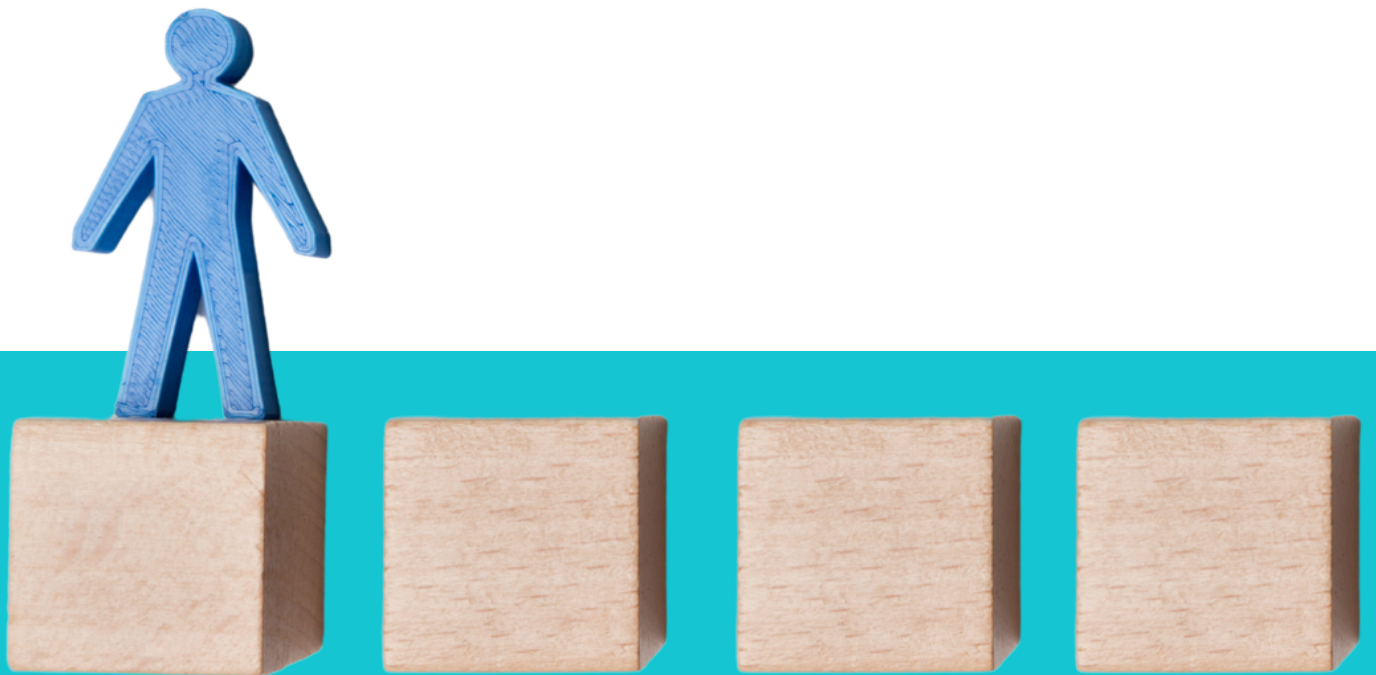# engage.

CIVIC EDUCATION GAP ANALYSIS

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CIVIC EDUCATION GAP ANALYSIS

Although the importance of civic education has risen, gaps have emerged as students are increasingly interested in complex and sensitive political issues at the domestic and international level, the skill and knowledge requirements placed upon teachers have yet to catch up. To preface this is not the fault of teachers as shortages in expert subject matter educators are the result of hiring practices which target courses such as STEM, Languages (English and French), social studies, and physical education according to the Ontario College of Teachers. While one might hope that civic education would benefit from the prioritisation of social studies, the breadth of the subject leaves little room to hire educators that also specialise in civics.

Within this report, and as a youth focused organisation committed to bolstering civic education, Engage aims to cover the current civic education situation and present the role that we and other NGOs can have in addressing the deficits to civic education in the classroom and wider community.

Data Analysis: Civic Education Attainment Across Canada

While there is a severe lack of data on the level of civic education attainment across all provinces in Canada, what is available is alarming. In Quebec, 55% of residents reported not recalling learning anything about <u>civics</u>. Additionally, 21% of those surveyed in Alberta did not recall learning about civic education. Overall, about one third of Canadians do not recall learning about civic education in <u>school</u> and this is significant as a lack of understanding about the way which governments function leads to adults being <u>less likely</u> to vote.

