

[House Bill \(HB\) 535 \(2024\)](#) amends [KRS 158.141](#) to require, **beginning with students entering grade 9 in the 2025-2026 academic year**, the successful completion of a one-half (1/2) credit course in civic literacy or a civics test in order to graduate with a regular diploma from a Kentucky public high school. This requirement also applies to students participating in the Early Graduation Program (EGP) established under [KRS 158.142](#).

To meet the civic literacy requirement, districts shall implement at least one of the following options:

1. A one-half (1/2) civic literacy credit in addition to the existing 3 social studies credits required for graduation;
2. A one-half (1/2) civic literacy credit embedded within the existing 3 social studies credits required for graduation;
3. A civics test composed of one hundred (100) questions drawn from those that are set forth within the civics test administered by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to persons seeking to become naturalized citizens.

OPTION 1: One-half (1/2) civic literacy credit in addition to the 3 social studies credits required under 704 KAR 3:305

In order to support young people in becoming more effective citizens and problem solvers, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) Office of Teaching and Learning **strongly supports** implementation of a one-half (1/2) credit standalone civics course option, in addition to the existing three social studies credits currently required for graduation, to promote student engagement in their local, regional and global communities. Student engagement in a civic literacy course would support an understanding of the fundamental values and principles of America's democratic republic, using civic mindedness to be informed citizens, fostering civic dispositions and promoting life-long participation in the political process. Several programs can support districts in this work, such as the Civics Seal from the Secretary of State Office or Project Citizen from the Center for Civic Education.

Specifically, HB 535(5) requires a one-half (1/2) credit course in civic literacy that shall include but not be limited to instruction in the following areas:

- An overview of America's founding history, including but not limited to key texts; the role and operations of local, state, and national governments; the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; federalism; civil liberties; and civil rights;
- Principles of the United States government;
- The Constitution of Kentucky and the Constitution of the United States;
- Institutions of the United States government and the responsibilities of the executive branch, legislative branch, and judicial branch;
- State government and local governments and the role of each;
- Political parties and interest groups;
- Campaigns and elections;
- United States Congress;
- Domestic policy;
- Foreign policy;
- Comparative systems;
- International relations; and
- Major issues facing government.

As one of the four disciplinary strands of the [Kentucky Academic Standards \(KAS\) for Social Studies](#), civics is included in each grade K-8 and high school. According to the *KAS for Social Studies*, "Civics is the study of the rights and duties of citizenship. Knowledge about the structures of power, authority and governance and their evolving functions in contemporary society is essential if young citizens are to develop civic responsibility. Young people become more



effective citizens and problem solvers when they know how local, state and national governments and international organizations function and interact.” Within the civics strand, a variety of concepts and practices are addressed throughout a child’s K-12 education. These concepts and practices, as well as their descriptions, are as follows:

- **Civic and Political Institutions:** Knowledge of law, politics and government are essential to understanding the important institutions of society and the principles these institutions are intended to reflect.
- **Roles and Responsibilities of Citizens:** Exemplifying the characteristics of productive citizenship includes adherence to and understanding of the social contract, consent of the governed, limited government, legitimate authority, federalism and separation of powers. It also includes civic dispositions, such as honesty, mutual respect, cooperation and attentiveness to multiple perspectives, citizens should use when they interact with each other on public matters. It means understanding the diverse arguments made about the underlying principles and founding documents and their meanings.
- **Civic Virtues and Democratic Principles:** Understanding democratic principles, such as equality, freedom, liberty and respect for individual rights, and how they apply to both official institutions and informal interactions among citizens is a fundamental concept of being a citizen in a democratic republic. Learning civic virtues and democratic principles requires obtaining factual knowledge of written provisions found in important texts, such as the founding documents of the United States.
- **Process, Rules and Laws:** Determining how groups of people make decisions, govern themselves and address public problems is a key component of functioning in a democratic republic. People address problems at all scales, from a classroom to the agreements among nations. Public policies are among the tools that governments use to address public problems.
- **Kentucky Government:** Kentucky’s government influenced the history and culture of the citizens of Kentucky. These standards promote understanding of the functions of local government where applicable.

