
AMANDA NEDWESKI

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 32ND ASSEMBLY DISTRICT



February 6, 2025

Testimony on AB 4

Chairman Kitchens, thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 4, which will require civics instruction for grades K-12 and establish a graduation requirement of one-half credit in civics. Currently, three credits of social studies are required for graduation. This bill requires that the half credit of civics is included within those three social studies credits, so it does not increase graduation requirements. It also does not require the addition of any new teachers, as social studies teachers should already be teaching these concepts. Unfortunately, data shows that some critical civic concepts are being missed in our current social studies curriculum.

The 2024 Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey, conducted annually since 2006, found that 75% of Americans could name only a SINGLE right guaranteed by the First Amendment, and over a third cannot name all three branches of government. A 2023 American Bar Association survey revealed that 85% of participants believe civility has significantly worsened over the last decade. Furthermore, recent polling has shown a significant lack of pride in America, especially among younger voters. Only 45% of voters aged 18-34 said that they are either “very proud” or “extremely proud” to be American. Thanks to the continual lowering of academic standards by our state superintendent, not only are we failing over two-thirds of Wisconsin students in reading and math, but we are also clearly not doing a good job in civics education.

Alarming, 45% of Americans aged 18-24 believe that socialism is the ideal economic system, despite the devastating consequences this ideology has brought to the people of other countries. This legislation requires instruction in forms of government in other nations, which is not a requirement in DPI's 2023 updated academic standards for civics. DPI's model curriculum for high school civics includes recommended discussions on liberal-focused issues like abortion, gun control, and climate change, but appears to avoid topics about the dangers of communism, socialism, and totalitarianism.

This is concerning. To ensure that our students can effectively be civically engaged as adults, we need to make sure we are teaching them the basics of how our government works.

Under this bill, students will learn their rights and responsibilities as citizens and the foundation of those rights. The goal is for students to develop civic pride and an understanding of how to participate in a government that is of, by, and for the people. AB 4 takes a step in the right direction toward building an informed electorate ready to engage in the civic process.



Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

Testimony on Assembly Bill 4

Good Morning. Thank you Chairman Kitchens and committee members, for allowing me to testify on Assembly Bill 4 (AB 4) relating to requiring civics instruction in school.

It may seem obvious, but before we can cherish, protect, and rely on our basic rights and freedoms as Americans, we must first know and understand what those rights and freedoms actually are.

The same can be said with respect to holding our government and elected officials accountable; to do that, we must have a basic understanding of the framework of government and how the three independent branches of government work as a check and balance against each other. That is why Representative Nedweski and I have introduced this legislation, AB 4, which takes a small, but measured step toward ensuring that students, as future voters, taxpayers, and citizens, are taught about their rights as well as how to petition their government.

In short, this common sense and much needed legislation requires school districts to develop a curriculum and instructional materials for grades kindergarten to 12 on civics to prepare pupils to be civically responsible and knowledgeable adults.

The bill is slightly different than the one the Assembly passed late last session. In this bill, we provide more flexibility to school districts and schools to establish their curriculum, as opposed to the Department of Public Instruction developing model curriculum.

This legislation requires that students come to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens, as well as the foundation that those rights are built upon. The simple objective is for students to develop a sense of civic pride and an understanding of how to participate in a government of the People, by the People, for the People.

Thank you for your consideration of AB 4.

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February 6, 2025

**Assembly Committee on Education
Department of Public Instruction Testimony
2025 AB4 Required Instruction in Civics**

I want to thank Chair Kitchens and members of the committee for the opportunity to give testimony on AB4 related to Civics education. My name is Laura Roeker and I am the Director of Teaching and Learning for the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), and with me today is Sara Knueve, Policy Initiative Advisor for the DPI. We are here to testify for information only in regard to this proposed legislation.

Education is the foundation of our democratic republic. Public education in the United States was created to help develop a population that is not only knowledgeable about our government, but also actively engaged in supporting the values our nation was built on. State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly and the Department of Public Instruction believe that civics instruction is essential to giving students the knowledge and skills they need to be informed and productive citizens.