The relationship between poor civic education and low voter turnout among youth is reinforced by Statistics Canada as they break down the reasons that youth do not vote in the table below.

Reasons for not voting	18-30 years old, %	31-46 years ols, %	47+ years old, %
Everyday life or health reasons	**41.5**	**32.5**	**32.7**
Own illness or disability	2.2	4.2	11.4 *_
Out of town or away from home	13.7	6.1 *_	9.8
Too busy	8.5	9.6	6.1
Conflicting school or work schedule	16.5	6.8 *_	3.1 *_
Polotical reasons	**32.4**	**42.5**	**38.2**
Not interested	11.3	16.7	18.6
Felt voting would mot make a difference in results	4.6	8.2	8.3
Did not like candidates or campaign issues	4.8	10.0	6.3
Nor informed on political issues	11.7	7.5	4.9 *_
Electoral process- related issues	**2.7**	**1.3**	**3.6**
All other issues	**23.5**	**23.8**	**25.5**

*_ significantly different from referencs category (ref.), (p<0.05)

Note: Due to small sample size, not all reasons are presented separately.
Souce: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Social Identity, 2020

Compared to other age groups, "not [being] informed on political issues" is a leading reason (11.7%) why youth (ages 18 to 30) do not vote. Despite this relationship, Statistics Canada notes that:

> *"although youth are less interested in politics than older adults and are less likely to vote in elections, they do engage in non-electoral political activities such as searching for information on political issues, signing internet petitions or boycotting or choosing products for ethical reasons".* *_

Based on this data, this report will explore three notions about the impact and role of civic education in Canada.

O1 First, civic education does not appear to promote trust or participation in our democratic institutions or processes.

O2 Second, while civic education may bolster interest in non-electoral political activities in civil society, current educational approaches do not enhance students' knowledge of traditional political processes and civic responsibilities.

O3 Third, the complexity of political engagement extends beyond understanding democratic institutions and civic duties. To be an active citizen requires a broad range of knowledge and skills, including economics, history, international relations and geopolitics, law, fact-checking across sources, and critical thinking. This breadth of knowledge is reflected in the non-electoral political activities youth engage in, such as signing internet petitions, making product choices based on ethical reasons, and navigating modern online spaces, which demand skills not typically covered in traditional civic education.

At the heart of the problem lie the shortcomings in the K-12 education system, notably:

- individual educators' lack of capacity to teach civics;

- schools' low prioritization of civics; and

- a dearth in the complex exploration of the various components that encompass civics.

These issues will be explored further in the next section.

Shortcomings in Institutional Civic Education: Examining Deficiencies Within the K-12 Schooling System Regarding Civic Education

The data on civic education in Canada shows that in its current state, it is delivered inconsistently across schools. According to CIVIX, a non-profit that works on advancing civic education in schools, civic education is an important educational goal across the country. However, the effectiveness of the education provided depends on the individual course and the personal interest and capacity of the teacher. *

Furthermore, civic education is not always delivered by experts. In the survey conducted of nearly 2000 Canadian teachers, aimed at assessing teachers' (K-12) perceptions of civic education, their teaching methods, and the barriers they face, CIVIX found that: **less than 50% of survey** respondents expressed low level of confidence in teaching these subjects.

I am confident teaching about politica and government :
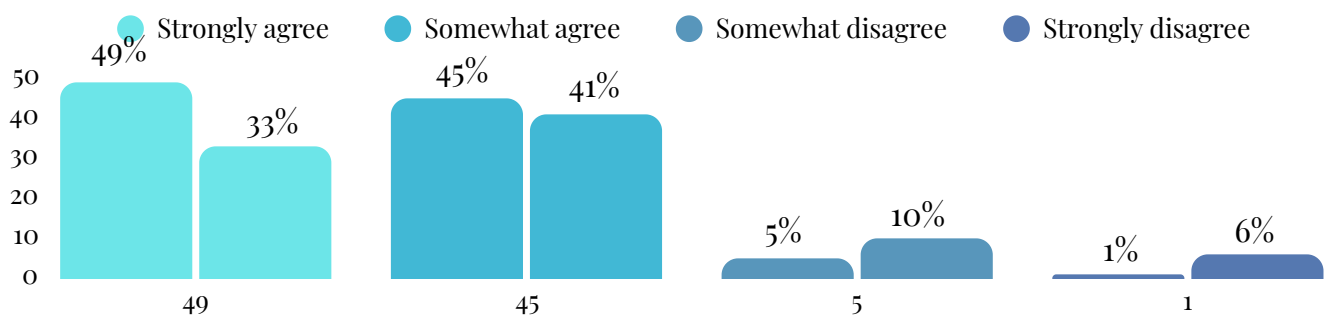
The top five barriers identified by teachers in delivering effective civic education were a lack of time due to high workloads, pressure to teach other subjects, low student interest, a lack of quality resources and a dearth of training. The lack of training was a key issue that came up consistently throughout the survey. Only a quarter (25%) of the educators surveyed believed that they received any formal pre-service training in civic education, while 48% of them strongly disagreed.

