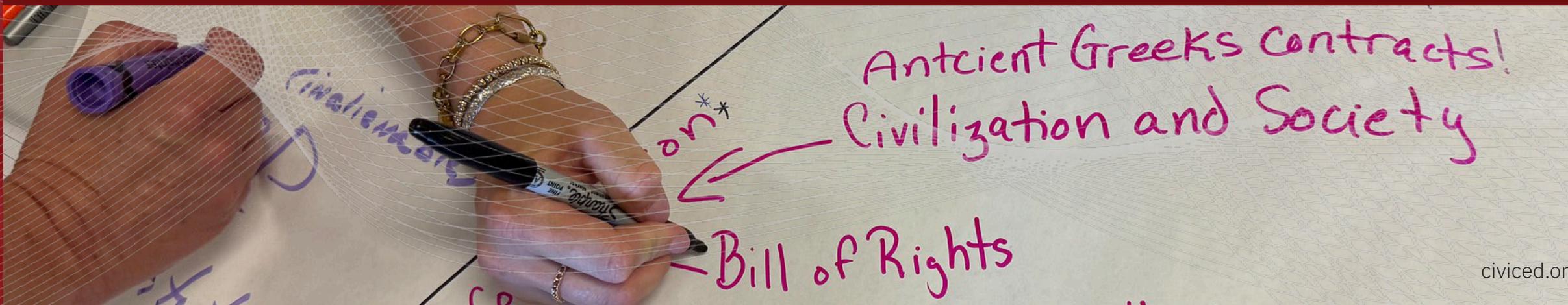
A People prepared to participate in and strengthen our shared civic life in pursuit of a more perfect Union.

Mission

We cultivate an informed and thoughtful citizenry committed to democratic principles and actively engaged in the practice of democracy.



True learning, *lasting* impact.



Scale *with* Substance

These numbers reflect not only scale, but depth—educators strengthened in their practice, students empowered to engage thoughtfully with democracy, and communities better equipped for civil participation.

814,776

People using our supplemental resources, taking part in civics competitions, and engaging with professional learning

326,018

Active educators and other adult users of digital and downloadable curricular resources

