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Do Politics in Our Democracy Prevent Schooling for Our Democracy?
Civic Education in Highly Partisan Times

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Abstract

Amid hyper-partisanship, increasing critiques of civic education reform priorities from conservatives, and growing signs of democratic backsliding, can schools provide foundational support for democratic norms, commitments, and capacities? Drawing on a unique national survey of high school principals conducted in 2018, we examine how political context, district priorities, and principal beliefs and characteristics are related to support for civic education. We find that a school's partisan context is unrelated to most supports for democratic education. Of note, however, support for the discussion of controversial issues is less common in conservative districts, raising important questions about why the discussion of controversial issues (a core building block of democratic societies) is less common in conservative settings. In addition, support for civic education at the school level is highest at schools led by principals who are civically active and in districts that are committed to democratic aims. At a time when school districts face highly contentious politics, these findings indicate that systemic district commitments can help strengthen our civic foundations and that principals and district leaders may be able to promote small-*d* democracy amid increasingly politicized school governance contexts.

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There is rising concern in the United States about the erosion of the practices, norms, and commitments necessary to sustain a democratic society (Carey et al., 2019; Mickey et al., 2017). This dynamic, termed *democratic backsliding* by political scientists, is associated with worrisome trends, including: electoral suppression, delegitimization of the press, partisan capture of supposedly neutral governmental institutions, attacks on minoritized communities, and embrace of authoritarian styles of leadership (Waldner & Lust, 2018). While democratic backsliding might sound like a minor decline from politics as usual, this process represents a dire threat to democratic life. The erosion of democratic institutions and of democratic norms and commitments is, as Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) have shown, "how democracies die" (p. 101).

Of course, the promise of democracy in the United States has never been fully realized. For example, state power has maintained racial inequality, reflected elite interests, applied the rule of law unevenly, and obscured information and corrupt behavior (Jacobs & Skocpol, 2005). While these problems with democracy are not new, democratic backsliding further undermines safeguards that can prevent varied forms of corrupt and antidemocratic actions and that offer modest protection and structures for redress to the most vulnerable. And backsliding creates a context in which it is that much more difficult to reinvigorate social movements aimed at more fully realizing inclusive participation and equal treatment for all.

Studies of democratic backsliding have paid scant attention to educational institutions. We believe this is a mistake. Educational efforts have the potential to strengthen our weakened civic foundations by developing young people's understandings of and commitments to democratic norms and their abilities to practice them. At the same time, just as hyper-partisanship can lessen support for democratic norms, it might erode public and professional commitment to educate for democracy. Indeed, as we discuss in more detail, a number of local, state, and federal officials currently are creating legislation and issuing regulations to constrain civic education efforts. Thus, we believe it is vital to examine whether and the extent to which a school's partisan context might influence support for civic education and, relatedly, whether other factors may be influential. Specifically, drawing on a national survey of high school principals, we examine how the partisan context surrounding a school, district priorities, principal beliefs and characteristics, as well as the demographic characteristics of the district are related to provision of supports for civic education.

Our findings reveal reason for both hope and concern. Drawing on data collected just prior to the 2018 midterm elections, we find that schools in conservative districts are less likely than those in liberal contexts to provide support for controversial-issue discussions in classrooms, but we also find that supports for many forms of civic education (including for education related to the upcoming elections) are not related to a district's political context. Moreover, and quite relevant for those interested in reform, we find

that school and district leadership can make a meaningful difference. High schools in districts committed to civic priorities provide significantly more support for teachers related to civic education than other high schools, regardless of the partisan lean of the surrounding community. We also find that schools that provide supports for civic education are more likely to be led by principals who participate frequently in civic and political life. Thus, while the hyper-partisan and contentious political contexts clearly create many challenges, we also see evidence that, with support from district and school leaders, schools can meaningfully advance the democratic aims of education and, in so doing, can play a meaningful role in helping to bolster democracy.

An Educational Response to Democratic Backsliding

In the late 1930s, against the backdrop of rising fascism in Europe and attacks on civil liberties in the United States, John Dewey argued that we cannot assume democracy will "perpetuate itself automatically" (1939/1988, p. 225). Dewey worried that rising social distrust and intolerance could "destroy the essential condition of the democratic way of living" (p. 228). Democracy, he reasoned, must be continually renewed through free and robust communication, joint work on projects of shared concern, and daily interchange that supports mutual respect and regard. Individuals must also learn to participate thoughtfully and effectively in civic and political institutions.

These norms, values, and practices, often viewed as the core of small-*d* democracy, create a foundation upon which more substantial work towards a more equitable and just society can be advanced. Dewey viewed public schools as critically important sites for young people to experience small-d democracy and to cultivate democratic ways of being and commitments—what Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 101) have referred to as the "soft guardrails of democracy." Similar educational imperatives are being emphasized by both scholars and educational reformers today (Educating for American Democracy, 2021; Lee et al., 2021).

To be sure, some efforts to educate for democracy focus on goals that extend well beyond supporting the norms and practices associated with these guardrails to include embracing transformative democratic aims (Banks, 2017). Whereas small-*d* democracy emphasizes abilities to understand, deliberate about, and work with others on issues of shared concern, transformative goals foreground an understanding of the underlying structures that hold the status quo in place as well as of the social movement strategies required to bring about social change and actualize justice and equality. Both small-*d*-democracy and transformational goals are important. In different ways, they respond to challenges that factors such as economic inequality, racism, corruption, disinformation, and distrust pose to the promotion of a more democratic and just society. This paper examines the factors that influence whether educational institutions support forms of pedagogy and curriculum designed to advance small-*d*-democracy priorities because of our interest in democratic backsliding, but we think employing similar analysis linked to transformative dimensions of democratic aims is vitally important as well.

Empirical research indicates that public schools in the United States can provide learning opportunities that promote small-*d*-democratic goals. Classroom-based learning opportunities such as open discussion of controversial societal issues, simulations, and community projects as well as civically oriented extracurricular activities have been found to promote commitments to engage in democratic life (Campbell, 2008; Gould, et al., 2011; Hart et al., 2007; Kahne et al., 2013; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Torney-Purta, 2002). Studies also indicate that civic learning opportunities can promote tolerance, abilities to evaluate sources, reasoning skills tied to social issues, and knowledge of constitutional principles (Campbell, 2006; Kuhn & Crowell, 2011; McGrew et al., 2019; Owen, 2015). Other studies explore how educators enact these practices within politically diverse and politically homogeneous classrooms (for example, Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Mirra et al., 2016; Parker, 2002). Often, advocates for civic education note these promising results and argue that school and district leaders should support these practices. Despite positive research findings and efforts by advocates to promote democratic education, however, institutional commitments to these priorities have been modest. Civics education reform largely has remained a marginal priority in public education systems (Gould et al., 2011). Thus, if one wishes for schools to play a significant role bolstering the foundations for democratic governance and life, it is vital to better understand factors that constrain or foster implementation of impactful civic education practices.

As a starting point, we examine whether one of the prime causes of democratic backsliding—partisan passions that overpower commitments to democratic norms and values—is also constraining democratic education. We know that hot-button curricular topics such as evolution and the civil war have become partisan battlegrounds (Goldstein, 2020). But are the partisan preferences of local communities related to whether schools advance the democratic aims of education more broadly? Will, for example, educators in deeply liberal or deeply conservative communities ensure that students are allowed to express contrarian views during class discussions? Will schools support students to participate in the electoral process regardless of how the students are likely to vote? At issue, as noted, is the question of whether schools can play one of their foundational purposes—helping to strengthen and sustain small-*d* democracy.