My pre-service education included formal training in civics:
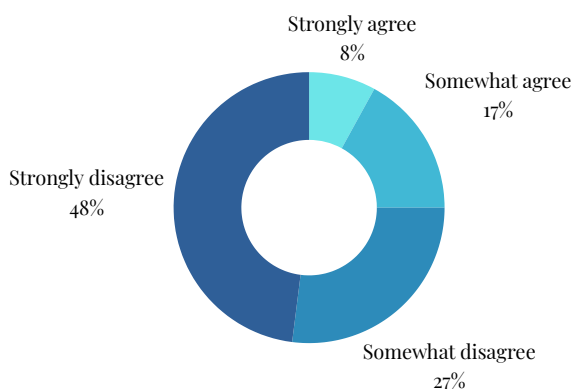
Additionally, the survey revealed that civic education is often deprioritized for STEM in teaching, with almost two-thirds (63%) of the teachers surveyed sharing this sentiment. Lastly, many educators reported dissonance between the topics they would like to teach and are expected to teach. According to teachers, the form of civic education prioritised by schools focuses on giving students an understanding of the political systems and an appreciation of Canadian institutions and laws. While this is important, many educators felt that civic education should also aim to equip students with the ability to question, think critically and engage with the community.

Another issue is the timing and delivery of civic education. According to a <u>2020 study</u>, the following courses were compulsory for high school graduation in each province or territory:

● **Alberta:** Grade 10-12 Social Studies

● **British Columbia:** Grade 10, 11 or 12 Social Studies

● **Manitoba:** Grade 9 Canada in the Contemporary World, Grade 10 Geographic Issues of the 21st Century, Grade 11 History of Canada

● **New Brunswick:** Grade 11 Modern History

● **Newfoundland and Labrador:** Grade 10 Canadian History, Grade 10 Canadian Geography, Grade 10 Social Studies, Grade 11 NL Studies, Grade 11 Labrador Inuit Society and Culture, or Grade 11 Mi'kmaq Studies, Grade 11 World Geography or World History

● **Northwest Territories:** Grade 10 Social Studies, Grade 10 Northern Studies, Grade 11 Social Studies

● **Northwest Territories:** Grade 10 Social Studies, Grade 10 Northern Studies, Grade 11 Social Studies

● **Nova Scotia:** Grade 11 African Canadian Studies, Grade 11 Canadian History, Grade 11 Gaelic Studies, Grade 11 Études acadiennes, or Grade 10 Mi'kmaq Studies, Grade 12 Global Geography, Global History, or Global Politics

● **Nunavut:** Grade 10 Inuuqatigiitsiarniq (Seeking Harmony), Grade 10 and 11 Aulajaaqtut (Social Studies)

● **Ontario:** Grade 9 Canadian Geography, Grade 10 Canadian History, Grade 10 Civics half-course

● **Prince Edward Island:** Two Social Studies courses from grades 10 to 12 required, one of which must include Canadian content

● **Quebec:** Secondary IV (Grade 10) History and Citizenship Education

● **Saskatchewan:** Grade 10 Social Studies, History, or Native Studies, Grade 11 Social Studies, History, or Native Studies Yukon, Grade 10 Social Studies, Grade 11 Social Studies, Grade 11 Canadian Civics, or Grade 12 Yukon First Nations Studies.

Although this data is somewhat outdated, it reflects the reality of civic education for many young voters today. At that time, the only compulsory courses were in Ontario, which offered a dedicated half-credit civics course, and Quebec, which combined civics with history. British Columbia had civics as an elective. Today, mandatory civics courses have expanded, with Nova Scotia introducing Citizenship 9 and New Brunswick Civics 10. However, civic education remains primarily concentrated in high school with limited emphasis and continuity, unlike subjects such as STEM and languages, which build upon foundational knowledge over time.