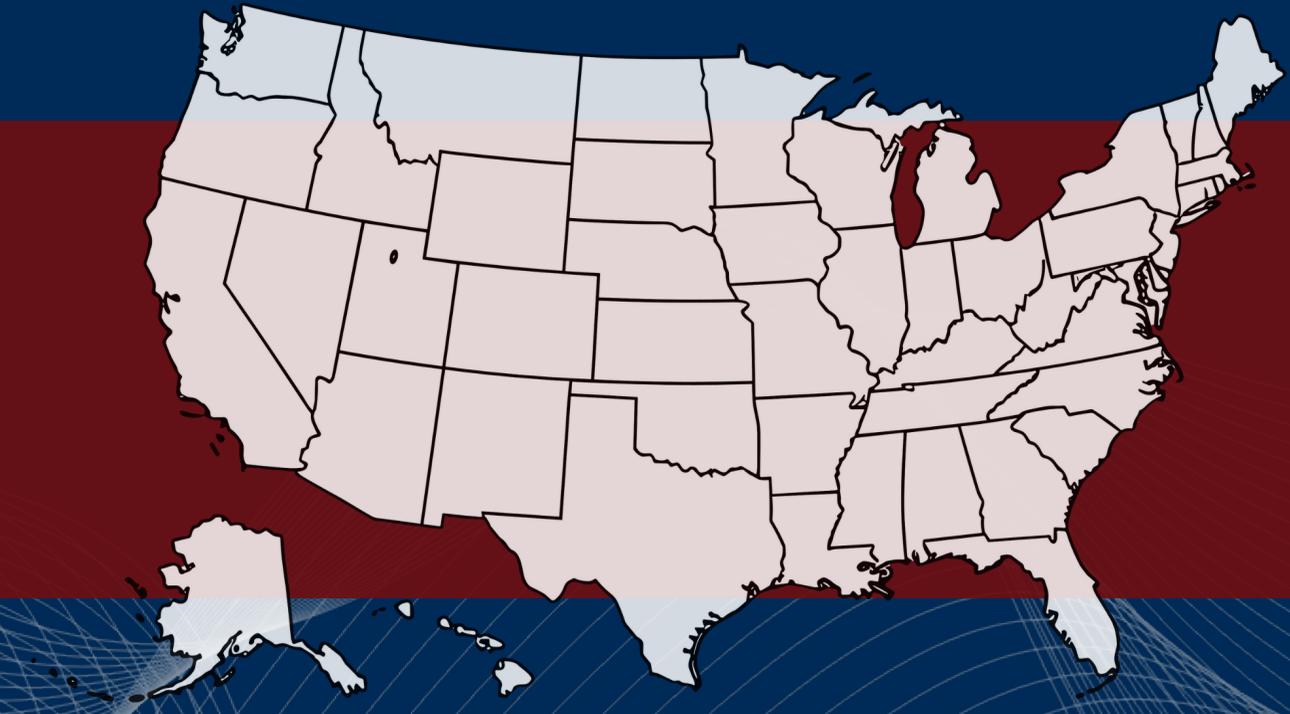
607

Educators who engaged in our in-person professional learning institutes

35% increase

21,726

Students who are supported by those teachers





**Democracy depends
on citizens who know how to
think, listen, and participate.**

Civic Education Matters — *Right Now*

Many young people today feel disconnected. Rapid information cycles, polarization, and social pressure can make democratic participation feel distant or even unsafe. These challenges place new demands on educators and students alike.

Civic education, when done well, offers a way forward. Students in classrooms using Center programs are not shielded from complexity. Instead, they are supported in learning how to listen carefully, evaluate evidence, and engage across differences—skills democracy cannot survive without.

Our research and experience show that students do not learn democratic habits by avoiding disagreement. These habits are formed by **practicing civil discourse in trusted spaces, guided by educators who model curiosity, respect, and constitutional reasoning.**

The Center's work responds directly to this moment by creating learning experiences that are invitational rather than prescriptive. We help students see themselves as **capable participants in civic life**, even amid uncertainty.

“I know that as a result of this program I will strive to be a **better citizen, friend, follower, and leader.**”

Michael Virtue, Student

“The State Competition was so exciting because after months of researching, reading, and listening to podcasts, we were able to showcase our knowledge in order to have these **civil and important conversations** that enriched larger and more complex debates being held nationally. Being able to come together as a team and leave it all out there was really the most fulfilling part.”

Isabella C., Student

“**I liked the community I built** and how comfortable I felt sharing my ideas, views, and opinions. I think the biggest takeaway was not to be afraid to talk, share your ideas, ask questions and help others and yourself.”

Anonymous Student

“I use skills learned through We the People every day, often without realizing it. **Every student deserves to have such an opportunity** to dive into history and build our future.”

Lauren O'Neill, We the People Alumna



Meeting This Moment *with* Clarity and Purpose

In uncertain times, educators need steady partners. Rather than chasing trends or retreating from complexity, the Center **advanced our commitment to people-centered programs** grounded in research and practice.

Our 60th anniversary served as more than a celebration. It was a moment of reflection and resolve, reinforcing a simple truth: **Improving civic education comes from connecting principles to practice** to keep lessons and democratic experiences authentic, timely, and steadfast.



Spotlight on: *Aruna Patel*

Vice President and Chief Program Officer

With a commitment to leverage strategy and move our mission forward, the Center strengthened its leadership by welcoming Aruna Patel as a key member of the team.

Aruna leads the Center’s curricular programs, leveraging her deep classroom and system-level experience. Her leadership ensures the Center’s programs remain **rigorous, relevant, and responsive** to the needs of today’s educators and learners.

Past experience

- Taught high school social studies, Philadelphia School District
- Designed and implemented course for the graduate teacher education program at the University of Pennsylvania
- Drafted and shaped policy for civic education initiatives in New York State
- Strengthened social studies instruction in New York City schools by supporting educators and principals as instructional leaders

FY25 impact highlight

Aruna oversaw the revision process for the upcoming edition of the level 3 We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution textbook, which delivers:

- Updated content for contemporary civic challenges and contexts
- Fresh visuals and primary sources that connect history to today’s issues
- Expanded resources for blended and digital classrooms
- Enhanced support for teachers to lead simulated congressional hearings.

