



Affirming Support for Alternatives to the USCIS Naturalization Test As a High Stakes Measure in Texas



*A Joint Position Statement of
The Texas Council for the Social Studies &
The Texas Social Studies Supervisors Association*

Introduction

The Texas Council for the Social Studies in conjunction with the Texas Social Studies Supervisors Association act as advocates for the core mission of public education as outlined in our Texas Education Code that states, the “primary purpose of the public school curriculum is to prepare thoughtful, active citizens who understand the importance of patriotism.”

Achieving active citizenship requires a multifaceted approach including authentic assessments designed to measure the application of civics knowledge. Both the Texas Council for the Social Studies and the Texas Social Studies Supervisors Association support civic education and assessment yet, we encourage Texas lawmakers to consider alternatives to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Naturalization Test as a high-stakes measure of civic readiness.

Background

The current USCIS Naturalization Test includes a set of 100 open-ended questions, readily available on the USCIS website. Immigration judges ask only 10 of the 100 questions on the test. Applicants reply orally and only need six correct answers. Well-intentioned groups advocating for students in the United States to take the same test as naturalized citizens perpetuate a misconception that those pursuing citizenship answer all 100 questions.

The USCIS Naturalization Test assesses a very superficial level of civic knowledge while failing to measure civic literacy. Rote memorization does not necessarily correlate to civic engagement. When compared to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards, the USCIS Naturalization Test clearly lacks the depth and complexity expected of Texas students.

Recommended alternatives to implementing the USCIS Naturalization Test

- 1) Direct the Texas Education Agency to incorporate additional civics-related assessment items on the current Grade 8 social studies STAAR and the U.S. History end-of-course exam. This allows Texas teachers to participate in the item review process by providing feedback to ensure items align to the depth and complexity of Texas standards.
- 2) Direct the Texas Education Agency, in conjunction with stakeholders, to research best practices in assessment of civic readiness and social studies skills to develop new assessments for both.
- 3) Direct the State Board of Education to revise Texas standards to provide for more civics-related education.
- 4) Invest in the implementation of civic education programs such as grants, teacher training academies, instructional resources, awareness campaigns, and student civic engagement opportunities.

Conclusion

Our organizations welcome the desire of Texas lawmakers to increase the priority of civic education. We recommend avoiding replacing the current STAAR test currently aligned to Texas standards with another high-stakes test whose design does not align to the organization of Texas coursework nor increases civic literacy for Texas students. Assessment practices shape instructional practices. The implementation of an assessment based primarily on rote memorization would significantly affect instructional practices resulting in “teaching the test.”

Our organizations urge Texas lawmakers to explore other options to the USCIS Naturalization Test. Several states have also recognized the need for improving social studies and civics assessments resulting in an array of new testing approaches. In partnership with educators and the public, the Texas Legislature can ensure the state leads the nation by implementing research-based policy decisions to improve assessment practices. Together, we can act to ensure that Texas provides students the highest quality education that reflects the paramount goal of developing civic-minded, informed, and engaged citizens.