DEMOCRATIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT

Assessment Specifications

Civic Engagement in Our Democracy (Grade 8)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Assessment Overview

Assessment Strategy and Principles

The Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP) and Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) collaboratively created a full-year eighth grade civics curriculum, Civic Engagement in Our Democracy, to support civic agency in alignment with the new Massachusetts standards for history and social studies that emphasize civic education. The state standards are comprehensive, reflecting the consensus within the research community that civic education must address civic dispositions and skills, as well as civic knowledge, to support deep civic learning (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2007;). For the promise of this more holistic approach to be realized, it is critical that assessments address each key element. A well-balanced assessment strategy will encourage and reward well-balanced pedagogy, giving educators the encouragement and validation they need to deliver on the promise of the new state standards.

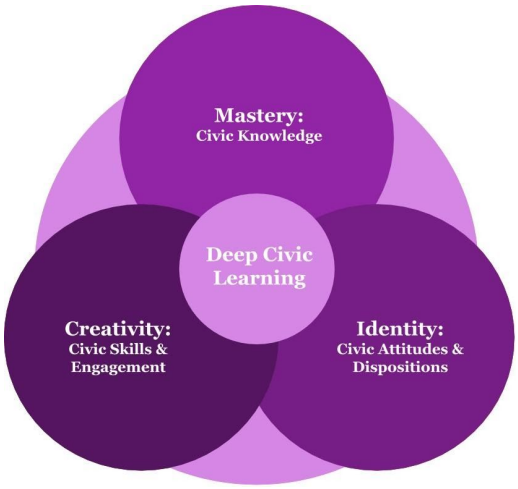


Figure 1. How the DKP Supports Deep Civic Learning

The DKP's assessment strategy draws on multiple methods to increase the coverage of civics assessment beyond content knowledge while not adding to the amount of total testing time and thus subtracting from valuable opportunities for teaching and learning. To achieve this, the DKP makes limited use of standardized multiple-choice and multiple-selection tests and relies on efficient self-report measures and indicators of students' learning that are embedded in the curriculum. Combined, these methods yield data that aggregate to illuminate students' civic development in terms of knowledge, attitudes and dispositions, and skills and capacities across classrooms, schools, and districts.

