

Letters

Voice of the People

Letter: Save our democracy

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Illinois is one of 10 states that doesn't require a civics course to graduate high school despite research that civic learning translates into civic action.

State Rep. Deborah Conroy (D-Villa Park) introduced legislation to have Illinois join the majority of states that mandates civics. House Bill 4025 recommends a civics education requirement for Illinois public high schools, and House Bill 4024 requires the State Board of Education to ensure that teachers have access to professional development activities in civics education.

Studies show that students who receive effective civics learning are more likely to vote and discuss politics at home, four times more likely to volunteer and work on community issues, and are more confident to speak publicly and communicate with elected representatives. In fact, high-quality civics learning contributes to lower dropout rates. These statistics are true even with variables for income and race.

Civics learning promotes civic equality, meaning that poor, minority, urban or rural students perform considerably higher for having received civics learning than their peers do. Comprehensive civics education that aims to reach all public school students would likely decrease the "civic achievement gap" evidenced by the research.

A Paul Simon Institute poll revealed that more than 70 percent of Illinoisans favor a high school civics course requirement for graduation. Moreover, the integrity and health of democracy in Illinois depends on the active, informed and effective participation of Illinoisans. Everyone gains from a civically literate population where individuals have the knowledge, disposition and skills to make a difference in their communities and hold government accountable.

— *Maryam Judar, executive director and community lawyer, Citizen Advocacy Center, Elmhurst*

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