Over the past four years, the DPI has supported and strengthened civics education throughout Wisconsin. We worked with educators from around the state to build a Kindergarten through 5th grade and 6-8th grade suggested scope and sequence for civics and a suggested high school course for civics or government. All of these resources are grounded in the current educational research on civics education. The Wisconsin Standards for Social Studies have a strong foundation in civics; we even have a separate standard stating that Wisconsin students will be civically engaged – meaning they will learn their rights and responsibilities and how to advocate to elected officials for what they think is important. Our department has also collaborated with CESA 1 on a grant from Educating for American Democracy to support our regional CESAs with the implementation of the K-5 civics scope and sequence with their districts. All this to say--we believe strongly in quality civics education for our students, based on research and best practices of the field.

The Department of Public Instruction will continue to do all we can in collaboration with others to promote civics education in K-12 classrooms.

When we turn our attention to this specific bill, we want to articulate a few places where we encourage reconsideration.

Standards and Statutes: School boards and administrators adopt standards and create and implement curriculum within their local district. According to the proposed bill, school boards would be required to include, in their respective curricula, instruction in civics that includes five topics and pupil development goals. However, it is not clear if the five topics and pupil

development goals are additional standards or how they might fit into the already robust social studies standards, curriculum and instruction.

Furthermore, the topics and goals outlined in AB4 reflect already existing academic standards in Wisconsin social studies. In a comparison between the topics outlined in AB4 and the Wisconsin Standards for Social Studies, we found that the topics in the bill can be located in Inquiry standard 1 (“Wisconsin students will be civically engaged”), Political Science standard 1 (origins and foundation of the government of the United States), Political Science standard 2 (rights, privileges, and responsibilities in society), Political Science standard 3 (evaluate the powers and processes of political and civic institutions), and political science standard 4 (political participation, linkage institutions, and public policy). This alignment is great news because it means our Wisconsin students are already learning these important concepts.

In addition to existing state standards for civics instruction, much of the content outlined in AB4 already exists in statute. For example, Wisconsin state statute has a citizenship requirement [Wisc. Stat. [§118.01\(2\)\(c\)](#)] that already requires districts, among other things, “to provide an instructional program designed to give pupils:

- An understanding of the basic workings of all levels of government, including the duties and responsibilities of citizenship.
- A commitment to the basic values of our government, including by appropriate instruction and ceremony the proper reverence and respect for and the history and meaning of the American flag, the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. constitution and the constitution and laws of this state.
- The skills to participate in political life.
- Knowledge of state, national, and world history.”

Civics Graduation Requirement: Another point for the committee to consider is that Wisconsin already has a civics graduation requirement. According to Wisc. Stat. [§118.33\(1m\)\(a\)1.](#), in order to earn a high school diploma, a student must take a civics test during high school that includes 100 questions – identical to the ones asked during the U.S. citizenship application process; To pass, students need to answer at least 65 of these questions correctly.

Students are already being prepared for the civics exam through their education. If the committee feels the exam isn't adequately preparing students in civic knowledge, then the exam should be eliminated. In other words, if the committee prefers a civics course instead of the test, and a bill is passed requiring half a credit of civics to graduate, the civics exam requirement should be removed.

We also know that most Wisconsin high schools already have civics education as part of their graduation requirements. According to recent research (2025) by the Wisconsin Civics Learning Coalition, an audit of school curriculums shows that 75% of districts already require a civics or government class for graduation. In addition, many of the remaining districts offer civics as an elective.

A final point for the committee to consider is the resources needed to help districts successfully implement this proposed legislation. To meet the goals outlined in the bill, Wisconsin districts will require additional funding and time. Districts not already offering a civics course will need to develop one, purchase instructional materials, provide professional development for teachers,

and ensure teachers have the proper licenses to teach civics. This bill could also strain staffing, given the specialized licenses required for civics teachers. While instructional materials are likely to be developed, the bill does not mention any funding to support districts in this effort, nor does it allocate resources for technical support from the DPI or collecting and organizing the required data. Additionally, the timeline for implementation outlined in the bill could be challenging for districts.