2 Civic Knowledge Assessment

Civic Knowledge Assessment Strategy

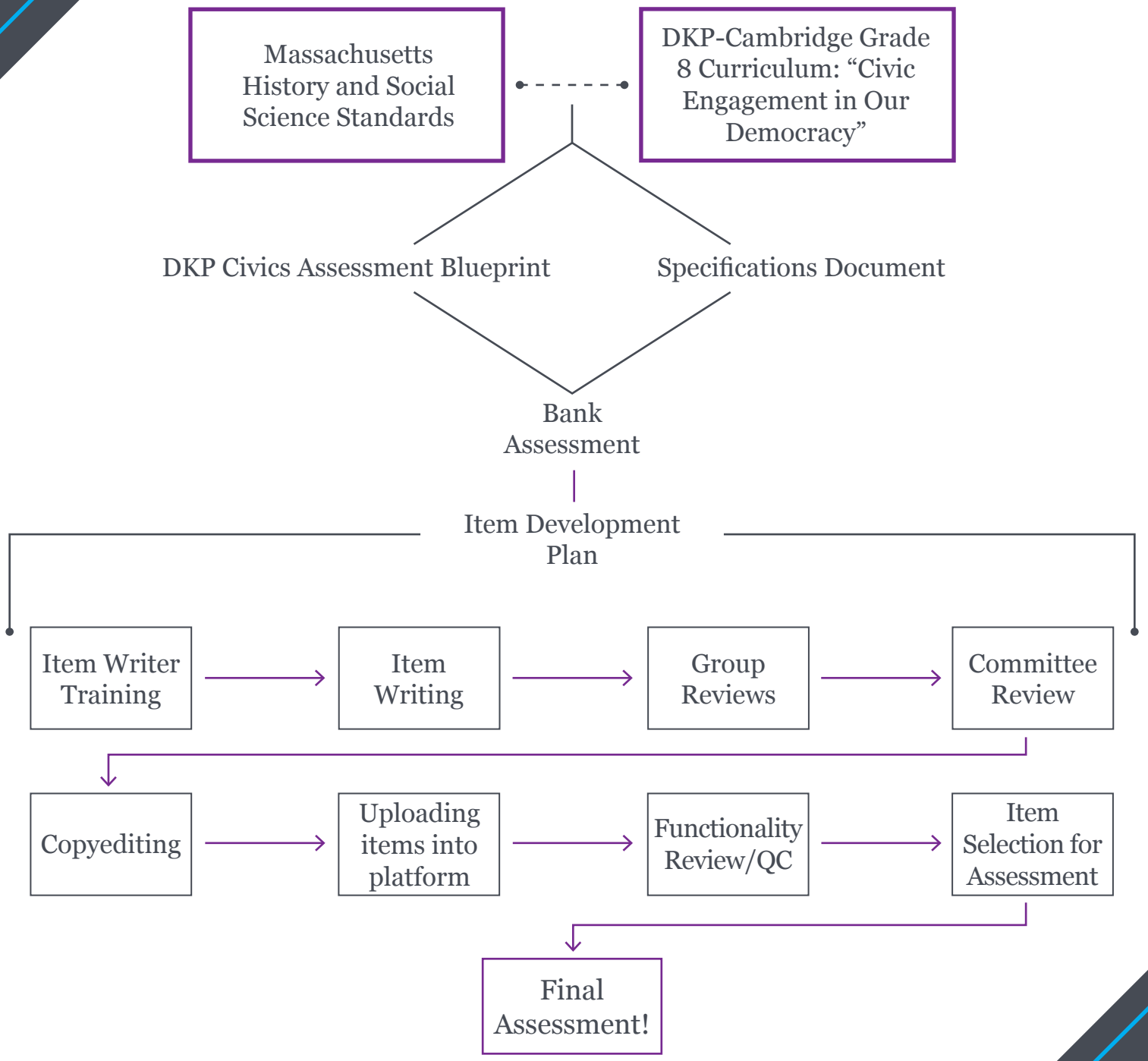
The DKP has adopted well-established practices for developing and validating content knowledge test items while introducing a new focus on aligning the assessment with the curriculum (see Figure 2).

Many knowledge assessments start with state standards, which item writers then interpret to create test questions. Limitations on testing time further limit coverage of assessments, leading some topics to receive more attention than others. This can leave curriculum developers and educators unsure that their standards-aligned materials and pedagogical strategies will also align with the interpretations of the standards that make it into the assessment.

Since the DKP's curriculum aligns with state standards, its assessment tools are as well. By assessing students' mastery of the curriculum's standard-consistent material, we also assess their achievement of state content standards. This approach ensures that educators and students are held accountable to the state standards while allowing them to fully explore the topics and activities introduced in the curriculum.

Despite reorienting civic knowledge assessment around curricula and pedagogy, the DKP otherwise relies on standard procedures for test development. Item writers, in this case DKP curriculum developers and teacher partners, received training in item writing that addressed common concerns, such as writing items of low, moderate, and high difficulty, and avoiding potentially confusing phrasing, implausible distractor items, and sensitive topics. Writers then created items based on topics covered in the curriculum, and these were then reviewed by bias committees including local educators and experts in youth development, as well as DKP members. A final 25 items were selected to address key standards and represent multiple levels of depth of knowledge (see Table 1).

CIVIC KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT PROCESS



The Democratic Knowledge Project's (DKP) Civics Assessment was born of a rigorous item development process that brought together curriculum writers, assessment developers, teachers, instructional coaches, and political scientists for the purpose of building an assessment that reflected the newly formed DKP-Cambridge Grade 8 curriculum, "Civic Engagement in Our Democracy," and was aligned to the Massachusetts History and Social Science Standards.

The assessment itself was designed using a blueprint to ensure that each of the seven Grade 8 History and Social Science Topics would be represented on the test. Items were thoughtfully developed by members of the curriculum team and went through multiple content and editorial reviews to ensure that they were aligned to the standards and that they accurately reflected the content students would be exposed to in the classroom.

