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New Laws Requiring Students to Pass Citizenship Tests Could be Harmful to Young People’s Education

Nation’s Leading Youth Researchers Call New Tests, “Not Just Insufficient, but Counterproductive”

Medford/Somerville, MA – The [Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement \(CIRCLE\)](#) today warned that the new laws passed recently in Arizona and North Dakota requiring students to pass the U.S. citizenship exam before graduating could actually be “counterproductive”.

[In a blog posted on CIRCLE’s website today](#), the preeminent, non-partisan research center on youth engagement based at Tufts University’s Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service stated, **“we believe that these new policies are not just insufficient, but could actually be counterproductive to educating our young people to be knowledgeable and engaged citizens.”**

CIRCLE has long studied what makes for strong civic education in America’s classrooms and has been an unbiased advocate for stronger, richer civic education curriculum to equip young people with the skills they need to become active, engaged participants in our

democracy.

CIRCLE goes on to state in their blog post that, “Excellent civic education involves more than the rote memorization of facts about the history and structure of our democracy; it requires engaging with that democracy by acquiring and applying skills like deliberation, critical thinking, and media literacy. Assessments, test-based or otherwise, should explicitly value and evaluate those competencies.”

Warning that the passage of new laws could have an unintended and reverse effect, CIRCLE further states, **“The problem of civic education in America is one of quality and depth. Mandating the U.S. citizenship exam does nothing to address that problem, and may exacerbate it. Students, teachers, and administrators faced with a very simple but high-stakes test may neglect deeper and more meaningful civic skills; the test may actually reduce the amount of time and attention devoted to civics and social studies.”**

In addition to today’s blog post, CIRCLE’s director and Associate Dean of Tisch College, Peter Levine, authored the [“Opposing View” editorial in USA Today](#). In the *USA Today* editorial commentary, Levine stated, **“Requiring students to pass the citizenship exam will reduce both the amount and the quality of civic education in our schools.”** Levine continues, **“The problem with civics is not that we fail to teach it. The problem is that civics is often viewed as a set of disconnected facts, not as a challenging and inspiring subject that will continue to interest us after high school.”**

For a comprehensive view and further research on K-12 civic education in America’s schools, including the latest studies and analysis on the topic, please visit CIRCLE’s civic education research topic located on their website, [here](#).

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CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org) is a nonpartisan, independent, academic research center that studies young people in politics and presents detailed data on young voters in all 50 states. CIRCLE is

part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University.

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service (<http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/>) is a national leader whose model and research are setting the standard for higher education's role in civic engagement education. Serving every school of Tufts University, Tisch College creates an enduring culture that prepares students to be lifelong active citizens.

Tufts University (<http://www.tufts.edu/>), located on three Massachusetts campuses in Boston, Medford/Somerville and Grafton, and in Talloires, France, is recognized as one of the premier research universities in the United States. Tufts enjoys a global reputation for academic excellence and for the preparation of students as leaders in a wide range of professions. A growing number of innovative teaching and research initiatives span all Tufts campuses, and collaboration among the faculty and students in the undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs across the university's schools is widely encouraged.