

Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches in U.S. Schools

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Corey Savage, Saki Ikoma

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For inquiries, contact:

Corey Savage, Researcher: csavage@air.org

Markus Broer, Project Director for Research under NAEP Support Contracts: mbroer@air.org

Mary Ann Fox, AIR Vice President and Project Director of NAEP Support Contracts: mafox@air.org

Abstract

Civic learning is an increasingly salient topic in research, policy, and practice. However, the recent empirical evidence on access to civic learning opportunities is limited. We build on prior research using survey items from the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress civics assessment and provide descriptive evidence on disparities in access to three categories of civics content and three evidence-based instructional approaches. We highlight inequalities in opportunities by student characteristics, school characteristics, and state characteristics among a national sample of more than 10,000 8th-grade students enrolled in a course with at least some civics focus (controlling for variation in the extent of civics focus). Our findings conflict with most of the prior evidence regarding disparities in access by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background, favoring Black students, Hispanic students, and students of relatively lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This suggests a shift in recent years, potentially due to an increased focus on equity. English learners and students with disabilities also reported greater access than their counterparts. Other findings include inequalities across school types, school location (city students reporting greater opportunity than both rural and suburban students), census region, and state testing policy. Additional findings are presented, and implications and opportunities for future research are discussed.

Contents

- Abstract ii
- Introduction 1
 - Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches 1
 - Why Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches May Vary..... 2
 - Empirical Evidence on Access to Civic Learning Opportunities..... 3
 - Present Study 4
- Method 4
 - Data and Sample 4
 - Outcome Measures 5
 - Predictor Variables 6
 - Analysis..... 9
- Results 9
 - Student Characteristics 10
 - School Characteristics 13
 - State Characteristics..... 17
- Discussion 20
- References 23
- Appendix A 27
- Appendix B..... 29
- Appendix C..... 30

List of Tables

Table 1. Percentages of Missing Data for Analytic Sample.....	5
Table 2. Summary Statistics for Outcome Variables Before Standardization.....	6
Table 3. Selected Summary Statistics for Analytic Sample	7
Table 4. Intraclass Correlation Coefficients (ICCs) for the Outcome Variables	10
Table 5. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by Race/Ethnicity	11
Table 6. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by Student Disability Status	12
Table 7. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by English Learner Status.....	12
Table 8. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by Student Socioeconomic Status	13
Table 9. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by School Type	14
Table 10. Pairwise Comparisons of Regression Results Among School Locations.....	15
Table 11. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by School Percentage of Black or Hispanic Students.....	16
Table 12. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by School Socioeconomic Status.....	17
Table 13. Pairwise Comparisons of Regression Results Among Census Regions.....	18
Table 14. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by State Testing Policy	20
Table A-1. Outcome Variables and Descriptions	27
Table A-2. Survey Questions and Response Options Used for Outcome Variables.....	28
Table B-1. Characteristic Variables and Descriptions	29
Table C-1. NAEP Scores in Standard Deviation Units for Specific Group Comparisons	30

Introduction

Recent federal policy initiatives in the United States have focused on strengthening U.S. democracy (White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2021), and in the field of education, policymakers and stakeholders are more attentive to civics than at arguably any point in recent history. Major civics reforms have recently been implemented across several U.S. states, with bills being proposed in many others, as well as proposed federal legislation that would earmark \$1 billion per year to support civics and history education (Civics Secures Democracy Act, 2021). The Educating for American Democracy initiative (a coalition of scholars and educators across the United States) recently provided guidance on implementing civics and history instruction in K–12 classrooms as well (Educating for American Democracy, 2021). Renewed public attention to strengthening U.S. democracy invites renewed attention to what we know—and do not know—about the teaching and learning infrastructure for civic education in U.S. schools.

One area in need of further attention is the issue of access to civic learning opportunities. To best allocate federal resources and to chart a future research agenda for the field, a national landscape of access and opportunity is crucial. We build on prior research on access to civic learning opportunities by using survey items from the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics assessment. We specifically address the following research questions:

1. To what extent does access to civics content and evidence-based instructional approaches vary within schools and between schools across the United States?
2. To what extent do the characteristics of students, schools, and states explain variation in access?

Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches

In this study, we focus on two key aspects of civic learning opportunities: specific civics content exposure and evidence-based instructional approaches. Regarding content, we focus on three categories of common civics topics: politics and government, citizenship, and international affairs. For evidence-based instructional approaches, we focus on those that (a) were included in the NAEP civics survey and (b) have empirical evidence of impacts on civic knowledge, civic skills, or civic dispositions. These include writing assignments (see Graham et al., 2020), political debates and discussions (e.g., Kahne et al., 2013; Persson, 2015), and civic-oriented field trips (e.g., Bowen & Kisida, 2020; Kisida et al., 2020). We acknowledge both (a) that there will be variation in quality within instructional approaches that cannot be captured by our data and (b) that there are other instructional approaches with documented effectiveness in civic learning that are not captured in the NAEP data. These include project-based learning (Duke et al., 2021) and various reading strategies (Vaughn et al., 2013; Wineburg et al., 2022).

Why Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches May Vary

Unequal access to civics content and evidence-based instructional approaches in the United States may manifest for a variety of reasons, including individual characteristics, school characteristics, and state characteristics.

Students and Schools

Prior research suggests that student characteristics may predict unequal access to civics content and evidence-based instructional approaches. Within U.S. schools, students of varying characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status [SES], native language, disability) tend to be sorted into different classrooms with different peers, varying levels of instruction, and/or teachers of varying qualifications (Dalane & Marcotte, 2022; Kalogrides et al., 2013; Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013). The same teacher (or different teachers in the same school) may approach civics curriculum and instruction differently for classes with varying student characteristics. Recent qualitative evidence suggests that English learners (ELs) and students with disabilities (SDs) may even be pulled out of their classrooms during civics and social studies instruction to address other learning needs (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2020).

School characteristics are also relevant for several reasons. First, in addition to within-school sorting, students of varying characteristics and backgrounds tend to be sorted into different schools (Reardon & Owens, 2014) with teachers of varying qualifications (Clotfelter et al., 2021; Lankford et al., 2002) and varying confidence in teaching civics (e.g., Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2020). Second, disadvantaged schools may emphasize the more commonly tested subjects rather than civics and social studies (Diamond & Spillane, 2004). Third, given recent evidence on geographic variation in “civic deserts” (Atwell et al., 2017), schools in distinct types of communities (e.g., large cities vs. rural areas) may also vary in their approaches to civic education. Finally, distinct types of schools (traditional public, charter, or private) may place greater or lesser value on civics and/or have more freedom to do so (Campbell, 2012; Gill et al., 2020).