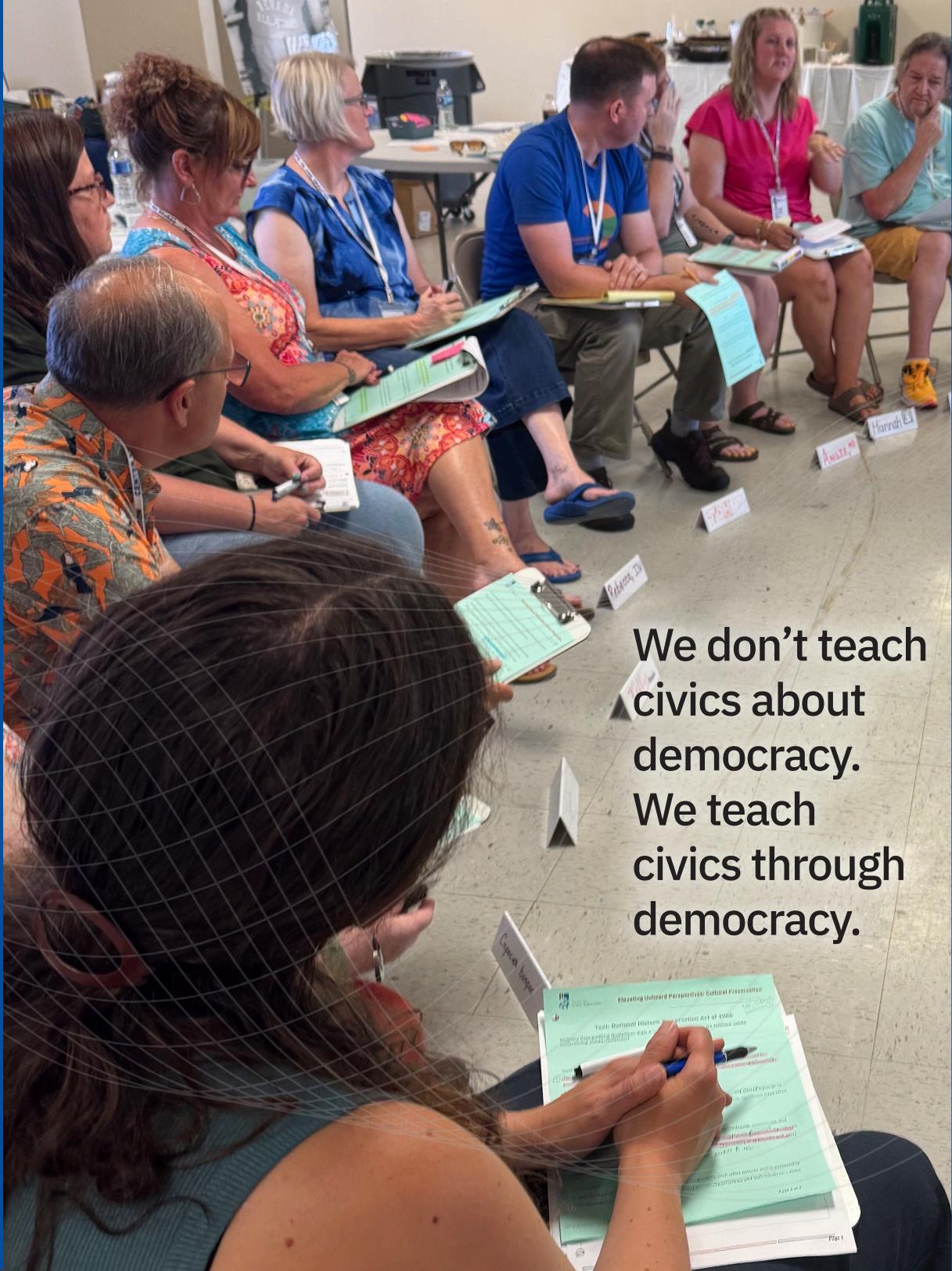


Principles and Practice — *Together*

At the Center, our North Star is simple: **We believe democracy is learned by doing.** That conviction shapes everything we design, from curriculum to professional learning to communities built with and around educators and students.

Our commitment to democratic practice also means widening the circle of whose voices are heard—modeling how democracy grows stronger when more people see themselves reflected in it.





We don't teach civics about democracy. We teach civics through democracy.

Spotlight on: *Unheard Perspectives*

In the last year, the Center addressed a critical gap in middle school civics education with a new, culturally responsive initiative. Elevating Unheard Perspectives Through Discourse (Unheard Perspectives) focuses on rural and Indigenous communities, **centering civil discourse on issues most relevant to students' lived experiences** while grounding instruction in constitutional content.

We developed three new lesson modules—Inalienable Rights, Land and Water Rights and Cultural Preservation—through educator focus groups, pilot classroom implementation, professional learning communities, and iterative revisions with educators and students in the very communities of the lessons' focus.

Our impact

- Unheard Perspectives directly engaged **35 educators and 1,743 students**, the majority from rural and Indigenous communities.
 - The pilot program included **13 educators from eight states**, subsequently reaching 663 students.
 - The in-person Summer Institute held at the Nevada Center for Civic Engagement involved **22 educators from 16 states**, ultimately impacting 1,080 students.
- The Unheard Perspectives digital toolkit is hosted on the Center's website, **positioning the program for continued growth and national adoption.**
- This project won the **2024 Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics prize**, an award that carried funding for the activity and a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.