Currently, we have little evidence upon which to base an answer. Polling indicates that civic education enjoys wide public approval (PDK International, 2019), with equal support from Democrats and Republicans (CivXNow, 2020). This might lead some to embrace the hopeful possibility that a school's support for the democratic aims of education is independent of that school's partisan context. But this hypothesis may be overly optimistic. Drawing on bipartisan focus groups with educational leaders and policy advocates, Hess and Rice (2020) have reported that many conservatives worry that when educators engage students in civic action projects or discussions of current events, those efforts are more "akin to indoctrination than instruction" (p. 4). Such concerns may be prompting conservatives to turn against these forms of civic education. Recently, Stanley Kurtz (2021), writing in

the *National Review*, titled his article opposing federal support for civic education "The Greatest Educational Battle of Our Lifetimes" (also see https://www.nas.org/blogs/article/the-civics-alliance-open-letter-and-curriculum-statement). In addition, the Federalist Society and the Heritage Foundation have come out against federal funding for civic education.

Relatedly, the conservative National Association of Scholars launched The Civic Alliance, which argues that "American students are being subjected to a relentless form of anti-American propaganda teaching . . . by means of deceptively named theories and pedagogies such as Action Civics, Anti-Racism, Critical Race theory . . ." and advocates that civics curriculum should be "exclusively academic" with "no encouragement for service-learning, civic engagement, action civics, or any cognate activity" (National Association of Scholars, 2021). Such statements may reflect and may be fostering sizable conservative resistance to civic education—resistance that may influence the behavior of schools in conservative communities. But it's also possible that fights over civic education are largely the result of specific federal legislation put forward under a Democratic administration. These fights may also be part of a short-term political strategy to mobilize base voters and fundraise. Bipartisan support for civic education might remain strong. In short, much remains unknown about the impact of varied partisan contexts on support for civic education at the local level. This prompts our first research question:

> RQ1: To what extent is the partisan leaning of a high school's community related to the supports that schools provide for: (a) civic education overall and (b) specific forms of civic learning?

In addition to partisan politics, a range of institutional- and individual-level factors may also influence support for educational efforts to promote democratic aims. For those committed to the democratic purposes of schooling, identifying the influence of such factors could be enormously helpful. Indeed, if districts and schools are to foster systemic support for democratic aims, efforts by districts and principals will likely be essential. Strikingly, while there is broad consensus that district actions and principals' beliefs and behaviors often influence school practices (for example, Leithwood et al., 2004), scant attention has been paid to the relationships between district priorities and principals' beliefs on the one hand and supports for civic education on the other. More commonly, scholars who discuss democratic leadership focus on whether principals model democratic norms when interacting with their staff, with parents, or with students (Woods, 2020).

When examining factors impacting classroom efforts to promote democratic aims, rather than focusing on principals or district leaders, scholars mostly focus on teacher beliefs and behaviors and on teacher perceptions of support within their contexts (Anderson et al., 1998; Cornbleth, 2001; Farkas & Duffett, 2010; Knowles & Castro, 2019; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019). We currently lack systematic empirical studies that examine the relationship between institutional and individual factors and educational leaders' support for civically oriented approaches. However, if we are to make high-quality civic education more

common and if we are to develop effective methods for scaling high-quality civic education, attention must be paid to the factors that may influence leaders' behaviors.

Such priorities prompt our second and third research questions:

RQ2: Do district commitments to the democratic aims of education relate to provision of supports for civic education?

RQ3: Do principals' beliefs, experiences, and demographic characteristics relate to provision of supports for civic education?

A sense of urgency and possibility surrounds these questions. If the democratic aims of education cannot be pursued in highly partisan contexts or if only those with a particular partisan leaning pursue them, public schooling's historic democratic mission will be hobbled. However, if we can identify characteristics of districts or school leaders that bolster the supports provided for these small-*d*-democratic aims, then not only will we have learned something about the degree to which the politics of education affords opportunities for individual and institutional level agency, we will also have identified promising ways for district leaders and policymakers to provide systemic and foundational support for democratic norms, values, and commitments.

Methods

Survey Design and Sampling

Data examined are drawn from an online survey of principals conducted in the summer of 2018. We sampled principals from a list of all public high schools in the U.S. (derived from the 2015–2016 National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES] Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data [NCES, 2016]) to achieve a uniform distribution of schools across student enrollment and race. We excluded schools with fewer than 100 students, "full virtual schools," and "special education schools," as these schools were unlikely to experience the type of democratic dynamics we were interested in studying.

The survey was sent out to 6,935 email addresses. Due to district email filters, we were not able to reach a large (but indeterminate) number of schools. Six hundred seventy-four principals started the survey, and 500 completed it, yielding an overall response rate of 7.2%. We note that there is the potential for response bias in our sample. Yet our response rate is similar to other email-based surveys of educators (e.g., Clark et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is a paucity of large-scale survey data for studying principals and civic education. Respondents were well-represented across all covariates used in analyses, and we adjusted our sample to achieve a better balance with the population on key covariates (Valliant et al., 2013). Appendix 1 contains comparisons of survey-completers and non-completers with national averages (Table S1) as well as additional information about survey administration, variable wording, descriptive statistics, and supplementary analyses.

Dependent Variables

We assessed a school's level of support for the democratic aims of education by examining the degree to which that school or their district offered professional development related to seven dimensions of civic education. Specifically, we asked principals if their teachers received professional development regarding the upcoming 2018 November elections. Voting is often thought of as the quintessential political act, and preparing informed voters is often thought of as a core priority of schooling. We also asked principals whether their school or district provided teachers at their school with professional development related to a widely accepted set of six "best practices" in civic education: instruction tied to history, economics, or the other social sciences; discussion of controversial issues; service learning; simulations of governmental processes such as mock trial or Model UN; engagement in school governance; and extracurricular activities related to leadership skills (Gould et al., 2011). Often referred to as the "six promising practices," this set of approaches is endorsed by the mainstream civic reform community and by many school districts. It has also been endorsed in a range of bipartisan commissions that aimed to advance an evidence-based agenda for civic education (Gibson & Levine, 2003; Gould et al., 2011). The "six promising practices" are sometimes critiqued from the left for being insufficiently attentive to issues of inequality, the lived realities of marginalized students, and the need for profound social change (for example, Clay & Rubin, 2020; Cohen et al., 2018; Mirra & Garcia, 2017). This framework also receives some criticism from the right for providing "cover" for left-leaning teachers to advance their agendas (National Association of Scholars, 2021). As noted earlier, it would also be valuable to examine how support for a more transformational agenda are supported in varied partisan contexts. However, given this paper's focus on small-*d*-democratic aims, we focus on more mainstream approaches to civic education. The number of affirmative responses to each of the forms of professional development related to civic education were added together, creating a scale ranging from 0 to 7, which we label *Support for a Mainstream Vision of Civic Education* (see Table S2 for descriptive statistics on dependent and independent variables).

Our focus on professional development stems from the fact that those advocating for and studying civic education consistently argue that the provision of professional development is essential for improved practices (Gould et al., 2011; Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017). In addition, analyses of the RAND American Teacher Panel's 2019 survey found that most social studies teachers "reported not feeling well prepared to support students' civic development" (Hamilton et al., 2020, p. 48). Teachers who received such support were more likely to offer civics instruction (Hamilton et al., 2020). This is not to say that all forms of professional development are equally effective (Garet et al., 2001). However, providing professional development for civic practices represents a strong indicator of support for democratic aims as it suggests a willingness to invest discretionary and highly valued time and funds.