States

State characteristics also may predict access to civics content¹ and evidence-based instructional approaches. For example, states in different parts of the country may simply take different approaches due to local history, values, and politics. Second, although many do not, some states test in civics and social studies, and evidence suggests that this may have an impact on civics knowledge (Campbell & Niemi, 2016). However, whether testing predicts greater access to civics content and whether this is at the expense of evidence-based instructional approaches (Brezicha & Mitra, 2019; Kahne et al., 2000) is still unclear.

¹ Some states also vary in their content at a given grade level due to how they structure the social studies scope and sequence. We address this further in our analyses below.

Empirical Evidence on Access to Civic Learning Opportunities

The most frequently cited study on access to civic learning opportunities used national data from the 1999 Civic Education Study, with one class per school sampling design,² and two purposive samples in California from the early years of the No Child Left Behind Act (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). With the national data, the authors reported that students of higher SES and in classrooms/schools with higher SES had greater access to a range of civic learning opportunities that were considered promising practices in the field (for a full list, see Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Additionally, the authors identified disparities among California high school students by race/ethnicity, SES, and grade point average in a sample of 12 schools in 2005 and by curricular track in a sample of six schools in 2006.

Researchers have also reported breakdowns by student race, ethnicity, and family background for a set of instructional approaches using NAEP civics data. Using the 2010 NAEP civics data, Kawashima-Ginsberg (2013) identified disparities across grade levels by race/ethnicity and family background regarding access to three focal practices—discussions of current events, political debates, and simulations such as mock trials—favoring White students and students of relatively higher SES. However, Hansen et al. (2020) highlighted that Black grade 8 students in 2018 reported more opportunities than other racial and ethnic groups regarding taking part in political debates and writing letters about community issues, which conflicts with the general theme in the limited literature base.

A recent national survey of young people between the ages of 14 and 17 provides some insights as well. Kiesa et al. (2022) found that teens in this age range living in urban areas tended to be much more likely to report having taken a civics course and learning about their civic identities than students in suburban and rural areas. The same urban/rural divide was identified with respect to media literacy educational opportunities. White and Hispanic teens reported greater opportunity for media literacy education than Black teens, as did teens with parents who went to college versus their counterparts.

Other scholars have focused on the teacher and school levels (rather than student-reported data). For example, as part of a nationally representative survey, social studies teachers in schools with higher percentages of students of color and low-income students reported less emphasis on student participation in school governance, responsible internet use, and discussion of controversial issues (Hamilton et al., 2020). Teachers with more ELs reported greater emphasis on simulations of democratic processes, student-centered or project-based approaches, social and emotional learning, and a range of topics (e.g., immigration, safeguarding the environment; Hamilton et al., 2020). Another recent study analyzed access to civic learning opportunities in six high schools of varying student composition and resources in the New York City metro area. Focusing on between-school differences, the authors reported disparities in access to courses, experiential learning opportunities, controversial discussions, and media literacy education, favoring schools with greater resources and lower percentages of students in poverty (Wolff & Rogers, 2019).

Finally, although much of the prior research focused on matters related to race, ethnicity, and SES, a recent study extended this literature to include students with disabilities. Bueso (2022), using data on nearly 24,000 high school students in Chicago Public Schools in 2018, found that students with

² This is important because this sampling design limits the ability to estimate within-school variation.

disabilities reported slightly less access to opportunities for political discussion in their schools but slightly greater access to opportunities for service learning.

Present Study

This descriptive study on access to civics content and evidence-based instructional approaches builds on prior evidence in the following ways. First, we focused the study on three distinct categories of important civics/government topics and three instructional approaches with empirical evidence of effectiveness, which allows for (a) a more fine-grained analysis and (b) a focus on practices that matter for student outcomes. Second, this study reports intraclass correlations (ICCs) for civics content and evidence-based instructional approaches (i.e., variation in access/exposure within and between schools nationally in the United States). No prior study quantified this variation, which is crucial to our understanding of how to address any existing inequalities. Third, this study incorporated a rich set of student, school, and state characteristics not studied in prior research on this topic, providing a detailed national landscape of access to civics content and evidence-based instructional approaches. Finally, our study contributes to the limited literature on access to civic learning opportunities at the middle grades level, which has been the target grade level for several recent civic education reforms and is an important period for civic development (e.g., Eckstein et al., 2012; Oosterhoff et al., 2021; Russo & Stattin, 2017; Wray-Lake & Shubert, 2019).

Method

Data and Sample

This study primarily leverages the student and school survey questionnaires from the 2018 NAEP civics assessment,³ the first administration of NAEP civics since the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act at the end of 2015. Data on whether states administered a statewide civics or social studies test in 2018 were obtained from a State Education Practices data table from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).⁴

We limited the sample to students who took a class or course that covered civics and/or U.S. government topics in grade 8; we excluded the approximately 24% of students who did not take such a course or did not remember whether they took such a course. These steps resulted in a sample of approximately 10,120 students in 590 traditional public schools, 50 charter schools, and 130 private schools. Within this sample, the unweighted percentages of missing data for the analytic variables were below 4.5%, with the exception of the student SES index (23.0%), as indicated in Table 1. Because we estimate separate regressions for each predictor/block of predictors, only the SES regressions exclude these 23.0% of missing observations.

³ It should be noted that there are no data for nine states (i.e., Alaska, Delaware, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, South Dakota, and Vermont) in the nationally representative sample.

⁴ The table can be found here: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/statereform/tab8_5.asp.

Table 1. Percentages of Missing Data for Analytic Sample

Variable ¹		Missing (%)
Outcomes		
Civics content	Politics and government	0.38
	International affairs	0.48
	Citizenship	2.36
Instructional approaches	Field trips	1.22
	Long written responses	4.13
	Written opinions	1.66
	Political debates and discussions	1.76
Student characteristics		
Student SES index	Students who had missing data for any of the components of the student SES index (i.e., missing either the number of books, NSLP eligibility, or parent education) were excluded from the analysis for student SES.	23.02
School characteristics		
Percentage of Black or Hispanic students		0.16
School SES	Students who had missing data for any of the components of the student SES index (i.e., missing either the number of books, NSLP eligibility, or parent education) were excluded from the analysis for school SES.	23.02

¹ Variables with no missing data are not included in this table.