In closing, while the DPI is here to provide information, we would like to reiterate our strong advocacy for civics education. We believe that high-quality, non-partisan civics education gives students a solid foundation for civic engagement that extends beyond their time in Wisconsin schools. We are committed to working together to make civics instruction even stronger. We believe one way to do that is by building on existing civics statutes and standards, eliminating the civics exam graduation requirement, and introducing a half-credit civics class graduation requirement. It is also essential that we provide the necessary funding and support to help districts successfully implement these changes.

Thank you for your time and attention. We would be happy to take any questions you have at this time and our copy of our submitted testimony includes an email address to direct any future questions.

You may direct any written follow-up questions to Sara Knueve, Policy Initiatives Advisor, at sara.knueve@dpi.wi.gov.

The first part of the document is a letter from the author to the editor, in which the author explains the reasons for writing the paper and the importance of the research. The author also discusses the challenges faced during the research process and the limitations of the study.

The second part of the document is the main body of the paper, which is divided into several sections. The first section is the introduction, which provides a brief overview of the research and its objectives. The second section is the literature review, which discusses the existing research on the topic and identifies the gaps in the knowledge. The third section is the methodology, which describes the research design and the data collection methods. The fourth section is the results, which presents the findings of the study. The fifth section is the discussion, which interprets the results and discusses their implications. The sixth section is the conclusion, which summarizes the main findings and provides recommendations for future research.

The final part of the document is the references, which lists the sources used in the paper. The references are arranged in alphabetical order and include books, journal articles, and online sources.

The document is a well-structured and informative piece of research that provides a comprehensive overview of the topic and its current state of knowledge.

2025 AB4: Written Testimony

Submitted to the Assembly Committee on Education by Kate Ullman and Michael Blauw

February 6, 2025

We would like to thank Chairman Kitchens and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 4, relating to civics instruction and a civics graduation requirement. This statement is submitted on behalf of Kate Ullman and Michael Blauw. We have both taught high school government, developed civics curriculum for K-12 teachers, and conducted professional development for government and civic educators. We also serve as co-chairs of the Wisconsin Civic Learning Coalition (WCLC). The WCLC is a network of organizations and individuals who seek to strengthen nonpartisan civic education in Wisconsin schools. Due to the short timeline to prepare this testimony our remarks represent our own personal positions, not the position of the WCLC as a whole or the position of any individual or organizational member. However, our comments here draw on many years of meetings and conversations with dozens of civics advocates about opportunities to strengthen non-partisan civic learning in our state. We believe that making civic learning universal is one such strategy.

We applaud this committee's interest in civic education and appreciate the opportunity to focus the attention of policy makers on this crucial public good. Universal civic learning is essential to ensuring each and every person in Wisconsin is equipped with the necessary tools to engage as informed members of our self-governing society.

Thirtyseven other states require a high school civics class for graduation, and many districts in Wisconsin already require a semester of civics for graduation through district policy. Based on a recent review of district level course requirements, about 75% Wisconsin students graduate from a school where civics is required; AB4 will not impose a burden on those schools. However, we strongly believe that ALL students in Wisconsin should have access to high-quality civic education. By adding a graduation requirement this bill would ensure that the remaining 25% of students graduate with knowledge about the foundations of government, the significance of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, a desire to participate in local, state and federal government, and other critical knowledge that prepares them to be effective citizens.

In January 2024 we submitted testimony to this committee regarding a similar bill, and raised concerns about certain provisions. When AB4 was introduced earlier this week, we were pleased to see changes to the 2023 bill that addressed our major concerns. In light of these changes, **we offer our support for passage of AB4.**

In addition to achieving the core goal of universal civic learning, the bill has some important strengths:

- ❖ Practicing teachers report that topics and pupil development goals in the bill largely align with existing required or elective civics and government curriculum in Wisconsin schools. When reviewing the bill, teachers we spoke to had no major objections to the topics listed.
- ❖ The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has published a recommended High School civics course outline, developed by a team of experienced Wisconsin government and civics teachers. This outline closely aligns with the topics and pupil development goals listed in this bill, and provides a resource for districts to utilize in implementation.