Independent Variables

Partisan Leaning is a continuous variable that represents the percent of the 2016 presidential vote for Donald Trump in the school district in which each school is located. Precinct-level data of the 2016 presidential election, collected from government

websites and election officials, were aggregated at the school-district level using GIS mapping (Rohla, 2017).

We assessed *District Commitment to Civics* by asking each principal, "Has district leadership talked about civic education with you personally or at principals' meetings you attended?" and "Has district leadership asked you for information about the civic education programs/activities and civic outcomes at your school?" We created a dichotomous variable and coded as "1" schools led by principals who replied "Yes" to both questions. As these questions were asked of principals, not district officials themselves, we note that this construct reflects principals' perceptions of district goals. Yet, given the low-inference nature of these questions, we view this scale as an indicator of a district's institutional focus on civic education.

We inquired about the level of *Principals' Civic Engagement*: whether they regularly follow the news, talk with friends and family about social issues, and participate in civic organizations. We also asked principals about the citizenship goals that their school emphasizes: *Personally Responsible Citizenship*, *Participatory Citizenship*, *Justice-Oriented Citizenship*, and *Patriotic Citizenship*. The first three are drawn from Westheimer & Kahne's (2004) framework that identifies visions of citizenship that schools might promote. We added *patriotic* to this mix because we aimed to ensure that principals could choose from a varied spectrum of ideological perspectives (Damon, 2020). Each of the four binary variables indicated if principals prioritized a specific vision of citizenship or not. Ultimately, we did not include Personally Responsible Citizenship as an independent variable in our analyses because nearly all principals strongly supported personally responsible citizenship goals.

Analytic Approach

Outcome measures were regressed on focal independent variables, as well as community, school, and principal-level covariates. Specifically, we included measures of student enrollment, racial composition, family income (based on the percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), and school geographic locale (i.e., rural area or town, suburb, and city) as covariates in our analyses. Models were weighted by sample weights. For ease of interpretation, we present linear probability models, fitted using weighted least squares with robust standard errors. (For logistic regression models, see Table S5).

Results

Partisan Leaning and Supports for Civic Education

A high school's supports for a mainstream vision of civic education were not related to the partisan leaning of its community. However, high schools in liberal communities were more likely than those in conservative communities to provide support for one part of the mainstream vision: discussions of controversial issues.

As detailed in Table 1, partisanship is unrelated to a mainstream vision of civic education and is unrelated to six of the seven civic education practices. We also conducted a stepwise regression to more closely examine the relationship between partisan leaning and a mainstream vision of civic education, and how this relationship changes as covariates are added (Table 2). With no controls, the relationship between partisan leaning and support for a mainstream vision of civic education was negative ($b = -0.0109$, $SEb = 0.0042$, $p = .0101$), but it was small. These figures indicate, for instance, that for every 10% increment in votes for Trump in the 2016 presidential election, the school provided 0.109 fewer supports (out of seven possible supports) for the mainstream vision of civic education. This relationship loses significance and becomes even smaller when controlling for covariates ($b = -0.0019$, $SEb = 0.0072$, $p = .7915$). We also checked for a quadratic relationship between partisan leaning and a mainstream vision of civic education, thinking there might be something unique about politically contested communities; however, there was no significant relationship.

Schools in liberal settings were, however, more likely than schools in conservative contexts to provide professional development related to discussion of controversial issues ($b = -0.0038$, $SEb = 0.0019$, $p = .0394$). For example, with all controls and independent variables included, a school located in a community where Trump received one quarter of the vote would, on average, be 19.2% more likely to provide support for controversial issue discussion than one in which Trump received three quarters of the vote.

District Commitment to Civics

High schools in districts committed to civic priorities provided significantly more support for a mainstream vision of civic education than other districts. This relationship was large and consistent. Schools in districts committed to civic priorities provided professional development support for 4.21 out of the seven practices compared to 3.00 in districts that were not committed to civics, a difference of $b = 1.2074$ ($SEb = 0.1844$, $p < .0001$) on average (Table 1). District commitment to civic education was also positively related to the provision of each form of civic education that we considered, and the relationship was statistically significant for five of the seven practices. For example, schools in districts committed to civics were more than twice as likely to provide professional development tied to the election than schools in districts that were not committed to civics (39.7% compared to 18.5%). This represents a difference (in probability) of $b = 0.2127$ ($SEb = 0.0416$, $p < .0001$) on average (Table 1).

Principals' Civic Engagement

High schools led by principals who were more civically engaged (those who regularly follow the news, talk with friends and family about social issues, and participate in civic organizations) provided more supports for civic education. Specifically, principals who were one standard deviation more civically engaged than other principals offered on average 0.2136 ($SEb = 0.0868$, $p = .0142$) more professional development opportunities linked to the seven supports. Consistent with this finding, schools whose principals sought to foster a participatory vision of citizenship in their students were more likely than others to provide professional development linked to elections ($b = 0.0904$, $SEb = 0.0434$,

Table 1. Linear Probability Models of Professional Development for the Six Proven Practices and Elections, and Multiple Regression of Supports for a Mainstream vision of Civic Education

	Six Proven Practices							
Variable	Instr. in Soc. Sci. & History	Discussion of controversial issues	Service learning	Government simulations	Engagement in school governance	Leadership activities	Elections	Mainstream vision
Intercept	0.5796*** (0.0505)	0.3710*** (0.0508)	0.3824*** (0.0507)	0.3675*** (0.0517)	0.3881*** (0.0510)	0.5971*** (0.0475)	0.1132* (0.0446)	2.9057*** (0.1975)
Partisan leaning [a]	-0.0006 (0.0018)	-0.0038* (0.0019)	-0.0021 (0.0018)	0.0030 (0.0019)	-0.0024 (0.0019)	0.0021 (0.0017)	0.0017 (0.0016)	-0.0051 (0.0071)
District commitment to civics	0.0927 (0.0474)	0.1927*** (0.0477)	0.2117*** (0.0475)	0.0456 (0.0485)	0.1477** (0.0479)	0.2507*** (0.0446)	0.2127*** (0.0416)	1.2074*** (0.1844)
Geographic locale [b]								
Suburb	0.0468 (0.0647)	0.0704 (0.0650)	0.0484 (0.0649)	0.0475 (0.0662)	0.0588 (0.0654)	-0.0189 (0.0608)	0.0002 (0.0569)	0.1083 (0.252)
City	-0.0219 (0.0756)	-0.0398 (0.0760)	0.1560* (0.0759)	0.0064 (0.0773)	-0.0188 (0.0763)	-0.0547 (0.0710)	0.0439 (0.0667)	-0.0698 (0.2954)
Student enrollment [c]	0.0107** (0.0038)	0.0001 (0.0038)	-0.0025 (0.0038)	0.0053 (0.0039)	0.0064 (0.0038)	0.0028 (0.0035)	-0.0025 (0.0033)	0.0148 (0.0144)
Percentage White students	0.0005 (0.0013)	0.0002 (0.0013)	0.0002 (0.0013)	-0.0024 (0.0013)	0.0030* (0.0013)	-0.0008 (0.0012)	-0.0021 (0.0011)	-0.0033 (0.0050)
Student family income [d]	0.0035** (0.0012)	-0.0001 (0.0013)	0.0007 (0.0013)	-0.0021 (0.0013)	0.0052*** (0.0013)	-0.0014 (0.0012)	0.0010 (0.0011)	0.0056 (0.0048)
Principal characteristic								
Years of experience	-0.0002 (0.0034)	-0.0057 (0.0034)	0.0056 (0.0034)	0.0077* (0.0035)	0.0083* (0.0034)	0.0016 (0.0032)	-0.0019 (0.0030)	0.0135 (0.0131)
Gender (female)	-0.0526 (0.0497)	-0.0229 (0.0500)	-0.1064* (0.0498)	-0.0154 (0.0508)	-0.0431 (0.0501)	-0.0149 (0.0467)	0.0169 (0.0433)	-0.3204 (0.1916)
Race/ ethnicity (non-White)	0.0152 (0.0688)	0.0116 (0.0691)	0.0155 (0.069)	0.0030 (0.0704)	0.1187 (0.0696)	0.0967 (0.0646)	-0.1125 (0.0602)	-0.0346 (0.2663)
Civic engagement	0.0646** (0.0222)	0.0207 (0.0223)	0.0376 (0.0222)	0.0024 (0.0227)	0.0347 (0.0224)	0.0178 (0.0208)	0.0322 (0.0196)	0.2136* (0.0868)
Citizenship goal								
Participatory	-0.0515 (0.0499)	0.0819 (0.0501)	-0.0721 (0.0499)	0.0711 (0.0510)	0.0517 (0.0503)	0.0070 (0.0469)	0.0904* (0.0434)	0.2040 (0.1923)
Justice-oriented	-0.0087 (0.0495)	0.0216 (0.0497)	0.0273 (0.0495)	-0.0216 (0.0506)	0.0271 (0.0500)	0.0036 (0.0465)	0.0195 (0.0429)	0.1457 (0.1899)
Patriotic	-0.0007 (0.0488)	-0.0740 (0.0490)	0.1152* (0.0489)	-0.0310 (0.0500)	-0.0197 (0.0492)	-0.0111 (0.0459)	0.0350 (0.0425)	0.0508 (0.1883)
R^2	0.0693	0.0875	0.1049	0.0397	0.0954	0.0915	0.1211	0.1465
N	500	500	500	500	500	500	466	466