NOTE: Analytic sample includes approximately 10,120 students. Details about these variables can be found in Appendices A and B. SES = socioeconomic status. NSLP = National School Lunch Program.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Outcome Measures

For civics content, we generated three mean-score scales using student reports of the extent to which they'd had exposure to each of the following topics in class in the current year. The Cronbach's alphas for these three measures were 0.82, 0.84, and 0.69, respectively.

- *Politics and government* (six items focused on the U.S. Constitution; the three branches of the U.S. government; how laws are made; political parties, elections, and voting; current political and social issues; and the roles and responsibilities of local, state, and national governments in the United States)
- *Citizenship* (three items focused on the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens; why it is important to pay attention to the political process and government; and why it is important for individuals to participate in the political process and government)

- *International affairs* (three items focused on other countries’ governments; international organizations; and how the United States influences and is influenced by events in other countries)

As discussed above, we also included three instructional approaches with prior evidence of effectiveness in civic learning. Students reported how often the following occurred during the school year:

- *Field trips* to learn about civics topics
- Writing assignments
 - a. *Long written responses* as part of social studies class
 - b. *Written opinions* on a community or social issue
- *Political debates and discussions* at school

All outcome variables, along with their descriptions and items, are shown in Appendix A. Summary statistics for each outcome variable before z-scores/standardization are included in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary Statistics for Outcome Variables Before Standardization

Outcome variable	Mean	Jackknifing standard error	Standard deviation
Civics content			
Politics and government	3.4	0.02	0.87
International affairs	2.8	0.02	0.95
Citizenship	2.9	0.02	1.05
Instructional approaches			
Field trips	1.5	0.02	0.93
Long written responses	2.7	0.02	1.25
Written opinions	2.2	0.02	1.28
Political debates and discussions	2.1	0.02	1.23

NOTE: Details about these outcomes can be found in Appendix A. Estimates are weighted averages. All outcome variables were standardized for regression analyses.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Predictor Variables

Appendix B provides a summary of the following predictor variables, including their coding and descriptions. Summary statistics for each predictor variable are included in Table 3.

Table 3. Selected Summary Statistics for Analytic Sample

Characteristic	Percentage ¹	Jackknifing standard error
Student characteristics		
Civics course-taking		
Mainly civics	62.1	0.90
Included civics	37.9	0.90
Gender		
Male	49.9	0.48
Female	50.1	0.48
Race/ethnicity		
Asian	5.4	0.55
Black	13.9	0.56
Hispanic	26.2	0.78
White	49.4	1.10
Other	5.0	0.64
Student with disabilities		
No	88.1	0.47
Yes	11.9	0.47
English learner		
No	94.3	0.39
Yes	5.7	0.39
School characteristics		
Type		
Charter	5.1	0.84
Traditional public	87.2	1.17
Private	7.7	1.10
Location		
City	29.5	1.46
Suburb	42.4	1.50
Town	12.0	1.28
Rural	16.1	1.36
Percentage of Black or Hispanic students ²		
0–19	40.8	1.75
20–39	17.4	1.34
40–59	14.3	1.44
60–79	11.4	1.33
80–100	16.1	0.85

See notes at end of table.

Table 3. Selected summary statistics for analytic sample—Continued

Characteristic	Percentage ¹	Jackknifing standard error
State characteristics		
Census region		
Northwest	13.8	0.82
Midwest	21.7	0.67
South	39.7	1.00
West	24.8	0.62
Assessment in civics or social studies		
No	41.2	3.00
Yes	58.8	3.00

¹ These are weighted estimates.

² Descriptive statistics of school percentage of Black or Hispanic students are shown here at 20% intervals. Note that this variable was used as a continuous variable for later analyses.

NOTE: Analytic sample includes approximately 10,120 students. All descriptive statistics are reported at the student level (e.g., school characteristics are percentage of students with the given characteristic). Details about these variables can be found in Appendix B. Student race/ethnicity is based on school records. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic origin. Black refers to Black or African American. “Other” includes students who are identified as either Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Two or More Races.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Student Characteristics

For student characteristics, binary variables describe students’ gender, race/ethnicity, and whether the student is an English learner (EL) or is a student with a disability (SD). We also included an index for student SES. The index was calculated based on Broer et al. (2023). Three variables—number of books at home, students’ eligibility for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and parents’ highest level of education—were used to create the index, and the sum of the scores was used as the student-level SES for each student.⁵

School Characteristics

A set of school characteristics was also included. Binary variables describe the school type (traditional public, charter, or private) and school location (city, suburb, town, rural). We also included the school-aggregated measure of Black or Hispanic students (i.e., the grade 8 students in the NAEP sample) as a proxy for the percentage of Black or Hispanic students in the students’ school. The school-aggregated measure of the student SES index described above was used as a proxy for school SES.

State Characteristics

We included state characteristics from multiple data sources.⁶ These include census region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West) and whether the state administered a state assessment in civics or social studies

⁵ Students missing data for any of these three variables were excluded from the calculation of the SES index. Therefore, these students were excluded from the analyses related to SES in the current study.

⁶ The nationally representative sample does not include nine states (i.e., Alaska, Delaware, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, South Dakota, and Vermont) in the 2018 NAEP civics assessment.

in any grade during the 2017–18 school year. We coded for any grade to capture the overall social studies test-based accountability context of the given state.

Analysis

After estimating ICCs for each outcome variable to describe the variation within and between schools⁷ (research question 1), we regressed each outcome on each predictor (or block) separately to describe access by student, school, and state characteristics. We controlled for the type of course the student reported being enrolled in during grade 8 (i.e., either a course *focused mainly* on civics or U.S. government or a course including *some focus* on civics or U.S. government). As mentioned above, we dropped all other students from our sample (i.e., those who reported being in a course not focused on civics and those who reported that they didn't remember). These two steps address the issue of having data only for grade 8, and differences in the social studies scope and sequence at a given grade level can exist simply due to differences in state social studies curricular standards. To our knowledge, this is the first study of this topic to address this, which underscores an additional contribution.