Civic engagement occurs when an individual or group works with others to address an issue of public interest or concern to make a difference in the community. The *KAS for Social Studies* requires students to be active members of their community starting in kindergarten, in part, through the “Communicating Conclusions” standards. When students engage with the “Communicating Conclusions” standards, students should have opportunities to:

- Synthesize information to construct new understandings, which will become the foundation for civic engagement;
- Construct explanations and arguments;
- Engage in deliberative and democratic procedures; and
- Act civically by identifying and addressing problems.

Furthermore, a one-half (1/2) credit standalone civic literacy course, in addition to the three credits currently required, would support Kentucky educators in meeting [KRS 158.6450](#), which requires schools to provide instruction in voter registration and election procedures in grade 12. KRS 158.6450 establishes:

“[K]nowledge of procedures for voter registration and participation in elections is essential for all Kentucky students to acquire the capacities established in KRS 158.645(2) and (4). Instruction in election procedures is consistent with the goals of responsible citizenship established in KRS 158.6451. Every secondary school shall provide students in the twelfth grade information on:

- (a) How to register to vote;*
- (b) How to vote in an election using a ballot; and,*
- (c) How to vote using an absentee ballot.*

A school may provide this information through classroom activities, written materials, electronic communication, Internet resources, participation in mock elections, and other methods identified by the principal after consulting with teachers.”

Therefore, a one-half (1/2) **credit in addition to the 3 social studies credits required under 704 KAR 3:305** would provide additional time for Kentucky educators to implement this requirement for high school graduation to its full potential while preparing young people for a successful transition into civic life.

OPTION 2: One-half (1/2) credit within the 3 social studies credits required under 704 KAR 3:305

Per 704 KAR 3:305, three credits for social studies are required for high school graduation:

- (4)(b) Social studies - two (2) credits to include the content contained in the Kentucky academic standards for this content area; and
- (5)(d) One (1) additional social studies credit that includes the content contained in the Kentucky academic standards for this content area and is aligned to the student's individual learning plan.

The three social studies credits must incorporate the inquiry practices of questioning, investigating, using evidence and communicating conclusions and the four social studies disciplines of civics, economics, geography and history and the standards therein. In Kentucky, the discipline strands in social studies are meant to be taught in unison. Students recall and understand themes and topics better if the social studies strands are integrated and not taught in isolation. Districts and schools can arrange the essential content within the three-credit requirement to best meet their needs.

Therefore, the one-half (1/2) civic literacy credit requirement may be embedded within the existing 3 social studies credits required for graduation. However, it is important to note that when students complete the three-credit requirement of social studies in high school, they must have had the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of **all** of the *KAS for Social Studies*, including the civics strand, within those credits, **and** they must receive the instruction outlined in the one-half (1/2) civic literacy credit outlined in HB 535.

The KDE has created a three-course social studies series as an additional option for schools and districts to meet the minimum high school graduation requirements for social studies: [Social Studies 1](#), [2](#) and [3](#).

The social studies courses are intended to:

- Offer schools an additional, integrated way to meet minimum high school graduation requirements for social studies; and
- Offer a pathway to ensure that students receive instruction in all of the *KAS for Social Studies* during the course sequence.

For more information, including course descriptions, visit the [Searchable State Course Codes Database \(SSCD\)](#).

OPTION 3: Civics Test

A local board of education may choose the option to administer the civics test to meet the civic literacy requirement of HB 535. The civics test must be composed of 100 questions drawn from those that are set forth within the civics test administered by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to persons seeking to become naturalized citizens. A student shall not receive a regular high school diploma until the student successfully complete the test requirements provided below.

Should the local board of education choose the option to administer the civics test, the following parameters must be met:

- Students shall be provided with the opportunity to take the test as many times as necessary for the student to pass the test **without the use of instructional aids** during testing, including but not limited to textbooks and internet browser searching.



- A student shall be considered to have **successfully completed the test if at least seventy percent (70%) of the questions are answered correctly.**
- A student who has passed a similar test within the previous five (5) years may provide the board with evidence of successful completion and shall not be required to take the test.
- **By September 1, 2026, and each year thereafter,** each school district requiring a civics test for graduation **shall submit annual testing data** to the KDE, which shall include:
 - The first-time successful completion rate of the civics test; and
 - The average number of times a student takes the civics test for successful completion.
- Schools and districts must meet the requirements and accommodations of a student's individualized education program (IEP) as defined in [KRS 158.281](#) or a Section 504 Plan as defined in [KRS 156.027](#).