- ❖ The bill gives districts latitude to develop a locally tailored approach to fulfill the requirements, and maintains the value of local control while ensuring that all students who graduate have exposure to important and enduring concepts in civics.
- ❖ The inclusion of elementary grades in this bill aligns with research in the field from the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) and the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) recommendations for teaching civics and social studies in elementary settings. Civic learning is vital in early grades in order to support the goals of fostering a civic-minded citizenry.


As in our 2024 testimony, we would like to highlight how essential it is that civic education legislation is bipartisan. We encourage the bill authors to invite co-sponsorship and support of their colleagues across the aisle, and remain open to their input. We also hope that the Democrat members of this committee will recognize that AB4 is a major step forward in strengthening civic learning in our state, and worth their support. It is essential that civic education be non-partisan, and in the case of this bill bipartisan collaboration is a necessary condition for success. Bipartisanship will enhance the legitimacy and inspire confidence among teachers, administrators, and the public that this bill represents common ground among both parties.


While the bill does not include an appropriation, we encourage the bill sponsors and others who support this proposal to secure funding in the biennial budget to support implementation. Some districts will need to add a new course, and others will expand staffing of an existing elective. All teachers, including those already teaching civics, benefit from ongoing professional development. Other states have allocated funding on the order of \$2 million per year when adopting new civics requirements. Although 75% of Wisconsin districts already require a civics course, relaxed teacher licensure requirements under PI34 mean that any teacher with a secondary social studies license, or a K-9 license, would be certified to teach civics. These teachers may have never taken a political science or government course. Funding to support professional development would ensure that teachers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources to do justice to these important topics.

We encourage all members of the committee to vote YES in order to advance this bill to the floor. However, we believe that it is essential to work across the aisle to ensure that this bill is truly bipartisan, and we will continue to advocate for collaboration as well as funding to support implementation. Ultimately, adopting AB4 will be a win for Wisconsin students, teachers, communities, and the civic health of our state.

Civic learning is a core purpose of public education in the United States and we support strengthening and enhancing civic learning broadly across all grades in Wisconsin schools. The civic mission of schools has never been more important than it is now. Thank you for taking time to engage in discussion about this important matter.

Yours in Service,


Michael Blauw, Co-Chairs of the Wisconsin Civic Learning Coalition


Kate Ullman, Co-Chair of the Wisconsin Civic Learning Coalition

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to include testimony for AB ~~898~~ 894

As this bill notes, Wisconsin currently requires three social studies credits for graduation. Though there is no credit requirement for civics education, many districts have their own requirements in this area and others offer elective civics courses. Existing statute provides guidance for civics instruction through the Wisconsin standards for social studies. Many aspects of this bill do not align with the work already being done by civics educators throughout the state, and some of the desired outcomes of this bill are unclear and difficult to assess in an educational setting. These elements would not support civics educators in their work.

The clearest aspects of this bill are those which describe student understanding, including those elements which describe "An understanding of pupils' shared rights and responsibilities as residents of this state" and "An understanding of the process for effectively advocating before governmental bodies and officials." I understand "effectively advocating before governmental bodies and officials" to include public testimony on bills in the legislature by stakeholders whom that bill concerns. I am compelled to call attention to the timing of this hearing, which was scheduled quite recently at a time when most of the people directly involved in education either as students and their families and civics educators were unable to attend or prepare careful testimony of this bill. I also want to call attention to careful testimony given by several individuals and organizations for AB 898 last year and point out that much of this bill is similar despite excellent clarification of its merits and weaknesses in how it would be able to effectively support civics education in the state. I specifically would call attention to the testimony of Sarah Kopplin, a former teacher of the year, who outlined several aspects of this bill, including that it lacked input from the educational community.

Much of this bill is a copy of Florida House Bill 5, which became law in 2021. As most educators can tell you, copies are often reflective of a hasty process. You are in a position to both modify this bill to support the needs of our state, and to provide a model for other states seeking to implement broader civics education. This bill concerns many stakeholders in the educational community who deserve to have their input heard and thoughtfully considered. If this bill passes into law without seeking to incorporate the input of those it directly impacts, that would be unfortunate commentary on the effectiveness of advocating before public officials in the state assembly and on the likely efficacy of this bill. I urge this committee to take time to seek more input from the educational community in this stage of the legislative process. Wisconsin needs a civics education bill, and deserves to have input.