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DEMOCRATIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT

Table 1. Civic Knowledge Assessment Blueprint

The civic knowledge assessment was designed to efficiently cover all content topic areas specified in the MA grade 8 content standards and focus on standards most emphasized in the curriculum. However, content standard topics 6 and 7, though addressed in the curriculum, are primarily assessed in the civic skills and capacities (topics 6 and 7) and civic attitudes and dispositions (topic 7) assessments. The test is designed primarily for accuracy at proficiency levels, leading to a predominance of moderately difficult items (see below for example items).

Content Topic	Standard	Depth of Knowledge
Topic 1 The philosophical foundations of the United States political system	8.T1.3	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8.T1.5	Level 4: Extended Thinking
Topic 2 The development of the United States government	8. T2.1	Level 1: Recall
	8. T2.1	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8. T2.1	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8. T2.3	Level 3: Strategic Thinking
	8. T2.4	Level 3: Strategic Thinking
	8. T2.5	Level 1: Recall
Topic 3 The institutions of United States government	8.T3.2	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8.T3.2	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8.T3.2	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8.T3.3	Level 1: Recall
	8.T3.3	Level 1: Recall
	8.T3.3	Level 3: Strategic Thinking
	8.T3.4	Level 2: Skill/Concept
Topic 4 Rights and responsibilities of citizens	8.T4.2	Level 1: Recall
Topic 5 The Constitution, Amendments, and Supreme Court decisions	8.T5.2	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8.T5.3	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8.T5.4	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8.T5.6	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8.T5.6a	Level 2: Skill/Concept
Topic 6 The structure of Massachusetts state and local government	8.T6.2	Level 1: Recall
	8.T6.7	Level 1: Recall
Topic 7 Freedom of the Press and News/Media Literacy	8.T7.2	Level 2: Skill/Concept
	8.T7.5	Level 3: Strategic Thinking

Civic Knowledge Example Item: Easy/Moderately Difficult

Standard Alignment: 8.T3.3 (Describe the respective roles of each of the branches of government.)

Which three responsibilities are carried out by the executive branch?

A. to write new laws
B. to approve appointments
C. to make sure laws are followed
D. to nominate judges for the Supreme Court
E. to handle relations with other governments
F. to state which laws live up to the Constitution and which do not

Key: C, D, E
Depth of Knowledge: Level 1 - Recall

Civic Knowledge Example Item: Moderately Difficult

Standard Alignment: 8.T2.2 (Analyze the weaknesses of the national government under the Articles of Confederation; and describe the crucial events (e.g., Shays' Rebellion) leading to the Constitutional Convention.)

In 1789, the states voted to replace the Articles of Confederation with the current United States Constitution.
What are two additions to the United States Constitution that were not included in the Articles of Confederation?

A. representative democracy
B. an independent court system
C. states' rights to print their own money
D. rights for all men and an end to slavery
E. centralized power in a strong national government

Key: B, E
Depth of Knowledge: Level 2 - Skill/Concept

Civic Knowledge Example Item: Difficult

Standard Alignment: 8.T2.1 (Apply knowledge of the history of the American Revolutionary period to determine the experiences and events that led the colonists to declare independence; explain the key ideas about equality, representative government, limited government, rule of law, natural rights, common good, and the purpose of government in the Declaration of Independence.)

"He [King George of Great Britain] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither."

--Thomas Jefferson, deleted passage from the Declaration of Independence, 1776

Which are the two most likely explanations for why the above passage was not included in the Declaration of Independence?