Note. Calibration weights were used in all models. *Civics Instruction* indicates instruction tied to history, economics, or social studies. *District Commitment to Civics* and *Principal Gender*, *Race/Ethnicity*, and the three listed *Goals* are binary variables. *Principal Civic Engagement* is a *z*-normed construct of principals' personal civic engagement.

a As indicated by the percentage of voters in the community who voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential elections

b Reference group = rural/town

c Reported in the hundreds of students

d Measured according to the proportion of the student population eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

Table 2. Stepwise Multiple Regression Model with Mainstream Vision of Civic Education as Outcome

Variable	0	1	2	3	4
Intercept	3.3948*** (0.0890)	3.4036*** (0.0879)	3.2972*** (0.1612)	2.8751*** (0.1653)	2.9057*** (0.1975)
Partisan leaning [a]		-0.0109* (0.0042)	-0.0019 (0.0072)	-0.0069 (0.0069)	-0.0051 (0.0071)
District commitment to civics				1.2429*** (0.1802)	1.2074*** (0.1844)
Geographic locale [b]					
Suburb			0.1113 (0.2623)	0.2124 (0.2504)	0.1083 (0.252)
City			0.1212 (0.3059)	0.0983 (0.2915)	-0.0698 (0.2954)
Student enrollment [c]			0.0166 (0.0152)	0.0127 (0.0145)	0.0148 (0.0144)
Percentage White students			-0.0048 (0.0051)	-0.0012 (0.0048)	-0.0033 (0.0050)
Student family income [d]			0.0013 (0.0049)	0.0058 (0.0048)	0.0056 (0.0048)
Principal characteristic					
Years of experience					0.0135 (0.0131)
Gender (female)					-0.3204 (0.1916)
Race/ethnicity (non-White)					-0.0346 (0.2663)
Civic engagement					0.2136* (0.0868)
Citizenship goal					
Participatory					0.2040 (0.1923)
Justice-oriented					0.1457 (0.1899)
Patriotic					0.0508 (0.1883)
ΔR^2		0.0142*	0.0092	0.0919***	0.0312*
R^2		0.0142	0.0234	0.1153	0.1465

Note. A total of 466 principals were included in the regression. Calibration weights were used in all models. *District Commitment to Civics* and *Principal Gender*, *Race/Ethnicity*, and the three listed *Goals* are binary variables. *Principal Civic Engagement* is a *z*-normed construct of principals' personal civic engagement.

a   As indicated by the percentage of voters in the community who voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential elections

b   Reference group = rural/town

c   Reported in the hundreds of students

d   Measured according to the proportion of the student population eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

$p = .0380$). In contrast, we found no relationship between principals who promoted the justice or patriotic vision of citizenship and the level of supports their schools provided for a mainstream vision of civic education. However, we did find that principals who embraced patriotic citizenship goals were more likely to provide professional development for service learning ($b = 0.1152$, *SE*$b = 0.0489$, $p = .0189$).

Some additional covariates were related to supports for some forms of civic education (though not to the aggregate mainstream vision of civic education), as indicated on Table 1. For example,

principals of larger high schools and of schools with fewer youth receiving free or reduced-price lunch were more likely to report providing support for social science instruction. In addition, principals with more years of experience and those in schools with a higher percentage of White students as well as a lower percentage of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch were also more likely to report that their schools provided support for youth engagement in school governance. Principals with more years of experience were also more likely to report that their school provided support for governmental simulations. Male principals

and those in urban schools were also more likely to report providing supports for service learning.

Discussion

Our examination of factors associated with providing supports for civic education emerges during a period that some have characterized as a "stress test" for American democracy (Remnick, 2018). There is growing apprehension about the erosion of commitments to democratic priorities such as the rule of law, support for an independent press, tolerance of those with divergent perspectives, inclusive participation, and evidence-based deliberation. In addition, concerns are raised about threats to voting rights, authoritarian styles of leadership, and politicization of institutions that previously prided themselves on independence (Carey et al., 2019; Foa & Mounk, 2016; Mickey et al., 2017).

In an increasingly contentious political environment, fewer institutions seem able to act independently of partisan pressures. Can schools? In many respects, our findings are encouraging.

Partisanship Does Not Prevent Education for Democracy
Provision of supports for six of seven practices that are part of a mainstream vision of civic education was unrelated to the partisan context of the high schools we studied. These practices, as we noted earlier, have been found to promote small-*d*-democratic priorities such as leadership development, community service, tolerance of those with differing views, concern about the accuracy of varied claims, community service, and informed voting (Hart et al., 2007; Kahne et al., 2013; Kuhn & Crowell, 2011; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; McGrew et al., 2019; Owen, 2015; Torney-Purta, 2002).

Relatedly, we found that principals' commitments to justice-oriented goals (a liberal-leaning perspective) were unrelated to all supports for small-*d*-democratic practices and that their commitments to patriotic goals (a conservative leaning perspective) were only related to one of seven supports for small-*d*-democratic priorities (schools of those with patriotic goals provided more support for service learning). In short, in a period where democracy is at risk, public schools may be able to help. They appear able to promote democratic norms and capacities across a diverse array of partisan contexts and commitments.

Partisanship Appears to Constrain Access to Curriculum with Controversial Content
While we found support for most forms of civic education was unrelated to a school's partisan context, we do not wish to overstate the case. Schools in liberal communities were more likely than those in conservative communities to provide support for professional development focused on controversial issue discussions. It would be valuable to know why.