All regression models were estimated at the student level with jackknifing standard errors, based on the complex sampling design (NCES, 2021). Therefore, coefficients are interpreted at the student level. We used the final student sampling weights in all analyses. To calculate the ICCs, the final student sampling weights were rescaled to sum to the sample size of their corresponding school-level cluster at level 1, and the school weights were used at level 2.

Results

The results for research question 1 are presented in Table 4. We estimated substantial variation within schools in access/opportunity, with ICCs ranging from 0.102 to 0.289. That said, although there is generally consistency across the measures of opportunity (all but one ranges from 0.102 to 0.144), access to politics/government content has considerably more variation between schools than the other content areas and instructional approaches, with an ICC of 0.289. In sum, the results suggest that there is considerable variation within schools on all investigated measures of civics content and instructional approaches, with politics/government content varying relatively more between schools than other measures of opportunity.

⁷ We did not estimate differences between states, because the samples within states for NAEP years were not constructed to be representative of the state. As such, differences between individual states would not be meaningful. That said, we do predict access with state characteristics.

Table 4. Intraclass Correlation Coefficients (ICCs) for the Outcome Variables

Outcome variable	ICC
Civics content	
Politics and government	0.289
International affairs	0.123
Citizenship	0.136
Instructional approaches	
Field trips	0.144
Long written responses	0.143
Written opinions	0.102
Political debates and discussions	0.123

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

The primary focus of this paper is not to isolate the extent to which each variable predicts access/opportunity at each level. Rather, we focus on uncovering descriptive disparities among a range of student, school, and state characteristics. However, these ICC results warrant further investigation to uncover why access/opportunity varies both within and between schools and how policy and practice can ensure all students have access to civics content and evidence-based instructional approaches.

We now turn to the main results (i.e., for research question 2), focused on identifying disparities in access/opportunity by student, school, and state characteristics. Tables 5–14 display the results by these characteristics based on separate regressions for each predictor/characteristic/block. We summarize the findings by student, school, and state characteristics, highlighting where significant differences are (and are not) estimated and the magnitude of these differences.

Student Characteristics

Results for race/ethnicity (Table 5) were surprising, based on findings from most prior research. Black students reported significantly greater access/opportunity than White students across all measures, with differences ranging from 0.232 to 0.456 standard deviation. Hispanic students also reported greater access/opportunity than White students across all but one measure (*political debates and discussions*), with differences ranging from 0.087 to 0.281 standard deviation. Students categorized as Asian reported significantly more access/opportunity than White students for *politics and government* content (0.098 standard deviation) and *long written responses* (0.124 standard deviation) but fewer opportunities for *field trips* and *written opinions* on community or social issues (0.107 and 0.130 standard deviation, respectively, favoring White students). For students of another race or ethnicity, significant differences were estimated for only *politics and government* content (0.109 standard deviation) and *written opinions* (0.127 standard deviation) in addition to marginally significant and practically meaningful differences for *international affairs* and *long written responses*, favoring students of another race or ethnicity versus White students.

Table 5. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by Race/Ethnicity

Outcome variable	Coefficient	Jackknife SE	p-value	n
Asian				
Politics and government	0.098	0.0444	0.032	10,090
International affairs	-0.074	0.0579	0.207	10,070
Citizenship	-0.013	0.0382	0.725	9,880
Field trips	-0.107	0.0379	0.006	10,000
Long written responses	0.124	0.0450	0.008	9,710
Written opinions	-0.130	0.0487	0.010	9,960
Political debates and discussions	0.054	0.0526	0.307	9,950
Black				
Politics and government	0.232	0.0434	0.000	10,090
International affairs	0.412	0.0403	0.000	10,070
Citizenship	0.253	0.0436	0.000	9,880
Field trips	0.403	0.0434	0.000	10,000
Long written responses	0.456	0.0401	0.000	9,710
Written opinions	0.315	0.0471	0.000	9,960
Political debates and discussions	0.292	0.0406	0.000	9,950
Hispanic				
Politics and government	0.205	0.0390	0.000	10,090
International affairs	0.275	0.0299	0.000	10,070
Citizenship	0.087	0.0339	0.013	9,880
Field trips	0.146	0.0342	0.000	10,000
Long written responses	0.281	0.0323	0.000	9,710
Written opinions	0.106	0.0310	0.001	9,960
Political debates and discussions	0.026	0.0372	0.481	9,950
Other				
Politics and government	0.109	0.0477	0.026	10,090
International affairs	0.112	0.0663	0.096	10,070
Citizenship	-0.019	0.0617	0.762	9,880
Field trips	0.062	0.0405	0.133	10,000
Long written responses	0.118	0.0715	0.104	9,710
Written opinions	0.127	0.0472	0.009	9,960
Political debates and discussions	0.053	0.0526	0.321	9,950

NOTE: Each regression (for each outcome) included the block of race/ethnicity dummies and a control for civics course taking (dummy coded: 0 = included civics, 1 = mainly civics). Outcome variables were standardized. The number of observations (*n*) for each outcome variable was rounded to the nearest 10. Student race/ethnicity is based on school records. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic origin. Black refers to Black or African American. "Other" includes students who are identified as either Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Two or More Races. Reference group for race/ethnicity is White. Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Students with disabilities (Table 6) reported significantly greater access/opportunity than students without disabilities on all measures but one (*politics and government* content, where there was no significant difference). Differences range from 0.076 standard deviation (*citizenship* content) to 0.426 standard deviation (*field trips*).

Table 6. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by Student Disability Status

Outcome variable	Coefficient	Jackknife SE	p-value	n
Politics and government	-0.032	0.0372	0.397	10,080
International affairs	0.258	0.0379	0.000	10,070
Citizenship	0.076	0.0347	0.032	9,880
Field trips	0.426	0.0410	0.000	10,000
Long written responses	0.156	0.0364	0.000	9,700
Written opinion	0.159	0.0349	0.000	9,950
Political debates and discussions	0.132	0.0347	0.000	9,940

NOTE: Each regression (for each outcome) included a control for civics course taking (dummy coded: 0 = included civics, 1 = mainly civics). Outcome variables were standardized. The number of observations (*n*) for each outcome variable was rounded to the nearest 10. Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

English learners (Table 7) reported greater access than non-EL students across all measures. Differences range from 0.124 standard deviation (*political debates and discussions*) to 0.439 standard deviation (*field trips*).