A. to avoid unequal representation of southern states
B. to avoid overrepresenting issues of southern states
C. to avoid a long debate over slavery with southern states
D. to ensure support for independence from southern states
E. to ensure there was continued support for slavery in southern states

Key: C, D
Depth of Knowledge: Level 3 - Strategic Thinking

4 Civic Attitudes & Dispositions

Civic Attitudes & Dispositions Assessment Strategy

Alongside developing mastery of more traditional civic knowledge and skills, students should also be learning how to be confident, equitable, and trustworthy civic actors. These attitudes and dispositions can be more discretely understood in terms of research-based psychological concepts: civic efficacy, commitment to reciprocity, intellectual humility, valuing media literacy, and endorsing norms of respect. These psychological factors are key to the DKP's model of civic development, and they align with many of the social and emotional skills highlighted in Guiding Principle 10 of the new Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Science.

Attitudes and dispositions cannot be assessed in the same way as content knowledge. Instead, they are assessed using self-report questionnaires that have been psychometrically validated in empirical studies. Whenever possible, widely used and extensively researched questionnaires have been adopted verbatim, but others have been less studied or required adaptation. Therefore, the psychometric qualities of these questionnaires will be regularly evaluated and used to inform revisions.

Despite limitations of self-report questionnaires, the data they yield can be reliably interpreted by examining average scores and changes over time at the classroom and school levels. Students' civic attitudes develop in relation to many things, ranging from family and peers to community conditions, and their self-reports will not be tied to their grades. However, aggregate scores can help educators evaluate how well they are supporting the development of civic attitudes and dispositions.

Civic Efficacy

Civic efficacy is commonly defined in terms of a person's ability to take effective civic action using formal and informal strategies. Beyond navigating the institutions and processes of official government, efficacy in a democracy requires that one have the confidence and ability necessary to engage with others and persuade them to join a collective effort (Allen, 2004). This view of civic efficacy is similar to that underlying a number of well-validated and extensively used measures, including a measure of civic skills used in a large-scale study of civics education in California (Kahne, 2005), and a measure of citizenship self-efficacy developed for the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), a large international study of civic development (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010).

For the ICCS, Schulz et al. (2010) assessed internal efficacy by asking participants to report generally how prepared they feel to participate in politics. In addition, Schulz et al. (2010) included a related measure of citizenship self-efficacy, which asked participants to report how well they think they can do specific civic activities, such as organize fellow students, write letters, and argue their political point of view. Both measures had significant unique positive relations with political knowledge and expectations for future active civic participation. These two measures were used in this study to assess efficacy.

Internal Efficacy. The measure of internal efficacy (Schulz et al., 2010) included six items responded on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items were statements reflecting confidence in one's capacity for civic engagement, such as, "I know more about politics than most people my age," and "I have political opinions worth listening to."

Citizenship Self-Efficacy. The measure of citizenship self-efficacy (Schulz et al., 2010) included eight civic activities (e.g., "Discuss a newspaper article about a conflict between countries," and "stand as a candidate in a local election"). Participants indicated how well they can do each on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not well at all) to 5 (extremely well).

The two measures of efficacy, internal efficacy and citizenship self efficacy, demonstrated good psychometric properties in a large online validation study conducted by the DKP. Each was internally consistent, and neither was strongly skewed. Accordingly, the IRT analyses revealed that the two measures are informative at all but the highest and lowest levels, with wide information curves centered over the scale average. The two efficacy measures were also strongly related with each other and with self-reported participation in civic activities, political voice, and electoral activities.

Equitability: Commitment to Reciprocity & Intellectual Humility

Democracies flourish when their members share benefits and burdens to make belonging to the democracy worthwhile for all. In this respect, Allen (2004) notes that healthy democracies are similar to friendships. Like friends, members of a democracy seek reciprocal equity over the long term; prioritize equitable self-interest over rivalrous self-interest; and are trustworthy and trusting. One way they can do this is by responding to the needs and contributions of others, but another important aspect of trustworthiness in political friendship is attentiveness to the experiences of others. Accordingly, the DKP defines equitability in terms of *intellectual humility*, or openness to changing one's views, and *commitment to reciprocity*, or pursuing long-term equity.

