



MEMORANDUM

To: Commissioners of the Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission
From: R. Suskey, The Ohio Center for Law-Related Education
Subject: Evaluation criteria for creation of education materials for classroom educators
Date: 01/15/15

The Ohio Center for Law-Related education serves as the primary civics education organization for Ohio, and is most well-known for administering the High School Mock Trial program. After years of experience working with educators around Ohio, OCLRE program criteria have been honed to meet the following aims:

- 1) The materials and programs are useful to teachers
- 2) The materials and programs are practical in their application
- 3) The materials and programs reflect best practices within the field

Although balancing these aims can be challenging, we have found that incorporating all of them makes it most likely that educators will implement the programs in their classrooms.

1) The materials and programs are useful to teachers

Teachers in Ohio are facing an ever-increasing list of curricular requirements, making many reluctant to take on new programs or materials. In order to overcome this hesitancy, we have found that materials “sell” better when they are of high value to educators. Value can generally be measured by the following:

- The program or materials require little to no resource creation on behalf of the teachers—this includes having lesson plans, worksheets/assignments, grading rubrics, etc.
- The program does not require significant investment of time in the teacher’s curriculum and/or is flexible to an extent that it can be adapted to fit into available time
- If program includes a culminating activity or assessment, the timing of this activity/assessment is at the discretion of the educator
- The materials/program are fully aligned to Ohio’s New Learning Standards at any applicable grade level, with the standards clearly marked within the materials
- The materials/program fulfills multiple learning standards (at least 5)
- The materials/program can take the place of a unit or lesson teachers are already required to teach

2) The materials and programs are practical in their application

It is essential that designers take into consideration the reality of most teachers’ environments. Teachers do not always have flexibility in timing, content, resource allocation, and a host of other factors that can make implementing a new program difficult. Acknowledging other stakeholders and easing the burden on educators increases the likelihood of successful implementation. Practicality can generally be measured by the following:

- The materials include information that teachers can share with principals, school boards, or superintendents to help justify the new addition

- The program/materials do not have a cost for teachers
- The program/materials are accessible both digitally and in hard-copy
- The program/materials include instructions for teachers and resources to close any potential gaps in their own knowledge of the content

3) The materials and programs reflect best practices within the field

In addition to meeting curricular standards that teachers are required to meet, designers should also ensure that they are integrating accepted best practices within the field of social studies education. With the next generation assessments being instituted in Ohio (PARCC), the materials should also be designed to help support literacy and math skills across the curriculum. This can largely be accomplished by the following:

- The program/materials help teachers employ one or more of the Six Proven Practices of Civics Education (produced by the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, see attached)
- The program/materials are written at an appropriate literacy level (should be in the “Stretch Lexile Band” published by the writers of the PARCC exam for each grade level)
- Materials include advice to scaffold the lessons (draw back the material in increments to ensure students can build upon each piece of knowledge) and make modifications/accommodations for students with IEPs



Six Proven Practices of Civic Education

- 1. Classroom Instruction:** Schools should provide instruction in civics & government, history, economics, geography, law, and democracy. Formal instruction in these subjects increases civic knowledge and increases young people's tendency to engage in civic and political activities over the long term. However, schools should avoid teaching only rote facts about dry procedures, which is unlikely to benefit students and may actually alienate them from civic engagement.
- 2. Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Issues:** Schools should incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events in to the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives. When students have an opportunity to discuss current issues in a classroom setting, they tend to have a greater interest in civic life and politics as well as improved critical thinking and communication skills.
- 3. Service-Learning:** Schools should design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.
- 4. Extracurricular Activities:** Schools should offer opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities outside of the classroom. Studies show that students who participate in extracurricular activities in school remain more civically engaged than those who did not, even decades later.
- 5. School Governance:** Schools should encourage meaningful student participation in school governance. Giving students more opportunities to participate in the management of their classrooms and schools builds their civic skills and attitudes.
- 6. Simulations of Democratic Processes:** Schools should encourage students to participate in simulations of democratic processes and procedures. Evidence shows that simulations of voting, trials, legislative deliberation and democracy, leads to heightened civic/political knowledge and interest.