Table 7. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by English Learner Status

Outcome variable	Coefficient	Jackknife SE	p-value	n
Politics and government	0.153	0.0440	0.001	10,090
International affairs	0.388	0.0464	0.000	10,070
Citizenship	0.169	0.0474	0.001	9,880
Field trips	0.439	0.0683	0.000	10,000
Long written responses	0.230	0.0424	0.000	9,710
Written opinion	0.173	0.0412	0.000	9,960
Political debates and discussions	0.124	0.0457	0.009	9,950

NOTE: Each regression (for each outcome) included a control for civics course taking (dummy coded: 0 = included civics, 1 = mainly civics). Outcome variables were standardized. The number of observations (*n*) for each outcome variable was rounded to the nearest 10. Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Finally, where differences by SES were identified (Table 8), they favored students of relatively lower SES. No significant differences were estimated for *politics and government* content, *citizenship* content, or opportunities for *political debates and discussions*. For other measures of access/opportunity, an increase of one standard deviation in the SES index corresponded with decreases ranging from 0.056 to 0.131 standard deviation.

Table 8. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by Student Socioeconomic Status

Outcome variable	Coefficient	Jackknife SE	p-value	n
Politics and government	-0.029	0.0160	0.080	7,770
International affairs	-0.131	0.0156	0.000	7,770
Citizenship	0.003	0.0129	0.797	7,640
Field trips	-0.111	0.0161	0.000	7,720
Long written responses	-0.129	0.0129	0.000	7,520
Written opinion	-0.056	0.0123	0.000	7,690
Political debates and discussions	0.025	0.0149	0.101	7,680

NOTE: Each regression (for each outcome) included a control for civics course taking (dummy coded: 0 = included civics, 1 = mainly civics). Outcome variables and student socioeconomic status were standardized. The number of observations (*n*) for each outcome variable was rounded to the nearest 10. Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

School Characteristics

Differences by school type (Table 9) were dependent on the measure. Private school students reported significantly less access than traditional public school students for *politics and government* content (0.133 standard deviation, favoring traditional public school students) but more opportunity for *field trips* (0.200 standard deviation). Charter school students reported significantly more access to *international affairs* content (0.183 standard deviation) and opportunities for *written opinions* (0.152 standard deviation) than traditional public school students, in addition to marginally significant and practically meaningful differences for *citizenship*, *field trips*, *long written responses*, and *political debates and discussions*.

Table 9. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by School Type

Outcome variable	Coefficient	Jackknife SE	p-value	n
Private				
Politics and government	-0.133	0.0657	0.047	10,090
International affairs	-0.040	0.0683	0.562	10,070
Citizenship	-0.031	0.0581	0.591	9,880
Field trips	0.200	0.0660	0.004	10,000
Long written responses	-0.079	0.0597	0.192	9,710
Written opinions	-0.053	0.0705	0.455	9,960
Political debates and discussions	0.039	0.0856	0.650	9,950
Charter				
Politics and government	0.045	0.0770	0.563	10,090
International affairs	0.183	0.0693	0.011	10,070
Citizenship	0.111	0.0696	0.115	9,880
Field trips	0.147	0.0906	0.109	10,000
Long written responses	0.155	0.0794	0.056	9,710
Written opinions	0.152	0.0624	0.018	9,960
Political debates and discussions	0.149	0.0927	0.113	9,950

NOTE: Each regression (for each outcome) included the block of school type dummies and a control for civics course taking (dummy coded: 0 = included civics, 1 = mainly civics). Outcome variables were standardized. The number of observations (*n*) for each outcome variable was rounded to the nearest 10. Reference group for school type is traditional public. Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Access/opportunity also varied by school location (Table 10). Students in city schools reported significantly greater access/opportunity than students in rural schools and suburban schools across all measures, ranging from 0.113 to 0.183 standard deviation. There were no significant differences between reports from rural students versus suburban students. Students in towns (i.e., not inside an urbanized area) reported significantly greater opportunity than suburban students for *field trips* (0.150 standard deviation) and less opportunity for *political debates and discussions* (0.138 standard deviation favoring suburban students). Students in city schools also reported greater access to evidence-based instructional approaches relative to students in towns.

Table 10. Pairwise Comparisons of Regression Results Among School Locations

Outcome variable	Contrast	Jackknife SE	Unadjusted <i>p</i> -value	<i>n</i>
Politics and government				10,090
Suburb vs. city	-0.113	0.0471	0.019	
Town vs. city	-0.124	0.0774	0.114	
Rural vs. city	-0.153	0.0692	0.031	
Town vs. suburb	-0.011	0.0742	0.883	
Rural vs. suburb	-0.040	0.0674	0.556	
Rural vs. town	-0.029	0.0721	0.690	
International affairs				10,070
Suburb vs. city	-0.167	0.0412	0.000	
Town vs. city	-0.078	0.0621	0.214	
Rural vs. city	-0.151	0.0513	0.005	
Town vs. suburb	0.089	0.0621	0.157	
Rural vs. suburb	0.016	0.0518	0.757	
Rural vs. town	-0.073	0.0680	0.288	
Citizenship				9,880
Suburb vs. city	-0.115	0.0335	0.001	
Town vs. city	-0.110	0.0670	0.106	
Rural vs. city	-0.139	0.0565	0.017	
Town vs. suburb	0.005	0.0674	0.938	
Rural vs. suburb	-0.024	0.0550	0.661	
Rural vs. town	-0.030	0.0734	0.689	
Field trips				10,000
Suburb vs. city	-0.149	0.0500	0.004	
Town vs. city	0.001	0.0650	0.987	
Rural vs. city	-0.146	0.0510	0.006	
Town vs. suburb	0.150	0.0660	0.025	
Rural vs. suburb	0.004	0.0450	0.938	
Rural vs. town	-0.147	0.0650	0.027	
Long written responses				9,710
Suburb vs. city	-0.172	0.0344	0.000	
Town vs. city	-0.224	0.0608	0.000	
Rural vs. city	-0.183	0.0643	0.006	
Town vs. suburb	-0.052	0.0589	0.382	
Rural vs. suburb	-0.011	0.0593	0.851	
Rural vs. town	0.041	0.0813	0.619	

See notes at end of table.

