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Letter: Support bill requiring high school civics classes in Illinois

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

Rep. Deborah Conroy, D-Villa Park, introduced legislation to have Illinois join the majority of states that mandates civics. House bills 4025 and 4024 require a civics course to graduate high school and prepares teachers for teaching civics.

Studies show that students who receive effective civic 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 in speaking publicly and communicating with elected representatives. In fact, high-quality civic learning contributes to lower dropout rates. These statistics are true even with variables for income and race.

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

A Paul Simon Institute poll revealed that 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.

By teaching high school students the importance of being civically engaged in high school, Illinois will be better prepared to face the future.

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