Thank you,

Nathan Smith
Madison, Wisconsin

February 6, 2025

Testimony on AB4

Good morning. My name is Erin Allers, and it is a pleasure to return to familiar surroundings. I served in the Senate Sergeant at Arms for 13 years, during which I was the advisor for the Senate Scholar Program for seven years. Currently, I am the Wisconsin State Coordinator for Project Citizen and a member of the steering committee for the Wisconsin Civic Learning Coalition.

I am pleased to present my testimony in support of AB4. Wisconsin is one of the few states that do not require a civics class for high school graduation. *This bill addresses that gap.*

I am particularly glad to see that this bill mandates the teaching of civics from kindergarten through 12th grade, rather than only in high school. Similar to mathematics, civics education should begin with foundational principles and build upon them each year. For instance, I recently observed a first-grade classroom where the teacher introduced concepts like the school, school district, city, county, state, and nation. Such fundamental knowledge is crucial for young learners.

If I were to propose an amendment to the bill, I would suggest the inclusion of a Civics Seal of Excellence designation on students' diplomas. Students could earn this distinction through good grades and active participation in a civics program. For example, participants in the Senate Scholar Program would receive this seal on their diploma and transcripts. Additionally, there could be provisions for a teacher designee and a school award. From a business and economic perspective, individuals with this seal may have an advantage in securing employment or gaining admission to their preferred educational institutions. Notably, this Civics Seal of Excellence exists in both Republican and Democratic states, including Michigan, Indiana, Nevada, Florida, Virginia, Tennessee, and New York.

Thank you for your attention and support of AB4.

Sincerely,

Erin Allers

erallers@gmail.com

The mission of The American Legion, Department of Wisconsin is to provide service to veterans, their families and their communities.

February 6, 2025

Chair Kitchens and members of Assembly Education Committee.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the authors of AB-4 Representative Nedweski and Senator Wanggaard.

The American Legion is the largest Veterans Service Organization in the Nation. In Wisconsin, we have over 45,000 members. You will find American Legion Posts in all 72 counties of the state. We were chartered by Congress in 1919 and have been advocating for veterans, their families and serving their communities ever since.

AB-4 is designed to ensure the citizenship goals found in §118.01(2) (c) are achieved. The American Legion has programming which is relevant to the intent of this program. Annually, in March we make available an Americanism and Government test. This multiple-choice examination is available to High School Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors in Wisconsin. There is also a short essay question to serve as a tie breaker. The top eleven students in each grade level receive a scholarship to further their education upon graduation. You may compete in each of the three years.

The American Legion Oratorical Contest is a civic themed program. Each participant must write and deliver a speech on the United States Constitution. Additionally, during the competition one of four amendments is chosen and all of the students speak for 3 – 5 minutes on the topic. Again, scholarships are awarded. The competition begins at the Post level and progresses to the National final.

Many of our County Councils run a County Youth Government Day. Students from the high schools in the county send students to the County seat to learn about county government.

Badger Boys and Badger Girls State are programs conducted by the American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary. These programs provide a hands-on experience for soon to high school seniors. The boys spend 4 days at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire immersing themselves in state and local government. They run for office and legislate for the fictional city, county or state they are in. Beginning this year, they will be able to earn college credit by participating in this program.

While we support the bill there are some areas that we would like to see amended:

1. Section 3-line 2 change to read national, state, and local
2. Provide a definition of Civics
3. Add language that would permit the .5 credit for civics to be obtained by participating in Badger State.

Citizens with a working knowledge are essential to our democracy surviving. This bill will ensure the next generation as that knowledge.

February 5, 2025

Dear Members of the Wisconsin Assembly on Education:

My name is Shawn Healy, and I serve as senior director of policy and advocacy for iCivics, the nation's leading provider of K-12 civics curriculum. I'm also a career-long educator who began my career teaching high school social studies in Sheboygan. At iCivics, I lead a pluralistic national coalition of 360-plus organizations committed to stronger civic education opportunities for students across the fruited plain, and are proud to have the Wisconsin Civic Learning Coalition as our state affiliate.