Table 10. Pairwise Comparisons of Regression Results Among School Locations—Continued

Outcome variable	Contrast	Jackknife SE	Unadjusted <i>p</i> -value	<i>n</i>
Written opinions				9,960
Suburb vs. city	-0.165	0.0311	0.000	
Town vs. city	-0.171	0.0436	0.000	
Rural vs. city	-0.129	0.0469	0.008	
Town vs. suburb	-0.006	0.0473	0.899	
Rural vs. suburb	0.036	0.0463	0.443	
Rural vs. town	0.042	0.0619	0.502	
Political debates and discussions				9,950
Suburb vs. city	-0.137	0.0386	0.001	
Town vs. city	-0.276	0.0520	0.000	
Rural vs. city	-0.169	0.0542	0.003	
Town vs. suburb	-0.138	0.0469	0.004	
Rural vs. suburb	-0.032	0.0556	0.571	
Rural vs. town	0.107	0.0552	0.058	

NOTE: Postestimation pairwise comparisons for school location regressions. The reference group for the contrast is the second category in each row. The number of observations (*n*) for each comparison was rounded to the nearest 10. Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Generally, patterns estimated for race, ethnicity, and SES at the individual level are replicated at the school level (Tables 11–12). That is, students in schools with higher percentages of Black or Hispanic students, and students in schools of relatively lower SES reported greater access/opportunity.

Table 11. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by School Percentage of Black or Hispanic Students

Outcome variable	Coefficient	Jackknife SE	<i>p</i> -value	<i>n</i>
Politics and government	0.003	0.0007	0.000	10,070
International affairs	0.005	0.0005	0.000	10,060
Citizenship	0.002	0.0005	0.000	9,870
Long written responses	0.006	0.0005	0.000	9,690
Field trips	0.003	0.0006	0.000	9,980
Written opinions	0.003	0.0005	0.000	9,940
Political debates and discussions	0.001	0.0007	0.077	9,930

NOTE: Details about these outcomes can be found in Appendix A. Each regression (for each outcome) included a control for civics course taking (dummy coded: 0 = included civics, 1 = mainly civics). Outcome variables were standardized. The number of observations (*n*) for each outcome variable was rounded to the nearest 10. The school percentage of Black or Hispanic students is a continuous variable that ranges from 0% to 100%. Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Table 12. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by School Socioeconomic Status

Outcome variable	Coefficient	Jackknife SE	p-value	n
Politics and government	-0.049	0.0225	0.032	7,770
International affairs	-0.138	0.0205	0.000	7,770
Citizenship	-0.027	0.0170	0.117	7,640
Long written responses	-0.146	0.0193	0.000	7,520
Field trips	-0.090	0.0204	0.000	7,720
Written opinions	-0.051	0.0158	0.002	7,690
Political debates and discussions	0.026	0.0195	0.190	7,680

NOTE: Details about these outcomes can be found in Appendix A. Each regression (for each outcome) included a control for civics course taking (dummy coded: 0 = included civics, 1 = mainly civics). Outcome variables and school socioeconomic status were standardized. The number of observations (*n*) for each outcome variable was rounded to the nearest 10. Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

State Characteristics

Access also varied by census region (Table 13). It is important to underscore again that the regressions include a control variable accounting for the type of course the student was enrolled in during grade 8. Students in the Midwest, South, and West reported significantly greater access to *politics and government* content than students in the Northeast. Students in the South reported greater access to *citizenship* content than students in the Northeast. Students in the Midwest reported fewer opportunities for *long written responses* than students in the Northeast. Students in the West reported fewer opportunities for *field trips* than students in the Northeast. Finally, students in the Midwest and West reported fewer opportunities for *political debates and discussions* than students in the Northeast. Students in the West reported less access to *citizenship* content, *field trips*, and opportunities to write *written opinions* than students in the South. Students in the South and West reported greater opportunity to write *long written responses* than students in the Midwest. Other comparisons were marginally significant and practically meaningful as well and can be seen in Table 13.

Table 13. Pairwise Comparisons of Regression Results Among Census Regions

Outcome variable	Contrast	Jackknife SE	Unadjusted <i>p</i> -value	<i>n</i>
Politics and government				10,090
Midwest vs. Northeast	0.196	0.0690	0.006	
South vs. Northeast	0.297	0.0593	0.000	
West vs. Northeast	0.295	0.0616	0.000	
South vs. Midwest	0.101	0.0635	0.118	
West vs. Midwest	0.099	0.0602	0.104	
West vs. South	-0.001	0.0521	0.978	
International affairs				10,070
Midwest vs. Northeast	-0.022	0.0736	0.763	
South vs. Northeast	0.039	0.0656	0.551	
West vs. Northeast	-0.059	0.0739	0.431	
South vs. Midwest	0.062	0.0496	0.219	
West vs. Midwest	-0.036	0.0546	0.509	
West vs. South	-0.098	0.0405	0.019	
Citizenship				9,880
Midwest vs. Northeast	0.051	0.0547	0.359	
South vs. Northeast	0.138	0.0460	0.004	
West vs. Northeast	0.044	0.0569	0.446	
South vs. Midwest	0.087	0.0506	0.090	
West vs. Midwest	-0.007	0.0567	0.903	
West vs. South	-0.094	0.0470	0.049	
Field trips				10,000
Midwest vs. Northeast	-0.065	0.0591	0.274	
South vs. Northeast	0.001	0.0473	0.979	
West vs. Northeast	-0.142	0.0520	0.008	
South vs. Midwest	0.067	0.0502	0.190	
West vs. Midwest	-0.077	0.0504	0.133	
West vs. South	-0.143	0.0439	0.002	
Long written responses				9,710
Midwest vs. Northeast	-0.121	0.0531	0.026	
South vs. Northeast	-0.010	0.0559	0.862	
West vs. Northeast	0.003	0.0591	0.965	
South vs. Midwest	0.111	0.0423	0.011	
West vs. Midwest	0.124	0.0497	0.016	
West vs. South	0.012	0.0556	0.825	

See notes at end of table.

