

I. Cover Page



State Office: Kentucky Secretary of State Michael Adams

Program title: Kentucky Civic Seal Program

Description of the program: The Kentucky Civic Seal program recognizes Kentucky students at all levels (elementary, middle, and high schoolers) who demonstrate exceptional civic performance through exhibiting their understanding, application, and reflection upon local, state, and national governance; commitment to democratic principles and promoting the common good; informed participation in civic spaces; and reflection upon their role in modern civic life. The seal may be earned at each of the three grade-band commencements

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Subject area: Civics

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II. Executive Summary

1. History

The Kentucky Civic Seal program is a partnership between the Kentucky Secretary of State's Office and the Kentucky Civic Education Coalition (KCEC), an arm of the Kentucky Council for Social Studies.

The partnership began in 2022 when Secretary of State Michael Adams saw the need for increased civic literacy in the state and joined the Kentucky Civic Education Coalition. The organization seeks to increase civic literacy among Kentucky students.

Kentucky is one of just a few states that does not require a specific civic education course in high school. Current high school graduation requirements only require three years of social studies, with passage of the U.S. Citizenship test needed to graduate. The current civic education requirements are failing Kentucky students to become civically engaged adults.

A 2023 Civic Health Assessment conducted by Secretary Adams found that just half of Kentuckians could name all three branches of government and under half could name a local legislator, state legislator, and most constitutional officers. The assessment also found that very few Kentuckians mix civics with interpersonal relations.¹

A lack of civic education is not unique to Kentucky. Nationally, civics education is funded at five cents per student while STEM education is funded at \$50 per student. Furthermore, a recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment and the American Bar Association's Survey of Civic Literacy demonstrate how recent approaches to civic education are insufficient in preparing students for civic life.²

While learning applied sciences are important for building a 21st Century workforce, so too is civics education. It is easy to segregate civics only to the realm of developing good citizens, which is important; but research from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and Harvard University also find civics education also develops good workers. Their findings show that civics education is one of the best ways to develop many of the soft skills needed in the modern workplace such as interpersonal relations, tolerance, discernment, and intellectual curiosity.³

The Kentucky Civic Seal program seeks to fill the gap in civic education to get students civically engaged while in school. The Kentucky Civic Seal allows students starting in elementary school to go above and beyond the current social studies requirements to become good citizens.

2. Significance

The Civic Seal Program is an innovative program that allows students to become civically engaged without expending extra resources for the Commonwealth or the school district. The program is designed to be administered in addition to social studies classwork.

In 2023, the Civic Seal Advisory Board was created to help craft the criteria for the Civic Seal. The group was comprised of educators, government officials, local organizations, and civic organizations. It was important to Secretary Adams and KCEC that local school districts maintained control over their specific projects as issues that are important in Louisville would be vastly different than those in Paducah or

¹ 2023 Civic Health assessment: <https://www.sos.ky.gov/civic-initiatives/Pages/Civic-Health-Assessment.aspx>

² United We Stand: Examining Core Criteria for the Kentucky Civic Seal Program: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PhHhZmdktw8pGWMxL_jztvYI3WmxneKf/view

³ <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/civics/business-case-civics-education>

Pikeville. By being flexible to different communities, the Civic Seal can address more limited opportunities for civic engagement.

The criteria aims to get students involved in their community in a nonpartisan way. To obtain a seal, students must complete all four components:

- Complete a civic engagement project
- Demonstrate knowledge and applied understanding of government and democratic principles
- Demonstrate an understanding of information literacy
- Demonstrate a high level of self-reflection

The criteria allows students the opportunity to not only become more engaged in the community but also to learn how to dissect and find credible information.

Complete a civic engagement project

The civic engagement project requires the student to create or engage in a real-world issue of their choice. Students can work individually or with a group to research and identify what issue they would like to address, assess how to address the issue, identify the proper stakeholders, design and implement a project to address the issue, and then apply the project outside of the classroom. It was important for Secretary Adams that work for the Seal was done outside of the classroom, to allow students to gain real-life knowledge of the issue. Applied Civics – where students apply civic learning to real-world issues - impacts the students' civic and political competencies, while also contributing to academic and social outcomes. ²

Demonstrate knowledge and applied understanding of government and democratic principles

For students to be properly civically engaged, they must not only be informed about the issue but also know how to engage with stakeholders. This requires students to properly navigate local, state, and federal government. To obtain the Seal, students must display an understanding of the various forms of government or civic spaces. Learning how to successfully navigate political spaces can make students feel more engaged in school, while also increasing the likelihood of civic and political engagement once they graduate. ²

Demonstrate an understanding of information literacy

To be able to properly identify governance and democratic principles requires students to properly identify information sources. In the Internet age, it is becoming increasingly harder for students to identify accurate sources. To obtain the Seal, students must be able to regularly find and identify credible, reliable, and varied sources.