An ideal civic education would develop similarly to other subjects, starting with basic concepts in elementary school and advancing to more complex topics in high school, potentially including four years of civics in high school. This approach would address two significant gaps: the curriculum (insufficient civic education) and knowledge gaps (lack of expertise to teach civics effectively). Extending civics education throughout a student's academic journey would increase the amount of civic education delivered and justify the need for specialized teachers or training in civic education. However, this is a long-term and costly process. In the short term, these gaps can be addressed through partnerships with NGOs to enhance civic education.

Role of NGO Partners: Exploration of the potential contributions of NGO partnerships in addressing civic education gaps

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can play a crucial role in addressing these gaps. They can contribute in two main ways: i) by addressing gaps in the curriculum and ii) by addressing lack of expertise within classrooms relating to specific topics. For example:

The Engage Foundation can significantly improve civic education in schools by offering a comprehensive suite of services including workshops, research, mentorship, and curriculum development on civics and social citizenship. Founded in 2022, Engage aims to empower marginalized youth and foster equitable policies.

Workshops

Engage provides dynamic training sessions on civic processes and current affairs. These workshops are designed to engage students in interactive learning experiences, enhancing their understanding of democracy, governance, and their roles as citizens.

Research

Engage's team of policy analysts, public relations experts, and doctoral researchers produce informative reports on key civic issues. These reports serve as valuable resources for both educators and students, offering in-depth insights into topics such as public healthcare, affordable housing, and youth-centered innovation policy.

Mentorship

Engage connects students with mentors who are experts in various fields related to civic engagement and social citizenship. Through one-on-one and group mentoring sessions, students receive guidance and support, helping them develop the skills and confidence needed to become active participants in their communities.

Curriculum Development

Engage collaborates with schools to develop and enhance civics education curricula. By integrating comprehensive and up-to-date content on civic processes, social justice, and community involvement, Engage ensures that students receive a well-rounded education that prepares them for active citizenship.

Through these services, the Engage Foundation works alongside community partners to train the next generation of change makers, ensuring that students are well-equipped to navigate and contribute to the complex world around them.

Additional examples include:

Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF):
a Canadian charity that aims to "promote, through education, the knowledge, skills, values, perspectives, and practices essential to a sustainable future"(LSF, 2018). It works with governments, school boards, and system administrators and engages in consultations with other community stakeholders. LSF classroom programs prioritise grade 7-8 education across Ontario, New Brunswick, and Manitoba. Key programs include Water Docs at School; delivering a free curriculum to educate students on water stewardship; funding for student-led sustainability projects; and youth forums that engage students in sustainability issues to develop action oriented skills and knowledge.

Equitas is a global leader in the human rights education movement that aims to further "equality, social justice and respect for human dignity through transformative human rights education programs in Canada". Equitas has engaged in civic education before through several partnerships through their community action projects (CAPs) specifically 8 English Montreal School Board (EMSB) schools to CAPs with the goal of enhancing inclusivity in their schools. This is alongside their library of online resources and tools for human rights (Equitas, 2014).

The Aga Khan Foundation has the Inspiring Global Citizens Educator Guide that is designed to equip educators with the tools they need to teach about sustainable development and global citizenship. It provides educators with activities, student assignments, videos, discussion guides, exploration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and real-world examples to examine and learn from.

Youth Ottawa works primarily in civics classes to implement the "Active Citizenship" curricular strand, but has worked with other courses in the past, from Environmental Science to Grade 9, 10, and 12 Religion Classes. The program is operated by Youth Action Facilitators that run an 8 week visit program designed to help youth engage in personally meaningful issues. This program is broken into three main parts: "1) introduces youth to active and engaged citizenship, allows them to choose an issue to work on together, and channels their creativity by brainstorming potential solutions; 2) Allows youth to develop an "Action Plan" – a series of interconnected activities intended to have a positive impact on the community by making use of civic "tactics" like petitions, surveys, lobbying, etc.; 3) Youth initiate their Action Plans – actually "do" what they imagine – and learn from the experience." (YouthOttawa, n/a). Teachers can request a resource guide that includes lesson plans, activity sheets, a civic "tactics toolkit", and evaluation options

Challenges for NGOs in Civic Education

Scholar <u>Sofia Mirayee</u> has identified a significant challenge to establishing sustained NGO-school partnerships: a lack of funding and capacity. Many NGOs struggle to secure the necessary funding to support educational programs effectively, leading to insufficient staffing to maintain a regular presence in schools.

One example highlighted by Mirayee is the 2011 Global Education Project, funded by the Australian government and run by AusAID. This NGO developed resources, educated teachers, and participated in school projects. However, without permanent government funding, the project eventually collapsed. Despite initial funding, it was short-staffed and struggled to offer consistent school programs and teacher support.