The ability to discuss controversial social issues is a core building block of democratic societies (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Mutz, 2006; Parker, 2006). Indeed, it is notable that when the National Academy of Education created a commission in response to concern regarding the health of our democracy, they focused on discourse and reasoning (Lee et al., 2021). Constraints on this practice may well reflect and, over the long run, contribute to

backsliding. It is therefore vitally important for scholars to better understand whether, when, and why the political context may constrain institutional support for learning that engages controversial issues.

Moreover, although we did not ask principals about support for other curricular practices that involve politically contentious issues such as those that align with transformative civics, it may well be that such practices are less likely in conservative contexts. For example, schools in conservative communities may be less inclined to support curricular content that focuses on the causes and consequences of racism or curricular approaches such as Youth Participatory Action Research which engage students in analyzing and responding to pressing problems of inequality in their communities (Mirra et al., 2016). Indeed, recent public campaigns in many conservative states and conservative communities attacking curriculum associated with the *New York Times*' 1619 project suggests that this is a very real possibility.

Demographic Factors Were Often Unrelated to Support for Democratic Aims
Given that demographic factors are related to many forms of educational opportunity, it was also significant that we did not find relationships between demographic factors and the provision of most supports for the forms of civic education that we examined. A school's location in a rural, suburban, or urban context and the size of its enrollment were largely unrelated to the provision of these supports for civic learning. Two small exceptions were that schools in cities provided more supports for service learning than schools in suburban or rural contexts and large high schools provided more support for instruction in history and social studies than smaller schools. Given scholarship demonstrating fewer civic learning opportunities for students from low-income backgrounds (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2013; Levinson, 2011) and the fact that such inequalities will magnify deeper societal and democratic inequities, it is particularly worth noting that schools enrolling higher percentages of White students and lower percentages of students from low-income families were more likely to provide support for instruction in social sciences and history. In addition, and consistent with what McFarland & Starmanns (2009) have found, students in schools enrolling proportionally fewer students from low-income families were more likely to provide teachers with support for engagement with student government. There were not relationships between these variables and any of the other forms of support.

A District-wide Systemic Focus May Be a Powerful Way to Promote Democratic Aims
Fortunately, our study highlighted factors that may well increase support for controversial issue discussion in politically conservative contexts. While schools in conservative contexts were 19.2% less likely to provide professional development associated with controversial issue discussion, schools in districts committed to democratic aims were 19.3% more likely to provide this form of professional development, roughly offsetting the partisan effect. Moreover, the benefits of district commitments are not limited

to this one form of civic education. Indeed, district commitment to civic priorities was associated with the provision of professional development supports for all the practices examined, signaling promising opportunities for systemic reform.

This finding parallels results from a large scale study by the bipartisan Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge (2013). The commission analyzed data from a nationally representative survey of teachers and found that one of the best predictors of teachers delivering instruction that promoted civic goals—student voice, discussions tied to elections, and classroom deliberations—was whether the teachers perceived support for these practices from their districts, their principals, and students' parents.

In short, findings from the current study suggest that institutional efforts by school districts to attend to civic priorities can meaningfully advance efforts to promote the democratic aims of education. This indicates that expanding district-wide approaches may be quite valuable. In addition, the potential strength of district-level action has implications for research. Scholars have long investigated systemic efforts by districts to advance learning in STEM. In terms of district-wide efforts in civics, there is very little. Johnson & Pak (2018) provide a valuable historical case study, and Berkman (2020a), Berkman (2020b), and Hodgin et al. (2020) provide recent reports of district-wide civic education efforts. Studies are needed that detail district-wide models to support democratic aims and that systematically assess the efficacy of varied district strategies. Studies examining ways that reform efforts manage political and other contextual constraints would also be enormously valuable.

Principals' Civic Identities Matter

When it comes to understanding the significance of principals' civic identities, both the relationships and non-relationships that emerged from our analyses are interesting. Our analysis points to a somewhat intuitive—but quite important—relationship between principals' personal civic participation and their schools' provisions of support for civic education. Principals who regularly take part civically in their communities led high schools that provided supports for education that encouraged deliberation, problem-solving, and active engagement in social and political life. Scholars of democratic aims have long viewed the civic identities of teachers as relevant drivers of civic education (Anderson et al., 1998; Cornbleth, 2001; Farkas & Duffett, 2010; Knowles & Castro, 2019; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019). However, scholars of civic education rarely focus on principals. These findings point to the potential cost of this neglect. Attending to principals' civic engagement within principal preparation programs, hiring civically committed principals, and working with principals to deepen understanding of and involvement in democratic life may well be fruitful avenues for proponents of civic education.

Limitations of Study

There is a need for caution when interpreting these findings. Our study relied on principal reports of both professional development and district-level commitment to civics. There is more we would like to know about professional development related to civic education beyond what practices were addressed. For example, was the professional development a single session or a sustained activity? It would also be helpful to have a direct measure of district policies and practices. The strength of our findings regarding the relationship between district commitments to civics and the provision of supports for civic learning might be due in part to principals who care about civic education recalling these conversations more frequently than others because the statements made by district leaders were more salient to them.

Moreover, by grounding our analysis in the provision of professional development designed to foster small-*d* democracy, we attend to some, but by no means all, democratic aims. Specifically, it is possible that transformative visions of civic education would be more heavily influenced by the partisan context. Furthermore, there are various ways that educational leaders can promote democratic aims that extend beyond professional development. For example, principals can structure opportunities to give students voice in decision making and engage in conversations and forums with both students and faculty. Principals also have a bully pulpit of sorts. Some use their ability to communicate to the entire student body and the broader community to address democratic values and norms by promoting democratic norms of tolerance and respect. Scholars should examine whether the very publicness of principals' communiques makes this form of leadership more sensitive to political context than offering professional development. In short, while this study examines important issues, and ones that have rarely been studied with large scale data sets, our focus on the political dynamics of leading for democracy is not comprehensive.

Some caution also is merited regarding our findings about the lack of association between the partisan leaning of communities and the provision of a mainstream vision of civic education. It is possible that while schools in different political contexts are equally likely to offer civic learning opportunities, they may do so in very different ways—and in ways that reflect the partisan context. For example, schools situated close to military bases that enroll many students from military families are likely to encourage very different kinds of service-learning projects than schools located in immigrant communities with a substantial presence of activist or civil rights organizations. While, in both cases, these service projects may advance small-*d*-democratic skills and commitments, they may also advance values that reflect distinct and more partisan priorities. Research with nuanced attention to such issues would be valuable.

Finally, our survey data reflect a snapshot in time. The national political environment today is different than in summer 2018. To take a dramatic example, the meaning of educating for democracy shifted fundamentally following the events of January 6, 2021. Moving forward, it will be important to examine the extent to which supports for civic education are independent of partisan context. Our study offers a baseline of sorts to test out how schools are holding up in the face of emerging democratic threats.

Conclusion

Given that educational institutions have long been envisioned as guardians of democracy, it is striking that political scientists studying responses to democratic backsliding have rarely focused on schooling. And while education scholars attend to efforts to prepare students for political life, it is notable that they too have not conducted large scale investigations of whether or how attention to democratic aims is itself shaped by the political life that surrounds the school or district. In an increasingly partisan age, such possibilities demand consideration.