Students Practicing *Constitutional* Democracy

One of our flagship programs, **We the People** brings students **face-to-face with the Constitution as a living framework** that demands thought, preparation, and responsibility.

Through sustained inquiry, students learn what democratic participation actually requires. They research essential constitutional questions, craft testimony, and defend their ideas before panels of judges.

In doing so, they practice the same habits that sustain a constitutional democracy: clarity, reasoning, respect, and the willingness to listen.

Our simulated congressional hearings help all students actualize the benefits of increased civic knowledge and skills—and apply them. Research shows that **81% of middle school and 89% of high school students who participated in We the People plan on voting** when given the opportunity.



Program highlight: *National competitions*

In 2025, two We the People competitions tested students' knowledge and application of the Constitution and the fundamentals of American government.

38th Annual We the People National Finals—April 9-11, Washington D.C.

- National Champions (tie): Lincoln High School—Portland, Oregon; Sprague High School—Salem, Oregon
- Second place (tie): Denver East High School—Denver, Colorado; Fishers High School—Fishers, Indiana
- 1,200 students, over 200 volunteers, 3,400 total attendees

The team from Tennyson High School (Hayward, California) was selected as the 2025 John Lewis Scholarship class, a needs-based award supporting a team that would otherwise not be able to participate. The scholarship is supported in part by a grant from the American Judges Foundation and generous gifts from the Wohlander Family and the Williams Family.

We the People National Invitational—April 25-26, virtual

- First place, high school division: Central Catholic High School—Portland, Oregon
- Second place, high school division: Western Ablemarle High School—Crozet, Virginia
- First place, middle school division: Nova Middle School—Davie, Florida
- Second place, middle school division: Faith Lutheran Middle School (maroon team)—Las Vegas, Nevada
- Third place, middle school division: Faith Lutheran Middle School (gold team)—Las Vegas, Nevada

Civic learning becomes real when students must explain, defend, and listen.



Civic Learning Made *Visible*

In October 2024, We the People reached a broader audience through **CITIZEN NATION, a four-part PBS documentary series that premiered right before the 2024 election.** Filmed over ten months, the series followed students as they advanced from regional contests to the We the People National Finals. It captured their preparation, collaboration, and growth while **showing civic learning as both demanding and deeply human.**

By making student voices visible, CITIZEN NATION affirmed that, **when students are invited into meaningful civic work, they rise with seriousness, empathy, and hope.**