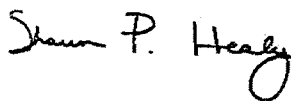
I'm writing in support of Assembly Bill 4, legislation to require a semester-long high school civics course, bringing Wisconsin in alignment with 35 other states with a similar requirement. In fact, six states require a full year of high school civics to graduate. As the bill text states, it is critical that students understand their rights and responsibilities as American citizens, develop skills and dispositions to participate in every layer of our federal system of government, and emerge with a deep commitment to our constitutional democracy and the institutions undergirding it.

I also encourage members of this committee, in partnership with appropriators, to provide resources to local education agencies for ongoing teacher professional development opportunities to support implementation of this act in time for the 2026-2027 school year. In order to achieve the critical outcomes for students detailed in the bill, teachers must have the requisite content knowledge and pedagogical skills, and this is best acquired through affordable, accessible, and continuous learning opportunities akin to other professions (law, medicine, etc.).

This pairing of stronger civics instructional requirements throughout K-12 and investments in civics teachers' professional development is central to our efforts to strengthen school-based civic education. AB-4 is a definitive step in this direction and I encourage you to view me as a resource as debate over AB-4 transpires. I can be reached at Shawn.Healy@iCivics.org.

Every Wisconsin student deserves to graduate civics-ready. I encourage you to vote "yes" as AB-4 comes before your committee tomorrow.

Yours in civics,
Shawn



Shawn Healy, PhD
Senior Director, Policy and Advocacy
iCivics





Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance

Feb. 6, 2025

Representative Kitchens and members of the Assembly Education Committee,

I am Cathy Olig, the executive director of the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA), which represents twenty-six public school districts serving approximately 180,000 students in southeastern Wisconsin.

I am writing to express our concerns with AB 3, 4, 5, and 6. While the proposals may have some merit they are matters of local control, and in some cases duplicative of what is already being done in schools. Further, the bills do not address the critical issues and needs of public school districts, which include:

- The increasing costs of special education services and a reimbursement rate that only covers 30% leave the remaining amount to come from a school district's general fund. This is often millions of dollars that a school district must transfer to provide federally mandated services that students need and deserve.
- Rising cost of doing business: increased costs for curriculum, student support needs, utilities, insurance, healthcare, transportation, food service, and wages. School districts are not immune to inflation, yet general school district revenues per pupil lag inflation by more than \$3300 since 2009. The current funding system is not sustainable.
- Advancing literacy and overall student achievement. Act 20 remains an unfunded mandate.
- Recruiting and retaining professional educators and support staff. All districts are experiencing staffing shortages in every single job category. Schools face increased labor costs in a competitive labor market, where it's common to see educators move districts at an increased rate or leave the profession entirely. This harms students and their learning.

The proposals do not help address any of the critical needs listed above. We are asking to work with you to develop sound education policy to support student achievement. Public schools need general, flexible, spendable revenue that keeps pace with inflation. Increasing special education funding to at least 60% reimbursement (sum sufficient) would provide more predictable, stable funding that supports all students due to less of a transfer from the school district's general fund.

We want to collaborate with you to help address immediate staffing needs and longer-term educator pipeline issues that all schools face. This would make a difference for all students in Wisconsin, regardless of what type of school they attend.





Southeastern Wisconsin
Schools Alliance

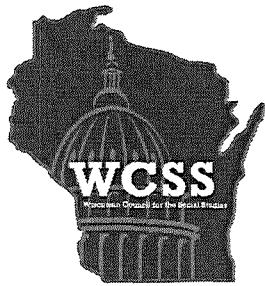
While this letter expresses our concerns, we want to emphasize that we value the long-term relationships that SWSA districts have built with legislators. **How can we start working together to implement solutions that ensure all Wisconsin students have an exceptional education to build a strong future workforce?**

Please meet with your school district leaders to understand the state of public schools. We are happy to speak with you and want to work together to help support Wisconsin students and schools.