The importance of such considerations is amplified, given increasing concern regarding the health of democracy in the United States as well as multiple high profile reports that call for increased attention to civic education (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2020; Educating for American Democracy, 2021; Lee et al., 2021). At this time of heightened need, will the partisan context of a school district influence whether public school leaders respond to these calls for reform?

A great deal of scholarship in civic education explores the relationship between teachers' knowledge and commitments, on the one hand, and teacher practices and student outcomes, on the other. Such work reflects recognition that education, while far from a democratic panacea, can make a meaningful difference. Teachers' efforts, for example, can help students to become more tolerant, informed, engaged, and capable of judging the credibility and quality of arguments. However, if our goal is to provide systemic supports for democratic aims, it is vital that careful attention be paid to school and district leadership as well. Our examination suggests that even in an era of hyper-partisanship and growing threats to democratic norms, educational institutions can play a productive role. This study finds that most supports for small-*d*-democratic practices were not influenced by the partisan contexts of a given high school. At the same time, the paper finds that these partisan contexts may have constrained support for engagement with controversial political issues—a particularly vital need in an increasingly partisan age.

Moreover, the strong relationship between district leadership and the provision of supports for civic education highlights the important potential for systemic district policy and action that focuses on civic goals. Such efforts appear to provide a means for advancing the democratic aims of education and a meaningful counterbalance to constraints on controversial issue discussion associated with conservative contexts. In addition, we suspect, though this needs further study, district commitments to democratic aims such as tolerance and support for vulnerable communities will be even more important than for discussion of controversial issues. These institutional efforts likely will have even greater influence if districts recruit and support civically engaged principals.

In a time when democracy is increasingly at risk, it is hopeful that a community's partisan leaning did not predict whether its public school provides supports for most forms of civic education. Furthermore, by focusing on school leadership and building district-wide commitment, public schools may well make a meaningful difference by helping to sustain small-*d* democracy. Specifically, these findings indicate that district commitments to promoting civic goals and to providing civic learning opportunities, such as opportunities for informed discussion of controversial issues and service learning, may be quite impactful.

Of course, education for democracy is playing out in a rapidly changing political environment. Since 2018, when our data was collected, the threat to democracy has grown and civics has become subject to more explicitly partisan debates (Kurtz, 2021; Packer, 2021). Currently, these controversies frequently tie concerns regarding civic education to curriculum and instruction that addresses issues of equity and race (Stout & LeMee, 2021; Mervosh & Heyward, 2021). Texas, for example, has passed a law that, in addition to banning elements of critical race theory, includes a ban on trying to persuade any elected official to adopt a position on any issue (Stout & LeMee, 2021). This might well prevent a relatively traditional civic education project in which teachers ask students to study an issue that matters to them and then write to their local, state, or federal representative to express their opinion. Indeed, it would be surprising if the widespread contention at the local level were not making many teachers and principals hesitant to engage with varied civic and political content, even when no laws prevent it. Thus, while we suspect that recent trends make district-wide efforts to support civic education more likely to encounter resistance, it also makes them more important. Such district-wide efforts can articulate a clear rationale for public schools to focus attention on civic development—one grounded in democratic commitments.

It is far from clear whether the highly contentious, hyper-partisan, and often antidemocratic contexts of public education politics will persist, grow, or recede. Ongoing study of these dynamics is needed. However, for those concerned with the state of our democracy, studying trends is insufficient. This research indicates that even amidst the highly partisan atmosphere of the 2018 elections, the partisan context of school districts was not a determining factor shaping which schools provided a range of supports for democratic aims. Rather, it was in school districts that expressed commitments to democratic education and where educational leaders had strong civic identities that provided significantly more support for civic education practices. These findings give us hope that public schools *can be* a critical asset for democratic sustenance and renewal. Yet the uncertain tenor of our current political moment means that this hope is conditional. In ways that are truer now than has been the case for many generations, the future of democratic education and the fate of our democracy are inextricably linked.

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Appendix 1: Details on Study Methodology, and Supplemental Analyses

Notes on Survey, Variables, and Analyses
Survey Construction and Administration

THE PRINCIPAL SURVEY was originally created to serve two purposes. First, it examined how societal challenges were affecting U.S. public high schools. Second, it explored whether and how public high schools promoted democratic aims. This paper focuses on the latter goal. In developing our survey, we reviewed other national surveys of principals, such as The School and Staffing Survey conducted by NCES, as well as surveys about civic education (Goldring et al., 2013). During survey construction, a small group of 10 current and retired school principals gave feedback regarding the intelligibility and readability of items.

Principals' email addresses were aggregated from publicly available state-level data. High school principals were invited to participate in the survey through Qualtrics. The first email invitation was delivered on June 21, 2018. Reminder invitation emails were sent on June 26, July 10, July 30, August 6, and August 9. The survey was closed on August 15, 2018. Many district servers treated email from our (self-identifying institution) server as spam and hence failed to deliver. We addressed this concern by sending invitations via Constant Contact, which reached more principals; however, we were not able to reach a large (but indeterminate) number of schools.

Principals who opened the email were invited to participate in an online survey examining how "the work of U.S. public school principals relates to social and political life in the United States." Principals were promised confidentiality and offered a $10 Amazon gift card for participating, and we also agreed to award the 100th, 300th, and 500th principal who completed the survey with a $250 Amazon gift card. Principals who were interested in taking the survey then clicked on a link to enter the survey itself. Principals who did not respond to the initial email (or who began the survey but did not complete it) received follow-up reminders.

Unfortunately, we are not able to share the underlying data from the survey. The combined information regarding the size of the school, Trump vote, racial mix, region, etc., would make it possible to identify some of the schools in our sample. As a result, our IRB approval required that we not make the data set public.

Missing Data
At the population level, only one variable (free or reduced-price lunch) had missing data: 4.88% of schools in the population were missing values for free or reduced-price lunch. Prior to narrowing down our sampling frame, missing values were imputed using predictive mean matching. The six variables used for imputation were not used for further analyses; these included Title I Status, School Type, Number of Teachers Employed, and whether the school was a Charter, Magnet, or Virtual school.

Of the 500 principals who completed the survey, 19 respondents (3.87%) were missing data for one or more principal-level covariates. Missing responses were imputed using predictive mean matching. *Support for Educating about the Election* had fewer responses (*n* = 466) compared to the other items. We did not impute missing values for this item, the details of which we discuss below.

Additional Information About Survey Weighting
We used a logistic regression model to generate propensity score weights to adjust for sampling bias (Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983; Valliant et al., 2013). Auxiliary variables used in the regression included: *Region of the U.S.*, *Geographic Locale*, *School Enrollment*, and *Percentage White Students*. Variables were selected using sequential replacement, with model fit measured by Akaike Information Criteria. The model was checked for multicollinearity via variance inflation factor. Second order predictors, including interaction terms, were examined but ultimately excluded from the final model. With respect to outliers, we examined Cook's score and deviation, and excluded four outlying schools when fitting the model.

Additional Information About Dependent Variables
Support for Educating About the Election was asked only for the subset of principals who replied "Yes" to the following question: "Do you feel that teachers at your school should use some class time discussing the elections and issues raised in the election?" In our sample, 82.1% of principals responded affirmatively to this question. However, among the 17.9% of principals who responded negatively, 27.3% clarified in a follow-up question that they did in fact support teachers addressing the elections in appropriate

courses, e.g., in a course on government. These principals were excluded from analyses for *Support for Teaching About the Election*, as we were unable to know their responses regarding professional development. The remainder of the 17.9% were assumed to have *not* supported educating about the election at their schools.