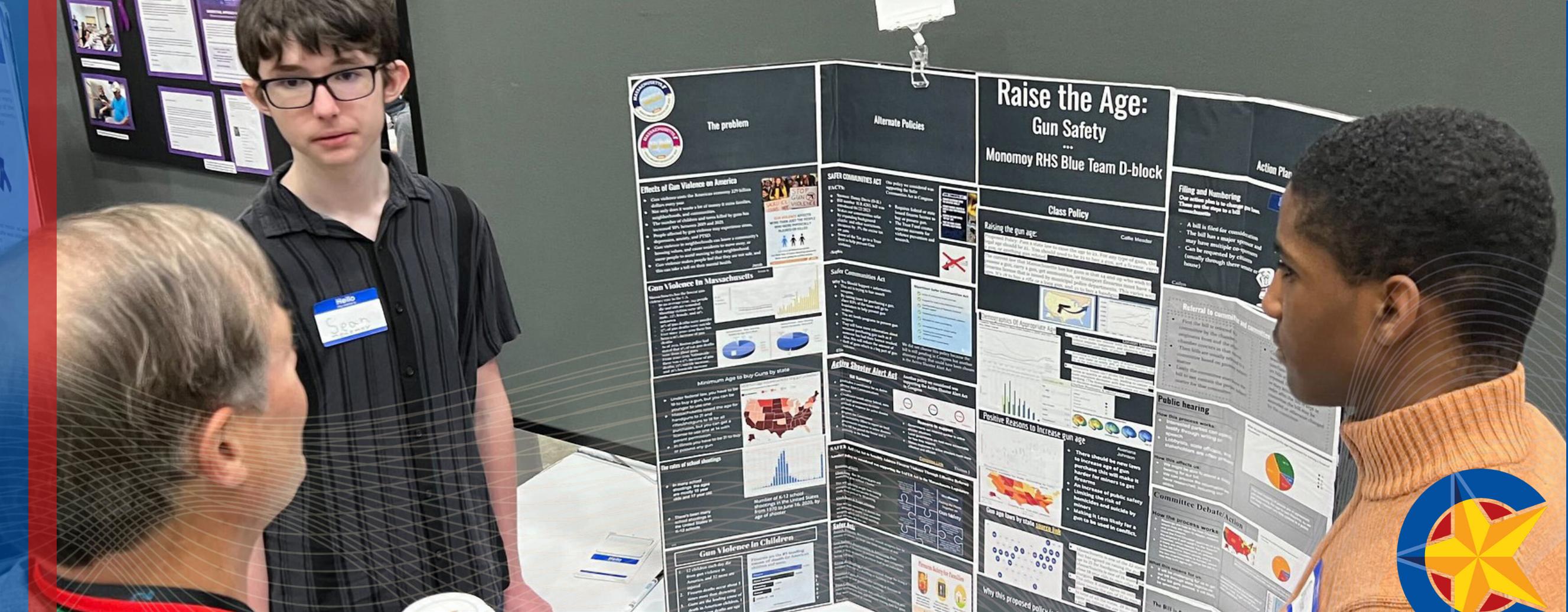
Featured schools

- Foothill High School—California
- Southwest Career and Technical Academy—Nevada
- East Brunswick High School—New Jersey
- Grant High School—Oregon
- Glen Allen High School—Virginia
- Maggie L. Walker Governor’s School—Virginia
- Tyler Consolidated High School—West Virginia
- Wauwatosa West High School—Wisconsin
- Sheridan High School—Wyoming
- Cheyenne South High School—Wyoming

Watch now: PBS, YouTube, and Amazon Prime Video

“We are the next generation of this country. And I think we have inherited a lot of problems. But ... we will do our best to tackle these issues. We will do our best to give everybody a voice. And we will do our best to make the world a better place.”

Eli, 2024 We the People student



Public Policy Learning That Starts in the Community

The longest-running public policy education program in the country, **Project Citizen begins with listening.**

In Project Citizen, our second flagship curriculum, students identify issues in their schools or communities, research policy solutions, and present proposals in simulated public hearings.

Project Citizen's strength lies in its connection to lived experience. Students see that civic participation is not abstract or distant, but something rooted in their own communities and relationships.

For over 30 years, Project Citizen classrooms have become places where civic agency is nurtured—linking learning to purpose and action.