Demonstrate a high level of self-reflection

The Seal requires students to show growth in civic knowledge and skills by being able to reflect on the challenges and successes of their projects. Self-reflection is key to being able to fully engage in democratic life.

3. Impact

Starting in the 2023-2024 school year, ten schools across the state began piloting the Seal. The purpose of the pilot was to learn about the enactment of the Seal, create resources, and consider administrative supports to help sustain the program. ⁴

⁴ Kentucky Civic Education Coalition: <https://www.kysscouncil.org/kcec.html>

The pilot schools were from various regions of the state, helping to provide an idea of how the program could work in rural and urban areas. Seven counties were included in the pilot: Boone, Fayette, Franklin, Greenup Jefferson, Johnson, and Todd.

The first Seals were issued in the Fall of 2024, 20 students in two high schools completed the program to obtain the Kentucky Civic Seal. Additionally, 60 post-secondary education students studying education at the University of Kentucky completed the program to obtain the Seal. Students at Seneca High School in Louisville completed a project about gun safety and access in Kentucky and how it relates to school safety. Students at Henry Clay High School in Lexington focused on several local issues, including the urban service boundary of Fayette County, public safety in the Lexington Urban County, and affordable housing in Lexington.

The projects of the post-secondary students varied from local to state issues. Some of the issues included, animal shelter welfare, the Kentucky bussing crisis, student housing crisis, and parking issues at the University of Kentucky.

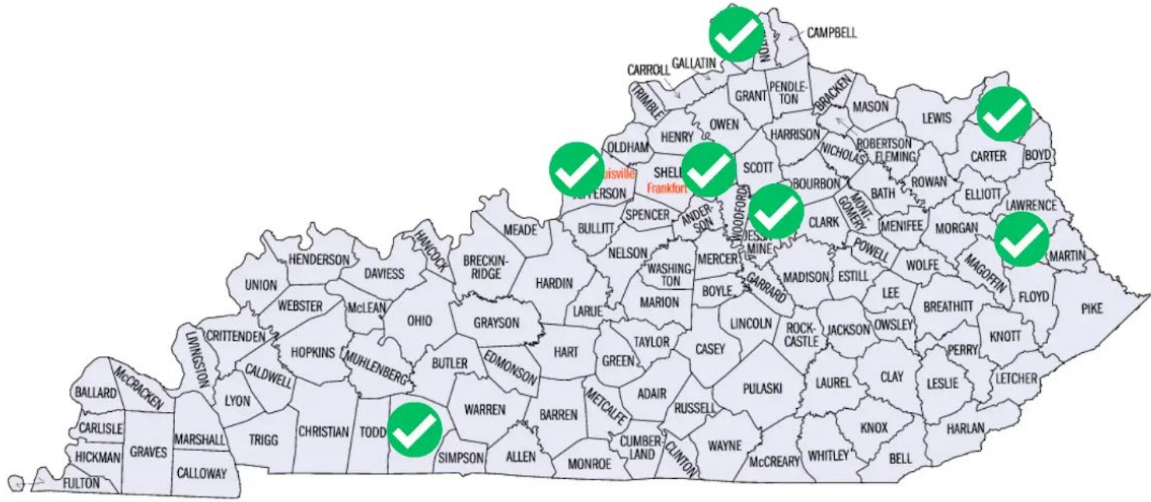
Each student was able to grow their understanding of civics through their work on the program and identify the proper channels to engage on their specific issue.

The feedback from the participating schools has been positive and we anticipate more districts will begin offering the program to their students. As a result, students in Kentucky will be better prepared to become civically engaged adults.

III. Supporting Documents



Civic Seal Certificate



Kentucky Civic Seal Pilot Map (created by Kentucky Civic Education Coalition)