Full wording of all seven dependent variables can be found in a later section of this appendix.

Additional Information About Principals' Beliefs, Experiences, and Characteristics
Regarding principals' attitudes, principals were asked how much they prioritized four different citizenship goals: "personally responsible," "participatory," "justice-oriented," and "patriotic and loyal" (Damon, 2020; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Principals could respond "not a priority," "a modest priority," or "a strong priority" to each of the items. Response rates revealed that very few principals responded, "not a priority." Rather than assume a linear scale based on limited data, we transformed responses into dichotomous variables, indicating whether principals responded "a strong priority" or not. Full wording of all independent variables derived from the survey can be found in a later section of this appendix.

Regarding principals' personal civic engagement, we summed principals' responses to three civics-related questions. Items used a five-point frequency scale that were converted into a numeric scale, summed together, and transformed into z scores. Based on analyses from a prior study (Rogers et al., 2017), the third question was found to be more discriminating, and thus doubly weighted.

We coded principals as White/non-White, due to the relatively small number of principals of color. The lack of racial/ethnic representation among U.S. public high school principals, however, is not peculiar to our sample. Of our sample, 15.6% were principals of color, compared with 21.4% of non-White principals in U.S. public high schools (Taie & Goldring, 2017).

Additional Information About Covariates
School and community independent variables were derived from the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data for 2017–2018 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019; Geverdt, 2018), the academic year in which our survey was conducted. *Partisan Leaning* signifies the percentage of voters in the community who voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election. These were aggregated from precinct-level voting data to school district communities for the 500 principals sampled in our study. To compare the representativeness of our sample to the population of schools (Table S1), we used congressional district-level voting data (aggregated by *Daily Kos*, 2018); schools were mapped to the 114th Congressional Districts using congressional district shape files (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

Multiple Regression Models
Models were checked for multicollinearity using variance inflation factor (VIF). *Geographic Locale* and *Partisan Leaning* were strongly correlated (*r* = .540, *p* < .001), but did not lead to multicollinearity during modeling (VIF_{MAX} < 4 for all final models). Outliers were examined using Cook's score and deviation, but no cases were

excluded. Robust standard errors were used for all models, except for the logistic regression models in the appendix.

Statistical Software

Analyses were conducted using R 4.0.2 (R Core Team, 2020), along with various packages: "mice" for multiple imputation (van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011), "MASS" for sequential replacement (Venables & Ripley, 2002), "car" for calculating variance inflation factor (Fox & Weisberg, 2019), and "estimatr" (Blair et al., 2020) and "sandwich" (Zeileis et al., 2020) for calculating robust standard errors in the models and population estimates, respectively.

Table S1. Descriptive Statistics Comparing Population to Survey-Completers and Non-Completers

Variable	Population	Completers	Non-completers
Partisan leaning [a]	48.3 (17.3)	46.3 (15.7)	42.7 (15.4)
School characteristic			
Geographic locale			
Rural/town	.483	.340	.253
Suburb	.256	.398	.437
City	.261	.262	.310
Total enrollment	812 (719)	1,461 (786)	1,435 (800)
Percentage White students	54.8 (33.8)	53.3 (31.0)	46.8 (30.8)
Percentage FRPL students	51.1 (26.2)	45.1 (25.0)	48.1 (27.4)
Principal characteristic			
Race/ethnicity (non-White)	.214	.156	—
Gender (female)	.327	.284	—

Note. Means are reported for all variables; standard deviations (in parentheses) are reported for continuous variables. The number of public high schools in the population of U.S. schools (excluding those in the sample) is 18,689. A total of 500 principals completed the survey; 174 principals started but did not complete the survey. Data about schools' total enrollment, percentage white students, and percentage of students who are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) were derived from the Common Core of Data (NCES, 2019). Principals' race/ethnicity and gender were taken from the NCES National Teacher and Principal Survey "All US High Schools" 2015–16 report (Taie & Goldring, 2017); these data are not collected annually or for all schools, and thus are not available for survey non-completers.

a   As indicated by the percentage of voters in the congressional district who voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election.

Additional Notes on Representativeness of Sample

Descriptively, based on Table S1, our sample is similar to the population of U.S. public high schools with respect to *Partisan Leaning*, *Percentage White Students*, and *Principal Gender* and *Race/Ethnicity*. Our sample is misaligned with respect to *Total Enrollment* and *Geographic Locale*. Specifically, our sample has a higher proportion of medium size to large schools and a smaller

proportion of schools in rural areas and towns. To some extent, these discrepancies reflect our sampling choices. We sampled schools to achieve a uniform distribution with respect to school size and race, which, due to the abundance of small schools in rural areas, is equivalent to oversampling large schools.

Table S2. Descriptive Statistics of Dependent and Independent Variables

Variable	Unadjusted	Adjusted
Dependent		
Mainstream vision of Civic Education	3.395 (1.922)	3.391 (1.905)
Six Proven Practices		
Instr. in Soc. Sci. & History	.624	.599
Discussion of controversial issues	.467	.446
Service learning	.477	.498
Government simulations	.436	.420
Engagement in school governance	.502	.481
Leadership activities	.696	.681
Elections	.204	.234
Independent		
Partisan leaning	46.96 (18.40)	49.23 (20.65)
District commitment to civics	.346	.335
Geographic locale		
Rural/town	.340	.453
Suburb	.398	.287
City	.262	.260
Total enrollment	1,461 (786)	1,030 (648)
Percentage White students	53.34 (31.02)	53.73 (33.33)
Percentage FRPL students	45.13 (25.01)	50.05 (25.79)
Principal characteristic		
Years of experience	9.04 (6.32)	9.20 (6.61)
Gender (female)	.284	.290
Race/ethnicity (non-White)	.156	.154
Civic engagement	0.000 (1.000)	-0.012 (1.021)
Citizenship goal		
Participatory	.402	.373
Justice-oriented	.356	.352
Patriotic	.322	.373

Note. Means are reported for all variables; standard deviations (in parentheses) are reported for continuous variables. FRPL equals eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch.

Adjusted Sample Demographics

The distribution of covariates in our adjusted sample are more aligned with those of the population of U.S. public high schools. In particular, mean *Total Enrollment* decreases from 1,461 to 1,030, much closer to the population mean of 812, and the proportion of schools in rural areas and towns increases from .340 to .453, much closer to the population proportion of .483. We also note that our weighting scheme did not require any trimming; the largest weight given to a single school was 4.63.

