

Project Scope

The Instructional Production Unit of the Wisconsin Educational Communications Board (ECB) Education Division began creation of a Democracy Education curriculum project — titled ***Democracy It Is!*** — as the fourth component of the ECB’s *Wisconsin Studies* media materials collection. The scope of the ***Democracy It Is!*** project moves beyond traditional textbook treatment of government and civics to actively model democratic participation by students who are expressing their rights and responsibilities as effective citizens engaged civically in their classrooms, schools, communities, state, and nation.

The project’s focus on government is broad and includes active participation in local, state, and tribal government, with references to federal government. Content strands include, but are not limited to, service learning; character education; core democratic values; student leadership; civic responsibility and engagement; and social action, justice, and change. Skills addressed include inquiry and investigation; media literacy; collaborative group work; critical thinking; and communication, debate, and participation.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) clearly stated its position on the importance of democracy education in May 2001:

“The NCSS believes that a primary goal of public education is to prepare students to be engaged and effective citizens. NCSS has defined an effective citizen as one who has the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to assume the “office of citizen” in our democratic republic. To accomplish this goal, every student must participate in citizenship education activities each year. Throughout the curriculum and at every grade level, students should have opportunities to apply their civic knowledge, skills, and values as they work to solve real problems in their school, the community, our nation, and the world. These opportunities should be part of a well-planned and organized citizenship education program.”¹

The need for both classroom resources and teacher professional development in democracy education is well documented in the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction’s (DPI) *Wisconsin Civics Action Task Force Report*. This report, published in 2000, states:

“...our students are entitled to and must have an effective and meaningful education for democratic citizenship in order to insure continuation of our democratic way of life. The task force is aware that many excellent resources exist to help students learn the knowledge and skills of civics, but finds that more and higher quality resources are needed to promote civics action. Professional development for teachers in a Democracy Citizenship Education Initiative is vital in helping Wisconsin students to be lifelong participants in

¹ *Creating Effective Citizens. A position statement* from the National Council for the Social Studies, May 2001.

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this nation's democracy. The Civics Action Task Force strongly recommends the development and implementation of a state-of-the-art professional development program for democratic citizenship education."²

In the aftermath of the attacks on the United States in September 2001, there has been much more discussion about the importance of civic education and participation in K-12 classrooms. The ECB took the lead in following DPI and NCSS recommendations by convening a ***Democracy It Is!*** [Advisory Committee](#) of content experts in November 2003. This group is responsible for the instructional design of new and effective curriculum materials and teacher professional development, and includes staff representing the DPI, the Wisconsin Historical Society, the State Bar of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies, Madison Children's Museum, Wisconsin Public Television, Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, as well as school districts and universities throughout Wisconsin. (See [Collaborators](#) for a complete listing.)

² *Wisconsin Civics Action Task Force Report: Recommendations for Democratic Citizenship Education*. DPI, February 2000; pgs. v, 7.