Sincerely,

Cathy Olig
Executive Director





Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies

2025 AB4

2/4/25 Testimony Submission

This statement regarding Assembly Bill 4 as it relates to Civics Instruction was submitted by Sarah Kopplin, President of the Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies (WCSS). WCSS is a non-profit, non-partisan organization providing education and connection to resources and training for social studies professionals across Wisconsin. As an affiliate of the National Council for the Social Studies, we work in collaboration with various entities to support teacher professional learning such as the Department of Public Instruction, the CESA Civics Fellowship Network, PBS Wisconsin, The National Constitution Center, The Wisconsin Historical Society, local historical societies and sites, and national organizations such as the Bill of Rights Institute, Jack Miller Center, The National Archives, the Library of Congress, iCivics, and many more. This testimony represents the official stance of the Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies Board of Directors whose delegates are elected regionally across Wisconsin to represent members who are pre-service educators, classroom teachers, higher education professionals, and other professionals in the field of social studies. Our mission is to support non-partisan collaboration which promotes the teaching and learning of social studies and, in this case, specifically civic learning in Wisconsin.

We support the committee's consideration of this bill on civic education and appreciate the opportunity to focus policymakers' attention on this crucial topic, which we believe deeply impacts the public good for all. Our organization strongly believes that Social Studies, specifically civic learning, are essential to ensuring that every person in Wisconsin is equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be informed and reasoned decision-makers as members of our society and the greater interdependent world.

Currently, 36 states require a civics course in some form for high school graduation. Wisconsin is one of just a handful of states that do not already require a course to be taken but only require a civics exam to be passed. We believe the existing mandate which simply requires students to pass the civics test falls short of the goal of preparing Wisconsin's young people to be ready to take on civic life. Currently, more than a quarter of Wisconsin students never take a dedicated civics or government class.

Additionally, our organization is deeply concerned that, according to research conducted by the Chief Council of State School Officers, only 10% of instructional time at the elementary level nationwide is dedicated to social studies. This marginalization is also evident in Wisconsin school districts. Members of our Board of Directors strongly believe that all Wisconsin students deserve access to high-quality

social studies education. This bill represents an essential step in ensuring civic education becomes a priority for district leaders when allocating instructional time in elementary grades.

Our Board of Directors believes this bill presents an opportunity to strengthen social studies and civics education in the early grades—helping students develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to succeed in the proposed 0.5-credit high school civics course. Young learners must enter high school civics with historical context, experience analyzing historical documents, and practice in critical thinking and discourse. A strong foundation in social studies across elementary, middle, and high school levels is essential to preparing students to meet the expectations of civic responsibility. We appreciate that this bill supports that vision.

Furthermore, we fully support the bill’s emphasis on integrating civic learning throughout K-12 education, rather than limiting it to a single high school course. NAEP test scores reveal that students are entering middle and high school with increasingly weak knowledge and skills in American history, civics, and geography—largely due to the lack of emphasis on social studies instruction. By prioritizing these essential civic topics, this bill has the potential to increase both instructional time and focus on social studies education.

Research published in the Journal Social Education and from the Fordham Institute also show that increased opportunity to learn social studies subjects like civics strengthens overall literacy. To achieve the admirable civic literacy goals outlined in the bill, students must build understanding and skills progressively from kindergarten through high school. This bill is a critical step toward ensuring that Wisconsin students receive the comprehensive civic education they need to become informed and engaged citizens.

Our board is supportive of the changes made to the 2023 bill which caused concerns for our organization and its membership. WCSS is happy to see that the bill supports the flexibility for local control over the implementation of the bill at the district level. Schools in Wisconsin vary greatly across rural, urban, and suburban communities. The bill allows each district to construct its own plan that best suits the size and staffing capacity to construct schedules to offer civics instruction in the elementary and high school grades to meet the pupil outcomes outlined in the bill.

We offer our strong support for the passage of AB4.

The Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies Board of Directors supports the notion of having required instruction in elementary and high school grades, as well as a civics graduation requirement as a first step in ensuring that all students in Wisconsin have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to be stewards of this constitutional republic and to fully function in democratic life. In addition to achieving the core goal of universal civic learning, some important strengths our Board see are:

- ❖ This legislation supports excellence in teaching that is already taking place in some schools across Wisconsin. The topics and pupil development goals outlined in the bill largely align with existing required or elective civics and government curricula in some Wisconsin schools that already offer Civics courses.