Mirayee also points out potential external influences that NGOs might bring into the classroom:

● Prioritization of funding over education

● Using schools to increase NGO reach rather than build awareness for core issues

● Consumer-focused marketing strategies emphasizing brand over critical thinking and analysis

● Commercialization of the classroom through corporate sponsorships

● Ideological biases

A more effective approach would be to fund local NGOs directly, allowing them to work with nearby schools. This localized strategy ensures that those most invested in their communities can remain effective without being distracted by the need for organizational growth and reach. By decentralizing and empowering local NGOs, schools can benefit from focused and consistent support tailored to their specific needs.

Another set of examples comes from <u>Louisa Slavkova and Maja Kurilić</u>. They surveyed 434 European civic educators in non-formal and informal settings across multiple countries, including Albania, Austria, Belgium, and others. They highlighted several key challenges faced by European NGOs in civic education:

01   **Topic-Specific Focus:** NGOs often concentrate on specific issues, which can lead to a lack of holistic civic education.

02   **Funding Discrepancies:** There are significant discrepancies in regional, national, and *‒ supranational funding. Countries with stronger democracies and economies tend to invest more in their NGOs and interfere less in their civic work.

03   **Need for Collaboration and Information Sharing:** Successful civic education requires collaboration and information sharing. Examples include Slovakia's national framework for NGOs focused on civic education, Austria's national platform for citizenship education, and France's national committee on civic education involving both the government and NGOs.

The European findings echo the challenges observed in the 2011 Australian project, where funding and capacity building are crucial issues. The survey conducted by Slavkova and Kurilić found significant training needs among European civic educators:

01   **Impact Evaluation and Evaluative Learning:** 46.1% of respondents indicated a need for further training, with higher percentages in Belgium, Finland, and Luxembourg.

02   **Securing Funding:** 45.3% of respondents required additional training, particularly in *‒ North Macedonia, Lithuania, Italy, Luxembourg, Czechia, Portugal, Greece, and Malta.

03   **Innovation and Foresight Thinking:** 42.4% of respondents indicated a need for training.

European NGOs also highlighted needs in communication, organizational development, working with media, building and maintaining partnerships, advocacy, collaboration with local and international partners, working with public institutions, knowledge exchange, volunteer management, strategy, mission and vision development, financial management, and project management.

These challenges highlight the limited scalability of NGO programs, affecting the availability and quality of NGO-assisted civic education. For example, an Ontario-based NGO might struggle to expand into Alberta due to the financial and time costs associated with recruiting and training staff in new locations. This limitation suggests that a resource-based approach, reaching a broader audience, might be more effective than bringing NGO staff directly into classrooms.

Canada, with its federal structure, can learn from the EU's approach. Provincial networks of NGOs in civic education and a federal network, similar to the desired Pan-European network among European NGOs, would be beneficial. Additionally, creating a platform for dialogue between federal and provincial governments and NGOs, as seen in France, Austria, and Slovakia, is crucial. Finally, shifting from project-based grants to more sustainable funding mechanisms, such as core funding or multi-year grants, would enhance the effectiveness and stability of NGO-school partnerships.

Conclusion

The gaps in Canada's civic education have far-reaching implications for our democracy, leading to disengagement and a lack of informed participation among citizens. Addressing these gaps requires a multifaceted approach, and NGOs can play a pivotal role in this effort.

Organizations like Engage, Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF), Equitas, the Aga Khan Foundation, and Youth Ottawa offer diverse programs that can enhance civic education through workshops, mentorship, curriculum development, and community engagement. These NGOs bring specialized knowledge and resources that can support educators and provide students with the comprehensive understanding necessary for active citizenship.

Challenges such as funding and capacity constraints hinder the scalability and consistency of NGO contributions. However, by adopting a localized approach and providing targeted funding to community-based NGOs, schools can leverage these partnerships to deliver high-quality civic education tailored to their specific needs.

Engage is dedicated to bridging the civic education gap by empowering youth through dynamic training sessions, insightful research, and robust mentorship programs. By integrating comprehensive civic education into the school curriculum, Engage aims to prepare the next generation of informed and active citizens, ensuring a vibrant and participatory democracy.

Through sustained efforts and collaboration with educational institutions and community partners, we can create an environment where civic education is prioritized, and students are equipped with the skills and knowledge to navigate and contribute to the complex world around them. Engage remains committed to this mission, striving to enhance civic engagement and foster a more informed and involved youth population in Canada.