Table S3. Linear Probability Models Regressing District Commitment to Civics on Other Independent Variables

Variable	Null	Trump vote only	Civic engagement only	Full
Intercept	0.3460*** (0.0213)	0.3330*** (0.0211)	0.3360 (0.0210)	0.2968*** (0.0464)
Partisan leaning [a]		0.0023* (0.0010)		0.0039* (0.0018)
Geographic locale				
Rural/own				
Suburb				-0.0844 (0.0617)
City				-0.0097 (0.0722)
School enrollment				0.0034 (0.0036)
Percentage White students				-0.0019 (0.0012)
Percentage FRPL students				-0.0034** (0.0012)
Principal characteristic				
Years of experience				0.0006 (0.0033)
Gender (female)				0.1434** (0.0471)
Race/ethnicity (non-White)				0.0337 (0.0658)
Civic engagement			0.0575** (0.0206)	0.0602** (0.021)
Citizenship goal				
Participatory				0.0872 (0.0475)
Justice-oriented				-0.1001* (0.0471)
Patriotic				0.0180 (0.0467)
R^2		0.0101	0.0154	0.0813

Note. A total of 500 principals were included in the regression analysis. Calibration weights were used in all models. *Rural/Town* is the reference group for *Suburb* and *City*. FRPL equals eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch. *School Enrollment* is reported in the hundreds of students. Principals' *Gender*, *Race/Ethnicity*, and the three listed *Goals* are binary variables. Principals' *Civic Engagement* is a *z*-normed construct of principals' personal civic engagement.

a As indicated by the percentage of voters in the community who voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table S4. Logistic Regression Models of Professional Development for the Six Proven Practices and Elections

Variable	Instr. in Soc. Sci. & History	Controversial issues	Service learning	Government simulations	School governance	Leadership activities	Elections
Intercept	0.6014*** (0.1200)	-0.1147 (0.1133)	-0.0426 (0.1147)	-0.1847 (0.1107)	-0.0028 (0.1149)	0.9446*** (0.1298)	-1.4687*** (0.1571)
Partisan leaning [a]	-0.047 (0.1496)	-0.3152* (0.1504)	-0.1832 (0.1505)	0.2381 (0.1482)	-0.1943 (0.1509)	0.1887 (0.1584)	0.2032 (0.1872)
District commitment to civics	0.2003* (0.1011)	0.3992*** (0.0996)	0.4398*** (0.1008)	0.0912 (0.0966)	0.3101** (0.1001)	0.6588*** (0.1230)	0.5888*** (0.1192)
Rural/town							
Suburb	0.0969 (0.1397)	0.1499 (0.1367)	0.1031 (0.1388)	0.0998 (0.1357)	0.1205 (0.1390)	-0.0493 (0.1481)	0.0193 (0.1822)
City	-0.0482 (0.1470)	-0.0769 (0.1441)	0.3014* (0.1468)	0.0152 (0.1431)	-0.0424 (0.1464)	-0.1258 (0.1537)	0.1286 (0.185)
School enrollment	0.3924 (0.1370)	0.0029 (0.1291)	-0.0851 (0.1307)	0.1749 (0.1269)	0.2300 (0.133)	0.1024 (0.1415)	-0.1348 (0.1592)
Percentage White students	0.0707 (0.1756)	0.0283 (0.1775)	0.0277 (0.1758)	-0.3263 (0.1737)	0.4194* (0.1785)	-0.1244 (0.1908)	-0.4045 (0.2109)
Percentage FRPL students	0.3912** (0.1403)	-0.0067 (0.1385)	0.0705 (0.1377)	-0.2231 (0.1361)	0.5738*** (0.1427)	-0.1674 (0.1475)	0.1629 (0.1646)
Principal characteristic							
Years of experience	-0.0057 (0.0948)	-0.1630 (0.0948)	0.1585 (0.0959)	0.2056* (0.0928)	0.2306* (0.0952)	0.0547 (0.1029)	-0.0922 (0.1155)
Gender (female)	-0.1065 (0.0991)	-0.0468 (0.0984)	-0.2155* (0.1003)	-0.0307 (0.0973)	-0.0888 (0.0991)	-0.0354 (0.1069)	0.0199 (0.1183)
Race/ethnicity (non-White)	0.0168 (0.1129)	0.0191 (0.1092)	0.0254 (0.1093)	0.0061 (0.1073)	0.1920 (0.1106)	0.1738 (0.1195)	-0.2468 (0.1364)
Civic engagement	0.2864** (0.0992)	0.0928 (0.0974)	0.1652 (0.0982)	0.0104 (0.0955)	0.1525 (0.0972)	0.0884 (0.1036)	0.1839 (0.121)
Citizenship goal							
Participatory	-0.1066 (0.1082)	0.1773 (0.1067)	-0.1574 (0.1088)	0.1471 (0.1048)	0.1162 (0.1075)	0.0149 (0.1152)	0.2697* (0.1294)
Justice-oriented	-0.0192 (0.1048)	0.0429 (0.1043)	0.0535 (0.1046)	-0.0444 (0.102)	0.0517 (0.1044)	0.0187 (0.1108)	0.0783 (0.1276)
Patriotic	-0.0038 (0.1005)	-0.1528 (0.1006)	0.2388* (0.1013)	-0.0600 (0.0984)	-0.0478 (0.1006)	-0.0315 (0.1082)	0.1069 (0.1231)
–2 log-likelihood	637.3848	640.3875	637.2088	660.1779	639.7315	576.2689	455.5432
n	500	500	500	500	500	500	466

Note. Calibration weights are used in all models. *Partisan Leaning* is the percentage of voters in the community who voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election. *Rural/Town* is the reference group for *Suburb* and *City*. FRPL equals eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch. *School Enrollment* is reported in the hundreds of students. *District Commitment to Civics*, *Principal Gender*, *Race/Ethnicity*, and the three listed *Goals* are binary variables. *Principal Civic Engagement* is a *z*-normed construct of principals' personal civic engagement.

a   As indicated by the percentage of voters in the community who voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Dependent Variable Survey Items
Six Proven Practices
This past year, did your school or district provide teachers at your school professional development in any of the following areas? [Yes, No]

1. Instruction tied to history, economics, or the other social sciences.
2. How to conduct productive discussions of controversial public issues.
3. Service learning.
4. The provision of simulations of governmental processes such as Mock Trial or Model UN.
5. Ways to engage students in school governance.
6. The development of extra-curricular activities related to leadership skills.

Support for Teaching About the Election
[Yes, No]

1. Do you feel that teachers at your school should use some class time discussing the elections and issues raised in the election?
2. Will teachers be involved in professional development or curriculum development work this summer or early fall[1] that focuses on preparation for teaching about the election?

Note. Principals had to respond "Yes" to both questions in order to be counted as supporting elections at their schools.

Independent Variable Survey Items

District Commitment to Civic Education
In the past year has your district leadership . . .
[Yes/No]

1. Talked about civic education with you personally or at principals' meetings you attended?
2. Asked you for information about the civic education programs/activities and civic outcomes at your school?

Note. The above items were transformed into a single dichotomous variable indicating if principals had responded "Yes" to both items.

Principals' Personal Civic Engagement
In the last month, how often have you . . .
[Never, About once a month, Weekly, A few times a week, Daily]

1. Followed news by reading a newspaper or news magazine, watching national news on TV, listening to news on the radio, or reading news online?
2. Talked about politics or government with your family and friends?
3. Participated in an organization that tries to make a difference in your community or broader society?

Note. Responses were converted to a numeric scale ranging 0–4, added together (the third item being doubly weighted), and converted to *z* scores.

Principals' Citizenship Goals
Principals do not always emphasize the same goals when it comes to civic education. Please indicate whether the following civic education goals are (a) Not a priority for you; (b) A modest priority; or (c) A strong priority.

1. Developing personally responsible community members (community members who, for example, pick up litter, give blood, recycle, and obey laws).
2. Developing highly participatory community members (community members who actively participate in civic affairs by, for example, organizing efforts to care for those in need or joining a committee to help a local non-profit organization).
3. Developing justice-oriented community members (community members who focus on addressing root causes of social problems).
4. Developing patriotic and loyal community members (community members who are loyal to and generally supportive of their country).

Note. Each of those were transformed into dichotomous variables that indicated if principals had responded "A strong priority." Because the first item was found to have little variation (nearly all principals indicated that this was a strong priority), it was excluded from analyses.

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1 Summer or early fall of 2018, i.e., preceding midterm elections

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