- ❖ The bill places a high value on required instruction in civics at the elementary and high school grades. This prioritization of civics in our schools in a K-12 manner will increase general literacy as well as civic literacy and improve the overall quality of social studies education for all students.
- ❖ There is already a path that has been developed that can be used to implement the goals of this bill for Wisconsin educators and school districts. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has spent time and effort in partnership with educators to develop a suggested K-12 Civics Scope & Sequence and specifically a High School civics course outline to strengthen civic learning in Wisconsin. The team of experienced Wisconsin K-8 and high school government and civics teachers spent years of learning and collaboration on this effort to prepare resources for educators. The work in the Civics Scope & Sequence, specifically the high school course, closely aligns with the topics and pupil development goals outlined in the bill.
- ❖ The bill gives districts latitude to develop a locally tailored approach for their K-12 implementation in order to fulfill the requirements and maintain the value of local control while ensuring that all students who graduate have exposure to important and enduring concepts in civics.

While we are unaware of any Democratic co-sponsors to this bill, we hope that the bill authors and co-sponsors would welcome and invite co-sponsorship and support of their colleagues across the aisle. We also hope that the Democrat members of this committee will recognize that this bill is a major step forward in strengthening social studies education by enshrining civic learning in our state. It is essential that civics education be non-partisan, and in the case of this bill that means that it needs bi-partisan support. Bipartisanship will enhance the legitimacy of the bill in the eyes of educators and the community, and inspire confidence among educators, administrators, and community members that requiring civics represents common ground among both parties. The bottom line is that ensuring the students in Wisconsin schools have access to civic education with this bill assures that all students in our state will be able to reach the pupil goals it outlines.

While the bill does not include an appropriation of funds to support its implementation, we feel strongly that the bill sponsors and others who support this proposal advocate for funding in the biennial budget to support its implementation. The reality is that funding will be necessary for professional development for educators in order to implement new course requirements at the high school level. Other states that have implemented new civics requirements have allocated funding to support it and Massachusetts sets the bar in funding to the order of \$2 million per year. Although 75% of districts in our state already require a civics course, relaxed teacher licensure requirements under PI-34 mean that any educator with a secondary social studies license is now eligible to teach civics or government, even if they have never taken a political science or government course. This highlights the need to support new educators and those with more experience in the classroom with ongoing professional development related to civic learning. This will ensure that educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills to do justice to these important topics.

Funding will also be necessary for elementary educators. The licensure requirements for an elementary teacher currently cover K-9th grade. Within the preparation programs at our universities, pre-service

educators will not leave their collegiate experiences with the necessary knowledge or training to implement the pupil development goals outlined in the bill. The heavy prioritization on fulfilling the requirements of Act 20 and the science of reading make it hard for districts and pre-service programs to properly prepare educators to teach civics in the manner described in the pupil outcomes of this bill. We see the need to make the connection in elementary classrooms between the science of reading that Act 20 requires and the teaching of civics. As research supports, educators can have the training they need to teach civics well in elementaries, this can support the overall general literacy goals that Act 20 aspires to.

We recommend that funding be provided to support the training of teachers through the Civics Fellows Network established by the Department of Public Instruction and the CESAs to support the current implementation of Civics Scope & Sequence. The bottom line is that we should all work across party lines to support this civics legislation. The goals of this bill largely align with the goals of the Civics Scope & Sequence, but our teachers must have the opportunity to learn and to have access to resources to use to meet these pupil development goals. Without funding this bill, an impossibly difficult, if not simply impossible, path is laid out for schools and educators to achieve its goals. Our kids deserve educators with the training and resources available to reach the goals laid out by this governing body.

While we believe that this bill could be strengthened with some small changes, such as adding in “middle” in addition to “elementary” to be inclusive of middle-level learners, and that advocating for funding to support implementation is absolutely necessary, we nonetheless encourage all members of the committee to vote YES. We believe that adopting this bill will be a win for Wisconsin students, but more importantly, it will be a win for the future stability of our nation.

The civic mission of educating our children has never been more important. Thank you for taking time to engage in discussion regarding this important matter.

Yours in Service,

Sarah Kopplin, President
The Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies