



Center for Civic Education

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Integrated Civic SEL

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by the

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A. Significance

(1) Introduction

High-need/underserved students—including students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and others who lack academic resources that promote successful graduation and credentials of value that lead to careers offering economic mobility (U.S. Department of Education 2023)—face critical civics and social-emotional empowerment gaps. Current curricular requirements and classroom practices do not sufficiently support underserved students, whose learning and achievement gaps were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic (U.S. Department of Education 2021).

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which people develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes conducive to achieving personal and collective goals, maintaining positive relationships, and making meaningful societal connections (CASEL 2024). Civic SEL, the integration of civics content and methods with SEL competencies that promote engaged citizenship, can be instrumental in addressing current complex civic and societal challenges that exceptionally impact underserved students. While national SEL organizations call for the integration of SEL in academic instruction, not one of the forty established SEL frameworks identified by Harvard’s EASEL Lab’s comprehensive inventory of high-quality programs was designed for the civics domain (EASEL Lab 2024). The Center for Civic Education’s (Center) Civic SEL Framework addresses this gap.

The Center and its research partner, the Civic Education Research Lab at Georgetown University (CERL), propose Integrated Civic SEL (ICS). This evidence-based program will holistically address middle and high school students’ civic and SEL development by engaging them in Project Citizen, a powerful, project-based curricular program developed by the Center in

1993. The Center and CERL will use the Civic SEL Framework to engage in an iterative development and research process to create, implement, and evaluate new instructional resources and teacher professional development (PD).

ICS will sharpen teachers' focus on SEL as they engage students in identifying, researching, and developing solutions to community problems. The new PD and curricular supports will provide powerful alternatives to existing civic education strategies, meeting Absolute Priorities 1 and 4 to address student SEL and academic needs. The proposed project will also meet Competitive Preference Priorities 1 and 2 by working in partnerships with entities underrepresented in Education Innovation and Research (EIR) programs and involving teachers in student needs assessment and evidence-based instructional approaches.

(2) Urgency for Quality Civic Education Programs

Civic education and engagement are at a critical juncture. Research indicates that civic engagement in the United States has been on the decline, exacerbating issues such as declining trust in government and increasing political polarization (Beljon-Regen 2023). In some cases, polarization fed by misinformation has devolved into violence (Berner 2020). These trends are evident in American schools. Sixth graders distrusting and disliking others based on political disagreements is occurring at an earlier age than in decades past (Tyler and Iyengar 2023).

The civic empowerment gap increases these problems because political power is concentrated among more privileged populations (Levinson 2010; Swalwell 2015; Van Camp and Baugh 2016). Marginalized youth have greater levels of societal and political mistrust. Despite years of awareness of these gaps, inequitable access to quality civic education has grown along racial and class lines over the last 20 years (Hansen et al. 2018). Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to have fewer school-based opportunities to develop civic,

social, and emotional competencies that lead to success in school, the 21st-century workforce, and civic life (Kahne and Middaugh 2008; Snellman et al. 2014; Aspen Institute 2018).

There is an urgent imperative for quality civic education that is universally available to American students. The time devoted to civics has declined for decades, especially in elementary and middle schools (Tyner and Kabourek 2021; Ollila and Macy 2019). A high-quality civic education is a powerful lever that supports people in developing civic capacities. The myriad challenges posed to democracy, coupled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on civic learning (██████ 2024b), warrant increased emphasis on classroom teaching that promotes knowledge of government and politics, the acquisition of civic dispositions and skills, and the development of Civic SEL competencies (EAD 2021).

Research shows that when exposed to high-quality civic education, students are more likely to become civic actors that vote, discuss politics at home, complete college, develop skills for the workforce, volunteer, and work on community issues (Pasek et al. 2008; Gould et al. 2011; Winthrop 2020). This impact is even more profound for marginalized students when they are exposed to equitable civic education opportunities (Burroughs 2010; Gainous and Martens 2012; ██████ 2020). K–12 educators have a unique opportunity to combat the historical exclusion of underserved populations by starting young people on the path to healthy democratic participation (Schairer 2023; Hope 2022).

(3) Urgency for SEL Programs

The imperative for Civic SEL has never been more pressing. Recent events have prompted calls from across the political spectrum for unity to counter malevolent polarization and for respectful disagreement to replace incendiary discourse. Civic SEL addresses inequities and empowers young people to thrive and contribute to healthy communities. It can instill in

students competencies that support democracy by developing lasting skills of cooperation, collaboration, respectful engagement, and civil discourse (Korbey 2021). Numerous independent studies demonstrate that SEL leads to better academic performance, improved well-being, and safer schools (Greenberg 2023; Jones et al. 2022). SEL fosters positive school environments where children learn essential skills for academic and future success. SEL skills are more malleable during childhood, and it is particularly important to invest in progressive SEL skill-building during schooling (OECD 2015).

Students of all ages are dealing with more mental-health issues since the COVID-19 pandemic (CDC 2023; Elharake et al. 2023). Nearly 30% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 received mental-health treatment in the past year (SAMHSA 2023). The pandemic has disproportionately affected underserved students (U.S. Department of Education 2021). Schools, particularly those in underserved communities, continue to grapple with how to meet the pressing social, emotional, and mental-health needs of students (Cook and Murphy 2023). Research has shown that embedding SEL into classrooms is a vital tool to help combat the increasing mental-health crisis among students. It can combat social isolation and address students' mental-health needs.

(4) Importance of Integrating SEL and Civic Learning

ICS will leverage the Center's Civic SEL Framework to make SEL a focus of civic learning. As evidenced in Project Citizen, as well as other Center programs, Civic SEL proficiencies have the potential to shape students' civic dispositions, skills, literacy, and engagement (Hartzell 2020; ██████████ 2024b). Educators leverage research-backed strategies to infuse SEL into the curriculum and foster inclusive learning environments. Students gain civic competencies, and in the process, develop skills critical for academic success and lifelong learning. They are empowered to become informed, engaged citizens prepared to succeed and

thrive in life.

ICS will forge relationships between students and teachers, helping them learn to appreciate divergent viewpoints and develop a disposition to seek root causes and solutions to community and societal problems. The Center has found that when students participate in inclusive classrooms and experience hands-on SEL-rich learning opportunities, their civic-identity formation, social awareness, and other Civic SEL competencies excel. Instructional strategies that support whole-child development are an important equity measure (OECD 2015).

(5) Development and Demonstration of New Strategies Building on Existing Strategies

The Center's Civic SEL Framework aligns with educational objectives and outcomes with CASEL's five core SEL competencies of (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) responsible decision-making, (4) social awareness, and (5) relationship skills. In CERL's current EIR-funded research, mentor teachers identified specific SEL competencies to emphasize in civics instruction. These include civil discourse, respectful engagement, active and empathetic listening, tolerance of diverse ideas, problem-solving, collaboration, cooperation, public communication skills, self-regulation, self-advocacy, and social awareness, among others ([REDACTED] and [REDACTED] 2023). Teachers, schools, and districts have the unique opportunity to incorporate these competencies directly into curriculum and academic instruction.

For ICS, the Center, CERL, expert teachers, and civic education partners across the country will engage in an iterative research and development process to create student materials and a curriculum guide for teachers. The new materials will support Civic SEL competencies. They will guide teacher PD and support the infusion of impactful SEL throughout students' Project Citizen experience.

(6) Project Citizen Curricular Program

Project Citizen provides students with unique opportunities for active engagement with each other and their communities—features that are not offered by more traditional civic education curricula. Though the curriculum is very well received where it has been introduced, many schools, particularly in underserved communities, have yet to learn about its advantages and incorporate it into their instructional practices. Project Citizen combines project-based learning (PBL) and civic education. Its effectiveness is demonstrated by rigorous research, including the recently completed Project Citizen Research Program (PCRP) randomized controlled trials meeting What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education (■■■■ 2024b).

In Project Citizen, students work in collaborative groups in a multistep process to identify problems in their community, select a problem to address, research the problem, develop a policy-based solution, and build a curated portfolio of their research. The process culminates with a presentation of the portfolio in a simulated or actual public hearing in which students showcase their process, findings, and reflections and respond to questions from community members and/or local policymakers. Through this process, students participate in policy processes, interact and problem solve with other students, involve adult stakeholders in their school and larger community, engage in civil discourse, and develop lifelong civic skills.

The Center and mentor teachers throughout the country have the capacity to provide teacher PD with summer and academic-year training that provides them with a professional learning community (PLC), mentorship, high-quality curriculum and resources, and pedagogical tools. These pedagogies are generally applicable to civics instruction and are central to successfully implementing the Project Citizen curriculum.

Meta-analysis of three decades of Project Citizen studies corroborates its effectiveness with underserved students (Hartzell 2020). CERL’s recent research demonstrates that teachers improve their capacity to implement active-learning strategies that foster Civic SEL skills (Gallo and █████ 2021). Students, including marginalized populations, increase their civic knowledge, civic skills, civic dispositions, civic engagement, STEM skills, and SEL-related competencies (█████ and █████ 2020; █████ 2024b).

(7) Iterative Development and Research Process

The Center will develop and research the impact of ICS PD and curricular materials using evidence-based practices and learnings from past program implementation and research processes, including the PCRFP and its current EIR grant focused on innovating the We the People civic-education curricular program for targeted groups of underserved students. In the EIR-funded James Madison Legacy Project Expansion Program (JMLPE), the Center and CERL designed an iterative research and curriculum-development process to address imperative civic education and SEL needs identified by teachers of English learners, students with disabilities, and students of color, who have faced significant learning gaps due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The JMLPE offers a blueprint for the development, implementation, and assessment of civic education programs through a cooperative, systematic process. The project employs design-based implementation research where program developers and evaluators work in partnership to solve problems of practice (█████ █████ and █████ 2024).

In ICS, the Center and CERL will work collaboratively with educator-experts to develop and assess a curricular model that aims to increase the effectiveness of the Project Citizen program for the target student populations. CERL will conduct formative research that informs the design and implementation of the PD program and curricular materials.

(8) Model for Teacher PD and Enduring Support

The Center has been working with a network of coordinators in all 50 states to provide PD, reaching more than 12 million students and 100,000 teachers. Its model of sustained teacher PD and in-state support is unique among national civic education organizations, which generally offer shorter PD opportunities without sustained teacher support during implementation.

The model begins with the recruitment of state coordinators from the Center's national network to lead programs in their states. To ensure everyone involved is well prepared, the Center works closely with state coordinators and mentor teachers to provide comprehensive training that covers project specifications, effective pedagogical strategies, and methods for embedding SEL into the classroom. State coordinators and mentors then plan and conduct a multiday PD institute for teachers in their state. During this intensive training, teachers receive instruction on civics content, pedagogy, and the Project Citizen program.

After the initial PD institute, mentors take the lead in developing a PLC with the participating teachers. The mentors keep in regular contact with their mentees, provide continuous support, and celebrate milestones as teachers engage their students in Project Citizen. To ensure continued growth, state coordinators and mentors plan and conduct follow-up PD sessions throughout the academic year. Teachers also become part of an enduring network of civic education teachers in their state, fostered by the state coordinator, who continues to share information and PD as part of their ongoing role beyond grant funding. This model ensures that teachers are well equipped to implement SEL and Project Citizen effectively in their classrooms.

Numerous efficacy studies conducted by CERL demonstrate that this robust approach to PD and support lead to positive and equitable outcomes for underserved students. PCRPD had significant positive impacts on teachers and students over a three-year period. Teachers

increasingly incorporated civic dispositions in their classes, with notable jumps: 40% to 73% of teachers in Year 1, 57% to 71% of teachers in Year 2, and 22% to 47% of teachers in Year 3. This shift in classroom instruction directly resulted in student civic knowledge gains of 44% in Year 1, 76% in Year 2, and 66% in Year 3 (██████████ 2024b). Students became more inclined to stay informed about government and politics. High school students in particular reported being very likely to turn out to vote in elections—69% to 72% in Year 1, 63% to 69% in Year 2, and 66% to 76% in Year 3—and expressed interest in pursuing careers in government or running for office one day themselves (██████████ 2024b).

The large-scale James Madison Legacy Project (JMLP) study, funded by a SEED grant from the U.S. Department of Education, focused on high-need students and met WWC standards of strong evidence of effectiveness. On average, middle school students scored 63% higher and high school students scored 78% higher on a standards-based civic-knowledge test after taking a civic education course taught by a Center-trained teacher. Additionally, 76% of middle school students and 79% of high school students felt that they were more prepared to become involved in their community (██████████ Hartzell, and Sanchez 2020).

The Center’s PD model provides levers for teacher retention, equitable access to civics instruction, and inspirational student outcomes (Hartzell 2020; Volcy 2024). The sense of community students obtain from participating in high-quality civic education goes hand in hand with the goals of SEL. Moreover, teacher retention is key to sustaining effective SEL programs.

B. Project Design

(1) Civic SEL Framework

The Center developed the Civic SEL Framework (see Appendix E) as a roadmap for fortifying civic instruction in alignment with the objectives and outcomes with CASEL’s five

core SEL competencies to enhance civic learning, foster the acquisition of civic skills, and promote the development of civic dispositions. This framework will serve as a guidepost for the development of teacher PD and instructional-support materials for ICS. Appendix E also shows how Project Citizen activates Civic SEL targets.

(1a) Logic Model

The logic model in Appendix G provides a conceptual framework for the project activities and research by defining the contextual moderators and aligning the program components, mediators, and outcomes with the goals of the project.

(2) Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes
Goal 1: Innovate Project Citizen curricular and educator support materials using the Center’s Civic SEL Framework	
Develop curricular and educator support materials to engage teachers in analyzing students’ needs and sharpen teacher focus on opportunities to support student Civic SEL using Project Citizen	A publicly available online module for educators with training, instructional support, and assessment materials (including at least eight inquiry-based lesson plans) ready for use in PD and classroom implementation
Pilot new materials in Project Citizen PD and classroom implementation for middle and high school teachers and students	10% increase in teachers’ knowledge of Civic SEL competencies and their ability to successfully use pedagogies; 10% increase in students’ Civic SEL competencies, including aligned knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Objectives	Outcomes
Evaluate and refine the materials based on data collected from teachers and students	Improvements made to ICS materials based on areas identified by participants
Goal 2: Support high-quality educator PD in Project Citizen, integrated with Civic SEL	
Train 18 mentor teachers and six state coordinators in Civic SEL competencies and the new materials	State coordinators and mentor teachers prepared to implement the PD program and assist in evaluation
Provide year-long PD and ongoing mentorship to 180 middle and high school teachers working with underserved students, guided by experienced mentors	50% of teachers demonstrate a statistically significant increase in Civic SEL content and methods; 60% demonstrate increased instructional efficacy
Goal 3: Increase underserved students' acquisition of Civic SEL competencies and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions	
Engage more than 8,850 underserved students in collaborative project-based learning to solve public policy problems in their community through Project Citizen	Students show a 30% gain in Civic SEL competencies and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
Facilitate each class of students to present their policy proposal to their school or local community	75% of students increase their engagement with their community
Support engagement across student communities through state or regional project showcases	75% of classes increase their engagement with students from other schools

(3) Project Design Meeting the Needs of the Students, Teachers, and Others

By engaging expert teachers in an iterative development, implementation, and research process, the Center and CERL expect that ICS will have powerful, lifelong impacts on underserved students. ICS will respond to current teacher and student needs, address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, take a unique and effective approach to addressing student SEL, and provide teachers and students with engaging and meaningful ways to reduce the civic empowerment gap and become more involved in their communities.

Some key factors that limit high-quality civic education in American classrooms include a lack of adequate resources, vague state standards, teachers not feeling supported by their schools and communities to discuss certain topics, and a focus on memorization of content over engaging with real-world civic competencies (Ward 2023). ICS will provide real-world experiences for students, ongoing teacher support, and alignment with state social studies and other applicable standards.

The Center will select six project sites from among the following 16 states where Project Citizen coordinators expressed both the need and their commitment to ICS (see Appendix C): Delaware, Hawaii, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. The Center and CERL will work with state coordinators and experienced Project Citizen mentor teachers in the implementation of K–12 PD and instructional-support programs. During implementation, it will be possible for other states in the Project Citizen network to express interest in participating or collaborating with the initial states selected.

(3a) Responding to Evolving Teacher and Student Needs

Through ongoing research and implementation of national civic education programs, the Center and CERL identified the urgent need for programs that address civic engagement and SEL gaps among underserved students and ongoing teacher learning and support. Underserved students benefit more from highly effective teachers than advantaged students do (Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges 2004; Kahne and Middaugh 2008; Lin 2015). Yet, underrepresented students and those living in poverty are disproportionately assigned teachers with the least preparation and the weakest academic backgrounds (Murnane and Steele 2007; Levine 2009; Adamson and Darling-Hammond 2012; Isenberg et al. 2013; Goldhaber, Theobald, and Tien 2015; REL Northwest 2020). Key ICS project activities will provide an ongoing analysis of and responsiveness to teacher and student needs. CERL will design its evaluation to provide feedback and insights from each of the following activities:

Key Activity 1: Preliminary Teacher Survey. In the first three months of the grant, CERL will field a survey to more than 10,000 middle and high school teachers across the country to gain feedback on current challenges and curricular and PD needs aligned with Civic SEL, as well as the impacts of COVID-19, empowerment gaps, and equity concerns they experience with underserved students in their classrooms.

Key Activity 2: Curriculum Development. The Center will bring together 12 experienced teachers who already implement Project Citizen and SEL pedagogies with underserved students to participate in a three-day curriculum development workshop to help draft eight new lesson plans and other educator support materials. The CERL team will provide input from past research and the preliminary teacher survey. The Center will engage an SEL expert to enhance the teachers' knowledge and capacity to align the materials to Civic SEL and culturally

responsive pedagogies. Following the workshop, the Center will work with the teachers over a period of two to three months to review and revise each lesson's alignment and support for Civic SEL content, pedagogies, and assessment. The Center's curriculum team will also work on developing and compiling teacher PD materials with input from the SEL expert. The materials will provide teachers with an understanding of Civic SEL and a capacity to implement Project Citizen pedagogies. They will also provide educators with directions and best practices for using the new lesson plans. This activity will take place over three months.

Key Activity 3: Pilot Study. Once the eight lessons are complete, the Center will invite 30 teachers to a four-day PD workshop and to pilot the lessons with 750 middle and high school students during their 2025–2026 Project Citizen implementation. The six state coordinators will take part in the workshop to become closely familiar with Civic SEL and the new materials. The teacher and student data collected by CERL will inform further lesson development and revisions. The Center will modify the lessons and teacher PD materials based on the evaluation results to best support Civic SEL.

Key Activity 4: State Coordinator and Mentor Workshops. Prior to implementing the teacher PD and classroom programs in Year 2, the Center and CERL will conduct a three-day planning and training workshop with state coordinators and mentor teachers to exchange expertise and build capacity to implement all aspects of ICS. The Center, CERL, expert teachers, and Project Citizen coordinators and mentors will share their latest experiences and strategies for working with teachers and underserved students in their states.

Key Activity 5: Teacher PD Program. In Years 2 and 3, the Center will work with the six project sites to provide the ICS PD and curricular program to 180 teachers and more than 8,100 students. PD content, as described in Appendix D, will include Civic SEL targets and methods,

civics content, and the implementation of Project Citizen. Content of Project Citizen includes what is and what is not public policy; federalism focusing on the different levels of government (community, state, and national); the branches of government and separation of powers; and the role of government departments and agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and interest groups in the policy process. The PD sessions will include a 30-hour in-person summer institute with at least 16 hours of follow-up sessions during the academic year. Teachers will participate in a site-level PLC led by mentor teachers to support the emerging needs.

Key Activity 6: Engaging Underserved Students in Project Citizen. Before beginning Project Citizen instruction, teachers will conduct asset-mapping and needs assessment to identify students who have become disengaged from learning, as responsive to Competitive Preference Priority 2. The educators will identify strategies to re-engage students and support family involvement. These will be incorporated into their instructional plans. Teachers will design targeted approaches to ensure successful student engagement and provide students with opportunities to successfully meet challenging civics content standards. Teachers will make use of the new ICS lesson plans as they implement at least 20 hours of Project Citizen instruction. This includes all steps of the previously described Project Citizen process whereby students work in collaborative groups to research and develop a public policy solution and presentation addressing a community-level problem they identify.

Key Activity 7: Local and State Public Hearings. Students will present their project portfolios to their school and/or local community in a simulated-public-hearing format or at an actual public meeting. When appropriate to school policies, teachers are encouraged to invite policymakers who deal with the policy area the students choose. In addition, each state coordinator will organize a state Project Citizen showcase for students from the different

participating schools to present their projects. Students from differing communities will have the opportunity to meet one another, as well as policymakers and other adult leaders, and discuss their policy concerns. This will provide a unique learning opportunity for students from marginalized communities who may not otherwise have substantive discussions with peers or access to state-level policymakers.

(3b) Addressing Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic (Competitive Preference Priority 2)

ICS will address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing on underserved students and the educators who serve them. CERL’s PCRPP research documented effects of the pandemic on teacher efficacy and student learning (██████████ 2024b). By conducting asset mapping in Key Activity 6, teachers will identify and address the needs of disengaged students. Through PD, the teacher PLC, and mentorship, ICS will provide coaching and support to educators as they design and implement targeted approaches to ensure successful student engagement. ICS materials will provide teachers with a diverse toolkit of strategies based on Universal Design for Learning principles that they are able to draw upon when designing individualized approaches.

(3c) Evidence Indicating the Project Will Successfully Address Student Civic SEL Needs

Research supports that ICS will successfully address students’ Civic SEL needs. PBL, as employed in Project Citizen, can improve student outcomes in civics and related fields. Evidence suggests that students in PBL classes have greater gains in civic knowledge than those in traditional lecture-style courses (Kingston 2018). PBL’s emphasis on authentic, active, and collaborative learning contributes to its ability to increase students’ civic orientations and related SEL competencies (Almulla 2020). Learnings from Project Citizen support that PBL can also be a gateway to lifelong civic engagement, as it encourages students to participate in their community, conveys knowledge of how the system works, instills an authentic desire to work for

the good of society, and imparts the proficiencies necessary for participation. PBL is highly conducive to students developing SEL competencies, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills, that facilitate high-level civic engagement (██████████ 2024a).

Civics, PBL, and SEL skills are deeply linked through their shared focus on holistic development and real-world application. PBL provides a platform for students to engage in authentic civic experiences, where they apply civics knowledge while deepening their practice of SEL competencies, such as collaboration and empathy. Meanwhile, SEL principles such as self-awareness and responsible decision-making are cornerstones in both civic education and PBL (Fester 2022), as they both aim to foster engaged and informed participation and empower students to address societal challenges with empathy and knowledge (Korbey 2021). As students engage in meaningful civic experiences through PBL, they use and develop SEL skills.

Project Citizen students use Civic SEL competencies such as collaboration, cooperation, problem-solving, and communication skills as they work with their classmates and community stakeholders to research and propose solutions to local issues. Middle and high school students demonstrate a significant advancement in their problem-solving abilities and civic-expression skills, expressing their views publicly, engaging with local media and government stakeholders, and leveraging social media to address community issues. Over the three years of PCRCP, middle and high school students who took part in Project Citizen showed statistically significant increases in civic expression skills, while gains in Civic SEL skills were notably smaller or nonexistent for control-group students (██████████ 2024b).

Teachers, in turn, developed their own Civic SEL capacities by participating in Project Citizen. In PCRCP, teachers reported feeling more capable in conveying civic knowledge, providing educational resources to others, promoting students' self-care and self-management,

developing students' relationship skills, facilitating respectful classroom discourse, and encouraging students' involvement in civic activities. While 77% of the participating teachers felt that Project Citizen played a pivotal role in their students' acquisition of SEL competencies, control-group teachers saw a decline in their confidence regarding their ability to instill SEL competencies in students (██████ 2024b).

(3d) National Availability of Project Deliverables

In addition to the six sites implementing the ICS program, the new curricular and educator support materials will be publicly available through an online module on the Center's website. Project Citizen state coordinators across the country will share this resource with educators in their states through educator communications and other PD sessions and meetings as part of their ongoing, routine practice supporting civic education. Upon the culmination of the Early-phase grant research, the Center and CERL will organize a two-day national dissemination conference, Civic SEL Research-to-Practice, to provide training on the new module and share research findings with Project Citizen state coordinators, mentor teachers, and other education leaders, such as state social-studies curriculum leaders. This will enhance the use of the curriculum in underserved communities as educational leaders deepen their understanding of Civic SEL and the curriculum's alignment with educational goals.

C. Project Personnel

The Center has more than 50 years of experience managing multiyear, multisite projects, supported by more than \$300 million in current and past federal-grant funding. (See Appendix D for the Center's history.) Center staff members are deeply experienced in nonpartisan K–12 civic education curriculum and teacher PD; capacity building and support for program sites; monitoring compliance with project requirements and federal regulations; collaborating with evaluation

teams; and widely disseminating results. These staff have recently been engaged in innovative research and curriculum-development projects that meet WWC standards and foster SEL, culturally responsive educational practices, student-centered inquiry, and PBL.

The Center is proud to be an Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer. It actively seeks applicants from underrepresented groups and does not discriminate based upon race, religion, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, sexual expression, age, status as an individual with a disability, or any other legally protected characteristics.

The Center's project-management and oversight team will lead program implementation, work with national program managers and coordinators, and collaborate with the Center's operations team for administrative, accounting, and information-technology support. [REDACTED], CERL at Georgetown University, will lead the research team. [REDACTED], President, Center, will provide executive project-management oversight. [REDACTED], VP/COO/CFO, Center, will oversee federal-fund management. [REDACTED], Sr. Director of Civic Education, Center, will oversee program staff, strategic partnerships in participating states, and the development of ICS materials. [REDACTED], Manager of Civic Learning and Curriculum, Center, will manage the development of curricular and teacher PD materials. [REDACTED], Sr. Manager of National Programs and PD, Center, will provide technical assistance for PD, student-portfolio development, and hearings at the sites. [REDACTED], Director of Program Grants and Innovation, Center, will lead grant reporting and site administration. [REDACTED], Director of Publishing and Communications, Center, will oversee the design, production, editing, and dissemination of curricular resources and online outreach to educators. The resumes of key personnel are provided in Appendix B.

D. Management Plan

The Center has considerable experience successfully managing personnel, task timelines, and budgets to achieve program objectives on time and within budget. The project-management team at the Center will coordinate with CERL and oversee the contracted experts. It will launch the project, conduct training of coordinators and mentors, provide technical assistance to state-level implementation teams, monitor implementation, use formative-evaluation information to keep the project on track, and lead its national network in planning for dissemination. The Center will also work with CERL to facilitate the timely gathering of data.

The contracted state coordinators work for nonprofit organizations that partner with the Center on its programs. These partners have years of experience coordinating civic education programs and conducting outreach to educational stakeholders throughout their states. They have successfully provided teacher PD and implementation support in other federally funded grants, working with school, district, and state leaders. Many of the state coordinators are current or former state, district, or school-level educational administrators or social studies supervisors.

State partners collaborate with community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and minority-serving institutions, as indicated in their letters of support in Appendix C. To achieve Competitive Preference Priority 1, these colleges and universities will provide input on ICS PD, contribute expert speakers, host project events for teachers and students, engage with students during public hearings, and provide students with feedback on their project portfolios.

The below table identifies the lead staff and timeline for each key project milestone.

Milestone	Lead Staff Responsible	Timeline (Jan. 2025–Dec. 2027)
Conduct and report on findings of initial survey	[REDACTED] and team	Feb. 2025–Mar. 2025
Center curriculum staff develop templates and drafts of Civic SEL lessons	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]	Mar. 2025–May 2025
12 teacher experts participate in curriculum-development and review workshop	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	May 2025
Draft training and instructional-support materials for teachers of target populations	[REDACTED]	June 2025–Aug. 2025
Four-day training workshop for 30 initial teachers	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]	July 2025–Aug. 2025
Pilot materials in 30 classrooms, 750 students	Teachers	Sept. 2025–May 2026
Observe and collect data on pilot	[REDACTED] and team	Sept. 2025–May 2026
Evaluation report on the pilot	[REDACTED] and team	June 2026
Refine and digitally publish materials	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]	Jan. 2026–June 2026
Recruit 180 teachers in six PD sites	State coordinators	Feb. 2026–May 2026
Six state coordinators and 18 mentors participate in planning and training workshop	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	Mar. 2026

Provide 46 hours of teacher PD in site-based PLC	State coordinators, mentor teachers	June 2026–May 2027
8,100 secondary school students receive 20 hours of ICS/Project Citizen instruction	Teachers	Aug. 2026–June 2027 Aug. 2027–Dec. 2027
Collection and review of site-performance reports	██████████ ██████████	July 2026, July 2027, Jan. 2027, Jan. 2028
Collection and analysis of coordinator, mentor, teacher, and student data	██████████ and team	June 2026–Aug. 2027
Production and review of evaluation report	██████████ and team	Sept. 2027–Nov. 2027
Review findings and adjust PD and materials	██████████ ██████████ ██████████	Nov. 2027–Dec. 2027
50 coordinators, 50 mentors, and 50 state/local education leaders participate in Civic SEL Research-to-Practice Workshop	██████████ ██████████ ██████████	Dec. 2027
Project presentations at national and state professional meetings and conferences	██████████ ██████████ state coordinators	Jan. 2026–Dec. 2027

Dissemination of research findings and project results, including online and print publications	[REDACTED]	Jan. 2026–Dec. 2027
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E. Quality of the Project Evaluation

(1) Methods of Evaluation

The research plan, consistent with the logic model (Appendix G) specifying a teacher and a student intervention, will have two components. It will determine whether the ICS program has a demonstrable effect on middle and high school (grades 6 through 12) teacher and student outcomes. A study will determine whether the ICS teacher PD program (1) has a positive effect on teachers’ knowledge and understanding of Civic SEL, (2) improves their teaching practices, and (3) increases their professional engagement. Based on the project design and prior research, it is reasonable to expect that teachers receiving the ICS intervention will achieve statistically significant increases on these measures. A second study, which is a priority of the proposed efficacy evaluation, will assess the extent to which the ICS curriculum intervention results in an increase in students’ acquisition of (1) Civic SEL capacities, (2) knowledge of government and the policy making process, (3) civic dispositions, and (4) civic skills. It is reasonable to expect that students receiving the ICS intervention will achieve statistically significant improvements on these indicators.

The independent research studies will be conducted by a staff led by [REDACTED], professor at Georgetown University and director of CERL. [REDACTED] has extensive experience with evaluating education programs, including those funded by grants from the U.S. Department of Education and the Educating for American Democracy national initiative.

(1a) Research Questions

The research will be guided by the following questions about the effectiveness of the teacher PD program:

- To what extent does participation in the ICS program improve middle and high school teachers' knowledge and understanding of Civic SEL?
- To what extent does participation in the ICS program improve middle and high school teachers' pedagogy? Are teachers more likely to integrate Civic SEL into their classes because of the ICS PD program? Are teachers more likely to incorporate active-learning elements into their classes due to the ICS PD program?

The study will address the following research questions related to student outcomes:

- To what extent does ICS improve middle and high school students' acquisition of Civic SEL competencies?
- To what extent does ICS impact students' knowledge of government and the public policy process?
- To what extent does ICS impact students' acquisition of civic dispositions consistent with Civic SEL?
- To what extent does ICS impact students' acquisition of civic skills aligned with Civic SEL?

The teacher and student studies will employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to measure outcomes and provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the ICS intervention for teachers and their students. The teacher study examines the effectiveness of the teacher PD program with the focal outcomes of Civic SEL knowledge and improved teaching practices. Civic SEL knowledge is defined as understanding the meaning of SEL concepts aligned with civics and grasping how students can develop and use Civic SEL

skills. ICS's influence on teaching practices accounts for how well teachers integrate Civic SEL into the Project Citizen curriculum, especially by using active pedagogies associated with PBL. The student study will evaluate the effectiveness of the ICS curriculum intervention on students' acquisition of Civic SEL competencies and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Civic SEL competencies are aligned with self-awareness, self-management, social and cultural awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (see Appendix E). Civic knowledge reflects students' mastery of content related to American government and the public policy-making process. Civic dispositions cover support for democratic values and principles, tolerance, civic duty, and political efficacy. Civic skills include problem solving, respectful communication, collaboration, and cooperation. The qualitative components of the research design will include (1) ethnographies of the teacher PD program, (2) classroom ethnographies, and (3) semi-structured teacher interviews.

(1b) Pilot Study

A pilot study of teachers and students that employs a quasi-experimental design will be conducted in the first year of the project. A sample of 30 teachers, who will participate in the first iteration of the ICS PD and administer the curriculum intervention with their students, will be recruited for the study from the Center's network. Pretests will be given to teachers prior to the start of the PD program. Posttests will be taken at the end of the summer institute and after completion of the PD program and curricular instruction. Students will be pretested prior to the start of their ICS class and posttested when the class has concluded. Interviews will be conducted with teachers to gain deeper insights into the survey data, identify best practices and challenges, and solicit feedback for improving the interventions. [REDACTED] and CERL researchers will

confer regularly with Center staff and issue a report. Center staff will revise the program, as needed, prior to implementation of the core research study in Year 2.

(1c) Teacher and Student Randomized Control Trial (RCT) Studies

The core quantitative research studies to be conducted in the second and third years of ICS are designed to meet WWC evidence standards without reservations. Multisite, school-level RCTs will be conducted for teachers and students. The school is the appropriate unit of randomization as Project Citizen is often implemented as a school-based project that can involve more than one teacher and/or class. The schools in the sample will be public and private middle and high schools, serving grades 6–12, in six project sites located across the country that are representative of schools in their district. The study uses a multisite design with random assignment of middle and high schools to intervention and control groups. Schools will be assigned to groups entirely by chance. Any differences in assignment probabilities will be adjusted according to methods specified by *WWC Standards Handbook*, vol. 5.0. The sampling procedure should yield diverse schools that will represent the broad, authentic conditions under which the curriculum intervention can be implemented. In-service civics, social-studies, and American-government teachers in schools assigned to the intervention group will receive the ICS PD and implement the ICS curriculum. Since the intervention is at the school level, all civics instructors in the intervention group will be invited to participate in ICS. In the case of treatment noncompliance in intervention-group schools, complier average causal effects (CACE) will be estimated as per *WWC Standards Handbook*, vol. 5.0. Teachers with the same profile in the control-group schools will not receive the PD program, will have no prior experience with Project Citizen, and will not implement the ICS curriculum in their classrooms. All students of teachers in the intervention and control groups are eligible for inclusion in the research. The

potential for study contamination is minimized because only the Project Citizen intervention will be implemented in the intervention classes. Schools in the control condition will employ a standard civics, social-studies, or American-government curriculum where teachers work from a textbook and use typical pedagogies, such as lecture and class discussion. CERL will work closely with the state coordinators to develop a randomization protocol and ensure the integrity of the randomization procedures. The coordinators are present on-site and are in a unique position to attend to the needs and concerns of school district administrators, principals, and teachers, to achieve buy-in, and to troubleshoot as the research is undertaken. Coordinators will work closely with CERL researchers to ensure that all legal requirements, including those for working with human subjects, are in compliance.

The RCT design will have a sufficiently large sample size to ensure high-quality analysis. A total of 50 schools will be randomly assigned to intervention (25 schools) and control (25 schools) groups. Based on prior research (██████████ 2024b), we estimate 30 students per school for a total of 1,500 students (750 per intervention and control conditions). The study is sufficiently powered. (See Appendix F for power analysis computation.)

The teacher and student studies will be based on pretest/posttest surveys that assess the impact of the PD program on teachers and the Civic SEL-infused curriculum on students. Pretests will be administered to teachers in the intervention group prior to the start of the PD program to get baseline measures of the outcome indicators. Measures with known reliability and validity derived from sources, including CASEL and RAND (2019), will be employed. In addition, new measures will be developed to reflect the novel attributes of Civic SEL. (See Appendix F for examples of measures.) Teachers will take posttests measuring these concepts after completion of the PD program and classroom instruction of the curriculum. Timing of the

control-group testing will coincide with that of the intervention group. Students in the intervention and control groups will be tested prior to and following their class. The student evaluation will include measures with known reliability and validity, including those used in the PCRP and others derived from CASEL, RAND (2019), Education Analytics (2019), and the Raikes Foundation (Haggerty, Kevin, Jenna Elgin, and Andrew Woolley, 2011). Additional measures will be developed to measure Civic SEL. (See Appendix F for examples of measures.) Teacher and student testing will be conducted using a secure online platform. Site coordinators or CERL staff will proctor teacher tests. Teachers will administer student testing in class.

Sample attrition will be carefully monitored and documented for teachers and students. “Stayers” and “leavers” will be identified for the teacher sample, as no teachers will join the study after it commences. “Stayers,” “leavers,” and “joiners” will be tracked for the student sample by comparing class lists with study participants at points in the research when data are collected. The study will be monitored for overall attrition and differential attrition, with the potential for bias assessed using procedures articulated in the *WWC Standards Handbook*, vol. 5.0. Steps will be taken to minimize attrition of teachers and students. [REDACTED] will provide informational letters to principals, administrators, and teachers to foster understanding of the program and cooperation. The CERL team will be readily available to provide assistance and consultation. Teachers in both the intervention and control groups will be offered monetary incentives and will have access to the study results. As the study design uses random assignment, unless there is a high level of attrition, establishing baseline equivalence is less of an imperative than if assignment is nonrandom. Nonetheless, the research will document that the intervention and control groups are equivalent at baseline on key indicators. If necessary, a statistical adjustment, such as ANCOVA, will be made.

(2) Performance Feedback and Assessment

CERL and the Center will employ design-based implementation research (DBIR) where program developers and evaluators work in partnership to solve problems of practice to maintain regular, cooperative, systematic feedback and program assessment. This process was used successfully with the JMLPE and PCRP ([REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] 2024). DBIR reconceptualizes the relationship between research and practice to be a multiway, recursive experience between innovators who design curriculum and PD programs, implementers who teach the curriculum, and researchers who conduct assessments. ICS is guided by a theory of change positing that the ICS PD program and curriculum will significantly improve civic-learning outcomes. The development process incorporates regular feedback from participants and data from CERL's research studies. DBIR aims to instruct the development of ICS and to facilitate scaled-up and improved teacher and student outcomes in a variety of settings.

(3) Implementation Study

Fidelity of implementation will be assessed for the teacher PD program and the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. The implementation study will employ relevant elements of the framework developed by Weiss, Bloom, and Brock (2014) focusing on content, quantity, quality, and conveyance. Data will consist of both quantitative measures (e.g., numbers of teachers and students recruited for ICS, number of hours of PD completed by teachers at each site) and qualitative data collected through on-site observations and interviews with coordinators and teachers. Findings of the implementation study will be regularly conveyed to Center staff, coordinators, and teachers. Instances where the measurable thresholds for acceptable implementation are not met and that would potentially compromise the research will be discussed, and steps will be taken to remediate the issues. This process was successfully followed for the JMLP and PCRP. (See Appendix F for more details on implementation

measures, which are aligned with components, mediators, and outcomes specified in the project's logic model.)