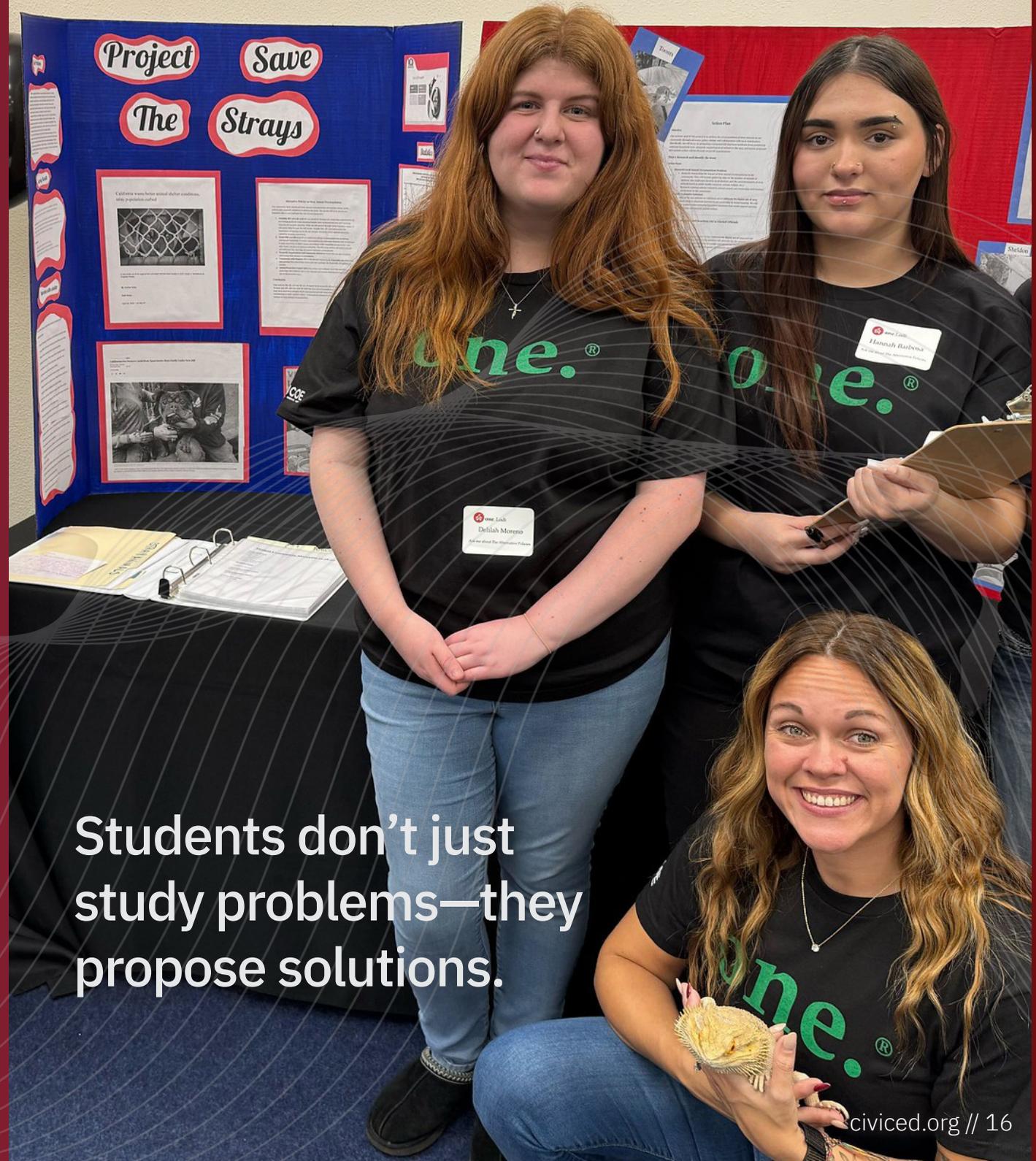
Program highlight: *National Showcase*

In July 2025, 18 teams submitted public policy portfolios for evaluation through the Project Citizen National Showcase.

This year's submissions radiated innovation and hope, each one underscoring the ability of young people to shape a better future.

Addressing issues from environmental conservation to mental health to social justice, these young changemakers took on the challenges that matter most.

[See the National Showcase results >>](#)



Students don't just study problems—they propose solutions.



Lasting Impact Begins with *Educators*

Teachers are the heart of civic education and the **most powerful multiplier of lasting democratic impact**. When educators feel prepared, supported, and trusted with rigorous content, their classrooms become places where civic learning takes root and endures.

By building teacher capacity, the Center strengthens democracy at its foundation. Each confident educator becomes a catalyst, shaping classrooms where students learn not just what democracy is, but how to practice it thoughtfully, inclusively, and with purpose.

A man in a blue suit and glasses is smiling and holding a red stuffed animal. He is wearing a red lanyard with "CIVIC EDUCATION" written on it. In the background, three young people are standing and giving thumbs up. They are in a room with large windows and a blue table with a "Will" sign.

“The professional development not only prepares teachers to teach civics but makes them overall better teachers in all their classes.”

Aurora B., teacher and curriculum coordinator

Spotlight on: *Professional Learning*

In FY25, educators engaged in summer institutes, district partnerships, and national learning communities designed not only to introduce content, but to strengthen practice.

Teachers experienced We the People and Project Citizen as learners themselves, **wrestling with constitutional questions, practicing inquiry, and facilitating dialogue** before bringing those same experiences to their students.

Program Highlights

- Educators participated in a weeklong Project Citizen summer institute focused on **civic engagement, critical media skills, and inclusive learning environments** for grades 4-8. Teachers engaged in simulated public policy hearings, media literacy lessons aligned to inquiry-based learning, collaborative portfolio development, strategies for creating identity-safe and inclusive classrooms.
- The Center released **eight free media literacy videos**, helping students explore topics such as bias in the media, reliable sources, online safety, citing sources, and the role of a free press in democracy.
- We expanded state and regional summer institutes **in support of underserved communities nationwide**. Our goals:
 - Increase underserved grades 4-8 students' attainment of state civics standards, related literacy standards, and social and emotional learning competencies
 - Create inclusive, supportive, unbiased, and identity-safe learning environments for underserved students in grades 4-8
 - Support high-quality development for diverse elementary and middle grades teachers across the nation and across the continuum of their careers





Evidence That *Improves* Practice

The Center's work is rooted in evidence. In FY25, research informed curriculum updates, literacy integration, and inclusive strategies for multilingual learners and students with disabilities. These findings translate directly into improved classroom practice.