Table 13. Pairwise Comparisons of Regression Results Among Census Regions—Continued

Outcome variable	Contrast	Jackknife SE	Unadjusted <i>p</i> -value	<i>n</i>
Written opinions				9,960
Midwest vs. Northeast	-0.020	0.0551	0.724	
South vs. Northeast	0.046	0.0404	0.255	
West vs. Northeast	-0.042	0.0488	0.390	
South vs. Midwest	0.066	0.0421	0.122	
West vs. Midwest	-0.023	0.0477	0.635	
West vs. South	-0.089	0.0377	0.022	
Political debates and discussions				9,950
Midwest vs. Northeast	-0.145	0.0665	0.033	
South vs. Northeast	-0.084	0.0476	0.084	
West vs. Northeast	-0.149	0.0504	0.004	
South vs. Midwest	0.062	0.0507	0.229	
West vs. Midwest	-0.004	0.0576	0.949	
West vs. South	-0.065	0.0384	0.094	

NOTE: Postestimation pairwise comparisons for census region regressions. The reference group for the contrast is the second category in each row. The number of observations (*n*) for each comparison was rounded to the nearest 10. Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Finally, disparities are presented by state testing policy (Table 14). Students in states with civics or social studies tests reported greater access to *politics and government* content and *citizenship* content, with a similar marginally significant and practically meaningful difference estimated for *international affairs*. There were no statistically significant differences in terms of evidence-based instructional approaches, with the exception of the use of *long written responses*, which was marginally significant and practically meaningful, favoring states without tests.

Table 14. Regression Results on Access to Civics Content and Evidence-Based Instructional Approaches, by State Testing Policy

Outcome variable	Coefficient	Jackknife SE	p-value	n
Yes, a state assessment was administered in civics or social studies				
Politics and government	0.123	0.0396	0.003	10,080
International affairs	0.074	0.0390	0.062	10,070
Citizenship	0.106	0.0316	0.001	9,880
Field trips	0.022	0.0374	0.554	10,000
Long written responses	-0.072	0.0379	0.061	9,700
Written opinions	0.023	0.0308	0.464	9,950
Political debates and discussions	0.008	0.0309	0.795	9,940

NOTE: Each regression included a control for civics course taking (dummy coded: 0 = included civics, 1 = mainly civics). Outcome variables were standardized. The number of observations (*n*) for each outcome variable was rounded to the nearest 10. State testing policy refers to whether a state assessment was administered in civics or social studies in any grade during the 2017–18 school year based on the information from [Table 8.5. Social studies statewide assessment name/title and grade administered, by state: 2018](#). Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Discussion

In this study, we presented a range of novel findings on the topic of access and distribution of civic learning opportunities in the United States in 2018. Most surprisingly, given prior evidence to the contrary, Black students, Hispanic students, and students of relatively lower SES generally reported greater opportunity than their counterparts. This is in line with what Hansen et al. (2020) pointed to and conflicts with the findings and implications of nearly all other prior work. One substantive interpretation of these findings is that the disparities documented in prior research were real and have recently flipped due to equity-oriented advocacy and/or recent political shifts (e.g., Jaffe-Walter et al., 2019). One methodological interpretation could be that prior studies did not consider or control for the type of course a student was enrolled in at a given grade level. The estimates may have been influenced by variations resulting from differences in course focus at a given grade level. For example, students at a given grade level may be enrolled in a course focused on geography or world history, due to the scope and sequence of social studies courses in that state or district. When analyzing a specific grade level, it is necessary to control for these variations in course selection, as we did. Furthermore, it should be noted that some previous research did not use nationally representative samples. In this study, we focused on national disparities to present a comprehensive picture; however, it is important to recognize that the educational landscape in individual states or districts may be different from what we found nationally.

In Appendix C, we provide context regarding selected NAEP score gaps in civics and other subject areas. Grade 8 NAEP score gaps in civics are essentially equal to score gaps in math and slightly larger than score gaps in reading, favoring White students and students not eligible for NSLP. While Hispanic students have narrowed the NAEP civics score gap with White students since 1998, NAEP civics score gaps between White and Black students and NSLP-eligible versus noneligible students have remained

consistent over time.⁸ Taken together with our findings on the distribution of opportunities, this generally contradicts what we would expect based on traditional theories of opportunity to learn focused on content exposure, presenting further questions: Are there validity concerns with the NAEP civics assessment for different groups of students? Do White students and students of relatively higher SES have less access and fewer opportunities in school but more opportunities outside of school? Is the greater access and opportunity for Black, Hispanic, and students of relatively lower SES not equitable enough to redress the inequality in achievement outcomes? Is there variation in quality of exposure that offsets the differences in quantity of exposure? Would our findings hold true with recent data in other subjects, such as math, where inequality in opportunities (favoring White students and students of relatively higher SES) have been highlighted in the past (e.g., Schmidt et al., 2015; Schmidt & McKnight, 2012)? These empirical questions should be investigated in future research.

Our additional findings on student characteristics also conflict with prior research. Students with disabilities generally reported greater access than their peers without disabilities, apart from politics and government, where there was no significant difference. Although we did not observe opportunities for service learning, our finding on political discussions and debates conflicts with Bueso (2022), at least at the national level (in contrast with Bueso's focus on Chicago). English learners also reported greater access than their peers. Our findings for both SDs and ELs suggest that they do not have systematically unequal access due to pullout interventions, as suggested by recent qualitative research (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2020), at least not nationally.

Our findings on school characteristics should not be overlooked. First, although traditional public schools appear to have an advantage in terms of politics and government content (relative to private schools), private school and charter school students reported more opportunities for evidence-based instructional approaches (field trips for private school students and long written responses for charter school students). Given that most students are educated in traditional public schools, disparities in access to content or evidence-based instructional approaches should be noted, investigated further, and remedied. Second, the city/suburban differences and the city/rural differences are worth highlighting. Similar findings have been highlighted recently among high school students (Kiesa et al., 2022). As the United States has become increasingly polarized politically, monitoring the extent to which students in all areas are (or are not) receiving high-quality education in civics (and history) is crucial. Our findings suggest that civic education in both rural and suburban areas needs to be addressed.

To our knowledge, we have presented the first findings on differences in civic learning opportunities by state characteristics. Similar to the implications for school location, that students in different parts of the country seem to be receiving fairly different civics content and instruction (again, limiting to students in a course with some civics focus and conditional on the type of course a student is enrolled in, which should capture policy differences across states) is a cause for concern. This finding should be explored more fully across grade levels, including grade 12, the typical year politics and government instruction is provided in high school. Additionally, and quite interestingly, states that have a civics or social studies test in any grade tended to have students reporting greater access to civics content but seemingly minimal differences in opportunities for evidence-based instructional approaches (with the

⁸ See <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/civics/results/groups/>.

potential exception of long written responses). This suggests that testing may result in a boost to content exposure for students but not at the expense of evidence-based instructional approaches.