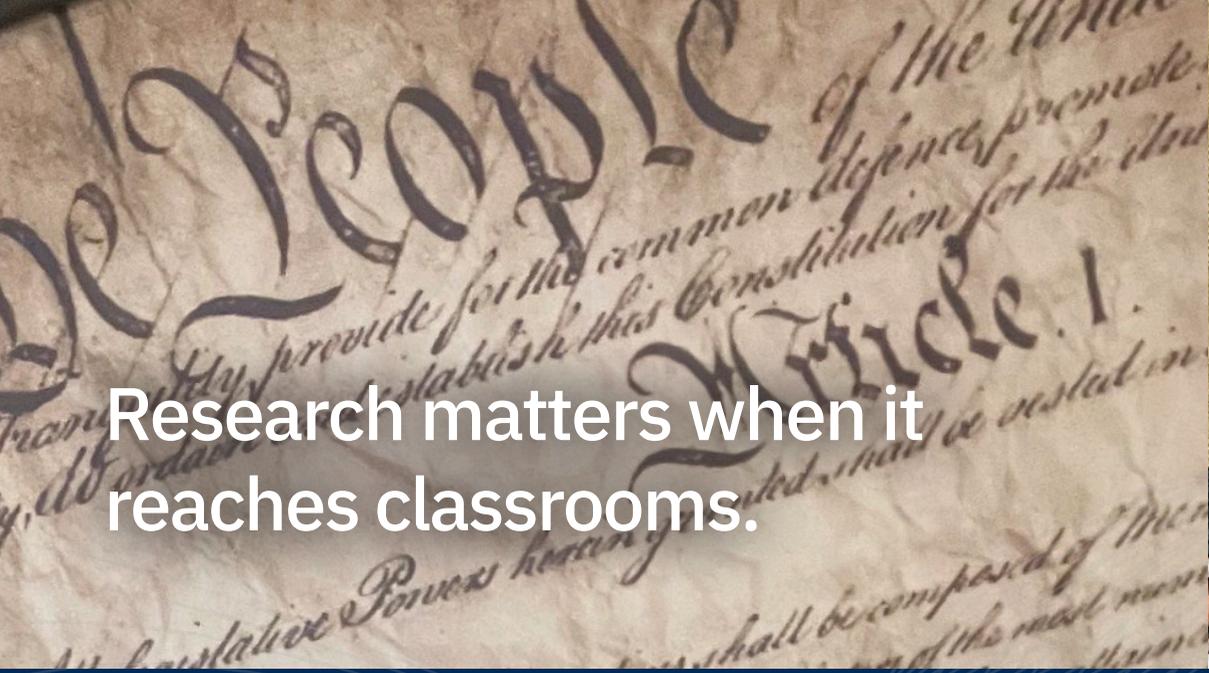
Research both fuels our improvement and validates our impact. Students in the We the People program have demonstrated:

87%
accurate interpretation
of civics content

67%
strong comprehension
of civics and American
history

64%
proficiency in analysis
and use of evidence

Our research-to-practice cycle ensures civic education remains effective, responsive, and inclusive in real classrooms with real students. Research results **affirm the Center's long-held commitment to inclusive civic education**—ensuring all students, regardless of learning needs, can meaningfully engage in democratic life.



Research matters when it reaches classrooms.

The research shows that **civic knowledge improves significantly after students' involvement in We the People.**

Grade-appropriate tests were administered to students before and following either their We the People or traditional civics class. Students' increase in civic knowledge was:

Elementary

- **We the People—124%**
- Control group—59%

Middle school

- **We the People—60%**
- Control group—32%

Spotlight on: *James Madison Legacy Project Expansion*

The James Madison Legacy Project Expansion (JMLPE) concluded its final year in FY25, marking a **major milestone in research-backed civic education.** This work was conducted as part of a national research study by Georgetown University's Civic Education Research Lab (CERL), funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

- Teachers from 22 states across 12 sites nationwide received intensive professional learning focused on **supporting multilingual learners in the We the People program.**
- Complementing this effort, CERL released groundbreaking findings demonstrating that **students with disabilities participating in We the People significantly increased** their civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- **Middle school students with disabilities in the We the People program score 19% higher** than their peers in civic knowledge and 11% higher in civic competencies like teamwork.
- High school students with disabilities in We the People **outperformed their peers in civic dispositions** like civic attentiveness and political efficacy by 7%.



Preparing Students in the *Information* Age

Democracy depends on citizens who can navigate information thoughtfully. In FY25, we published the newest edition of Project Citizen: Community Engagement in Public Policy Level 2, a cornerstone curriculum for middle school, high school, and young adult learners.

The updated edition includes **expanded media literacy resources—with an integrated curriculum that also serves as a standalone module**—and tools that help students connect classroom learning to real-world civic action.

59%

of students said it is extremely/very important to stay informed

29%

improvement in teacher civic knowledge

48%

increase in teachers' confidence in teaching media literacy

These lessons support both **civic understanding and digital citizenship**. Through these free resources, students explore bias, reliable sources, online safety, the role of a free press, and responsible information sharing.

By strengthening these competencies, the Center helps students stay connected to facts, to one another, and to democratic values.

ProjectCommunity
Media Literacy and Public Policy

Do I Have a Role in Media Literacy?

LATEST NEWS



Recognizing Leaders in *Civic Life*

While developing knowledge and skills are the core of the Center's work, recognizing excellence serves as inspiration and aspiration to everyone involved in our programs.

American Civic Education Teacher Awards (ACETA) —September 2024

Sponsored in partnership with Indiana University's Center on Representative Government and the National Education Association

ACETA recognizes educators who foster deep civic engagement in their classrooms, preparing young people to become informed and engaged citizens. These teachers model what civic education looks like at its best.

- **Lauren Hallgring (New Jersey, l)** is a civic educator who fosters democratic values through innovative lessons, including role-playing historical figures, and community initiatives like Civics Day and beach cleanups that empower students to be informed, responsible citizens.
- **Lem Wheelles (Alaska, c)** inspires students to become informed and engaged citizens through rigorous civic learning and meaningful opportunities to participate in government—empowering students to develop their voices, leadership skills, and civic confidence.
- **Christian Pensiero (Maryland, r)** is committed to inspiring a diverse community of students—many of whom are multilingual learners and first- or second-generation immigrants—to understand the essence of American democracy and become active, informed citizens.



Spotlight on: *We the People Alumni Awards*

Two We the People alumni were presented with We the People Alumni Awards during the National Finals.

The Awards recognize **alumni whose lives exemplify a deep and enduring commitment to service**, honoring those who use their knowledge, skills, and values to strengthen their communities, their country, and the common good.

- **Outstanding Young Alumni Award: Yanesi Gonzalez** (Hialeah Gardens Senior High School—Florida, 2015, l)
Gonzalez serves as a commuter senator in the University of Miami’s student government, where she advocates for commuter students and spearheads initiatives on financial aid and transportation policies. She mentors underprivileged female students and is a Silver Knight Awardee in Social Science for her dedication to community service.
- **Cincinnatus Award: Alison Brody** (Lincoln High School—Oregon, 1989, r)
Brody, an attorney who volunteers as a We the People coach, has degrees from Yale, Oxford, and the University of Washington School of Law. She recently coauthored the Thomas B. Fordham Institute’s 2021 report, *The State of State Standards for Civics and U.S. History*. Brody has served as a member of the Oregon Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and on the board of the Serendipity Center for at-risk youth.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

‘Citizen Nation’ Review: Mastering the Constitution on PBS

Also streaming on YouTube and Prime Video, this four-part documentary follows high-schoolers competing in ‘We the People,’ which tests young people’s civics knowledge.



PBS’ ‘Citizen Nation’ and a Portland high school’s victory in national civics competition

Updated: Oct. 31, 2024, 7:48 a.m. | Published: Oct. 28, 2024, 3:47 p.m.



statesman journal

Sprague High School students tie for first place in national competition on Constitution

“The We the People National Finals showcases the transformative power of civic education,” said Donna Phillips, president and CEO of the Center for Civic Education. “Students have pushed themselves to explore the U.S. Constitution and its relevance in preparing for this experiential democratic simulation.”



How a Wilmington charter teacher personalizes civics for students

by Julia Merola August 1, 2024



When the teacher then makes that lived connection between what they’re learning and doing in the classroom and how it actually works outside of the classroom, that’s true civic education.

— DONNA PHILLIPS, CENTER FOR CIVIC EDUCATION



Despite challenges, NSHS freshmen prepare for We the People nationals



Impact That Returns and Deepens

Our work is amplified through media and community engagement. FY25 included national coverage of the National Finals, local press stories, and ongoing appearances by Center leadership in public forums.

These stories reflect sustained relationships with schools and communities. **Media visibility reinforces local impact**, helping communities see themselves as part of a national civic education movement.

Together, these efforts **deepen connection and extend learning** beyond individual classrooms.



Carrying the Work *Forward* — Together

Civic education is generational work sustained by people who believe in its importance. We are grateful to the educators, partners, supporters, board members, and staff who make this work possible. And to the alumni of our programs, thank you for embracing the knowledge and skills you worked so hard to build, and for using them to strengthen your communities and our democracy.

As the nation marks its 250th anniversary, the **Center for Civic Education remains committed to renewing democracy through education that invites participation and builds connections** teacher by teacher, classroom by classroom, community by community—in partnership with you.

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Their investments power the **curricula, tools, and experiences** that prepare the next generation for active participation in our democracy.

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The Stewards of Civic Unity is more than a giving circle—it's a community bound by generosity, hope, and a shared commitment to young people. We honor the heartfelt dedication of these supporters, whose belief in every learner and educator helps shape the next generation of citizens ready to lead and strengthen our democracy.



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Thank you!

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