In addition to the need to further investigate some of the perplexing findings highlighted above, several additional research extensions and lines of inquiry are needed. First, although we presented a detailed national landscape of student-reported access to civics content and evidence-based instructional approaches, not all instructional approaches with evidence of effectiveness in civic learning were included due to data availability. Future research should comprehensively study student-reported access to other evidence-based approaches, such as project-based learning (Duke et al., 2021) and reading strategies (Vaughn et al., 2013; Wineburg et al., 2022). Second, our study was unable to probe variation in quality within learning opportunities (e.g., more/less effective delivery of content, more/less effective use of individual instructional approaches). To the extent possible, future studies of access should seek to measure such variation in quality. Third, we focused on presenting descriptive disparities along a wide range of characteristics, and future research should also probe interactions between characteristics or probe narrower research questions and hypotheses that may require estimating differences while controlling for other characteristics. Fourth, as mentioned above, future research should study why access to civics content and evidence-based instructional approaches varies so much within schools. Is this due to variations in teachers and/or due to sorting of students? Last, future studies also should seek to replicate our findings using more recent data. Future iterations of NAEP are one option for monitoring access issues in the future and will allow for examining whether similar findings hold true after the onset of COVID-19.

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Appendix A

Table A-1. Outcome Variables and Descriptions

Outcome variable	Description	Data source
<i>Politics and government</i> (6 items: $\alpha = 0.82$)	The U.S. Constitution	NAEP STQ26a
	The three branches of the U.S. government (executive, judicial, and legislative branches)	NAEP STQ26b
	How laws are made	NAEP STQ26c
	Political parties, elections, and voting	NAEP STQ26d
	Current political and social issues	NAEP STQ26g
	Compare the roles and responsibilities of local, state, and national governments in the United States	NAEP STQ29c
<i>International affairs</i> (3 items: $\alpha = 0.69$)	Other countries' governments (for example, their structure, how they are run, or interactions with the United States)	NAEP STQ26e
	International organizations (for example, the United Nations, World Bank, or World Health Organization)	NAEP STQ26f
	Examine how the United States influences and is influenced by events in other countries	NAEP STQ29b
<i>Citizenship</i> (3 items: $\alpha = 0.84$)	Study the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens	NAEP STQ29a
	Study why it is important to pay attention to the political process and government	NAEP STQ29d
	Study why it is important for individuals to participate in the political process and government	NAEP STQ29e
<i>Field trips</i>	Gone on class field trips to learn about civics and/or U.S. government topics	NAEP STQ28a
<i>Long written responses</i>	Long written responses (for example, several paragraphs)	NAEP STQ30d
<i>Written opinion</i>	Written about your opinion on a community problem or social issue (for example, in a letter, e-mail, or blog post)	NAEP STQ28c
<i>Political debates and discussions</i>	Take part in political debates or panel discussions	NAEP STQ28d

NOTE: NAEP STQ = NAEP Student Questionnaire. Details about survey questions and response options can be found in Table A-2.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Table A-2. Survey Questions and Response Options Used for Outcome Variables

Data source	Survey question	Response option
NAEP STQ26	In your social studies class this year, how much have you studied the following topics?	1: Not at all 2: Very little 3: Some 4: Quite a bit 5: A lot
NAEP STQ28	During this school year so far, how often have you done each of the following activities?	1: Never 2: Once 3: Two or three times 4: Four or five times 5: More than five times
NAEP STQ29	During this school year, how often do you do each of the following activities when you study civics and/or United States government?	1: Never or hardly ever 2: Once in a while 3: Sometimes 4: Often 5: Always or almost always
NAEP STQ30	In your social studies class this year, how often do you get the following assignments?	1: Never or hardly ever 2: Less than half of the lessons 3: About half of the lessons 4: More than half of the lessons 5: All or almost all of the lessons

NOTE: NAEP STQ = NAEP Student Questionnaire. Details about outcome variables can be found in Table A-1.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Appendix B

Table B-1. Characteristic Variables and Descriptions

Characteristic	Description	Data source
Student characteristics		
Gender	Male, female	NAEP student and teacher data
Race/ethnicity	White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Other	
English learners (EL)	Current ELs as “yes,” others as “no”	
Students with disabilities	Students on an Individualized Education Plan as “yes,” others as “no”	
Student socioeconomic status (SES) index ¹	<p>Number of books at home: 0–10 books scored as 0; 11–25 books scored as 1; 26–100 books scored as 2; and more than 100 books scored as 3</p> <p>Students’ eligibility for the National School Lunch Program: Eligible scored as 0; not eligible scored as 3</p> <p>Parents’ highest level of education: Did not finish high school scored as 0; graduated from high school scored as 1; had some education after high school scored as 2; graduated from college scored as 3</p> <p>Student SES index was calculated as the sum of these scores for each student. Students who were missing data for any of these three variables were excluded from the calculation of the SES index as well as subsequent analyses.</p>	
School characteristics		
School type	Traditional public (i.e., not charter), charter, or private	NAEP school data
School location	Four categories: city, suburb, town, rural	NAEP student and teacher data
Student racial/ethnic groups at school	Percentage of Black or Hispanic students at school	
School SES	To obtain school SES, the student-level SES shown above was aggregated to the school level	
State characteristics		
Census region	Four regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, West	NAEP student and teacher data
State testing policy	Whether a state assessment was administered in civics or social studies in any grade during the 2017–18 school year	NCES State Education Practices ²

¹ The scoring was based on Broer et al. (2023).

² Dummy coded based on [Table 8.5. Social studies statewide assessment name/title and grade administered, by state: 2018](#).

NOTE: Student race/ethnicity based on school records. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic origin. Black refers to Black or African American. Other includes students who are identified as either Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, or two or more races.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment.

Appendix C

Table C-1. NAEP Scores in Standard Deviation Units for Specific Group Comparisons

Group comparison	2018 civics	2019 math	2019 science	2019 reading
Non-NSLP - NSLP	0.789	0.810	0.790	0.712
White - Black	0.868	0.899	1.005	0.792
White - Hispanic	0.665	0.664	0.745	0.571

NOTE: NSLP = National School Lunch Program. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic origin. Black refers to Black or African American.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2018 Grade 8 Civics Assessment and 2019 Grade 8 Mathematics, Reading, and Science Assessments.

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