Intellectual Humility. Trustworthiness in political friendship requires what Leary et al. (2017) label *intellectual humility*, or, more simply, a recognition that one can sometimes be wrong and others correct. Leary et al. (2017) found that self-reported intellectual humility was associated with greater sensitivity to the quality of persuasive arguments and more positive interpretations of politicians' changes of policy positions. Similarly, Porter and Schumann (2018) found that higher levels of intellectual humility were associated with greater willingness to learn about opposing political views and actual engagement with them. These findings suggest that intellectual humility may be an important foundation for good political friendship. The DKP uses a six-item measure developed and validated by Leary et al. (2017) to measure intellectual humility. Participants are asked to read six statements (e.g., "I question my own opinions, positions, and viewpoints because they could be wrong") and the rate how well they describe them on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to (5) very much like me.

Commitment to Reciprocity. Equitable participation in democracy requires acknowledging and reciprocating the sacrifices of others. Relationships characterized by reciprocity are categorized as equality matching relationships in Relational Models Theory (Fiske, 1992; Fiske & Haslam, 1996). The concerns relevant to equality matching relationships highlighted by Fiske and his colleagues are well aligned with those emphasized in Allen's (2004) depiction of political friendship, and a questionnaire developed by Fiske and Haslam (1996) was adapted to focus on equality matching in a civic context. The questionnaire includes six statements describing civic relations, and participants are asked to rate how often civic actors should adhere to them on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

Self-Protection: Valuing Media Literacy & Online Respect

Unregulated by legal or well-established social norms, the Internet presents significant risks to civic actors for some of the same reasons it offers promising opportunities for engagement (Allen & Light, 2015; Choi, Glassman, & Cristol, 2017; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). Most civic engagement has the potential to expose people to harassment, put them at risk of embarrassing themselves or harming someone else, or make them vulnerable to misinformation or propaganda. The lack of constraints online tends to exacerbate these risks, making self-protection an increasingly important civic skill. The DKP focuses on two elements of self-protection for young people engaging online: endorsing norms of respectful online behavior and valuing media literacy.

Online Respect. In the Ten Questions Framework, self-protection involves extending political friendship to others while not making oneself vulnerable to exploitation, manipulation, or abuse. Research addressing online civic behavior, though still nascent, has demonstrated that endorsing respectful online behavior is related to both lower levels of online harassment perpetration and victimization (Jones & Mitchell, 2016), suggesting that people can learn to attenuate the interpersonal and social risks of online engagement. The measure of online respect (Jones & Mitchell, 2016) included seven statements regarding online behavior (e.g., "If I disagree with people online, I watch my language, so it doesn't come across as mean", "My favorite places to be online are where people are respectful towards each other") to which participants responded by rating their agreement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Valuing Media Literacy. Exposure to misinformation and propaganda online poses an additional risk, and research suggests that valuing media literacy is associated with greater knowledge of the news media as an industry, knowledge of current events, and news skepticism (Vraga, Tully, Kotcher, Smithson, & Broeckleman-Post, 2015). The value of media literacy measure included eight items addressing the importance of the media to supporting democracy and the importance of consuming media critically to stay informed (e.g., "People need to critically engage with news content," and "The news media have a role in informing citizens about civic issues").

4 Civic Skills & Capacities

Civic Skills & Capacities Assessment Strategy

The DKP-Cambridge Grade 8 Curriculum culminates in a civic action project. Student choice defines this experience. Students achieve their learning objectives by applying knowledge and skills to an extended, often collaborative project process. Success promotes important civic skills like communication, collaboration, time management, consensus-building and problem-solving. In addition, project-based learning promotes student self-awareness and reflection.

Teachers work in support of the civic action project to scaffold students through a process in which students themselves must undertake inquiry projects to develop the content knowledge necessary to support their civic action project. Teachers and students work together to track student progress with a rubric, and students complete the work with a reflection both on what they have accomplished and on the process that got them there. Along the way to the conclusion of the project, they complete planners and other process management tools and documents. These combined with the final artifacts of their work and their final reflection form the elements of a portfolio assessed by the instructor in alignment with the unit rubric.

The DKP is working with educators to develop an efficient reporting system that incorporates student and teacher voices to track the activities and experiences of students throughout the civic action project. The tracking system focuses on key elements of active learning identified in research, as well as by the Massachusetts guidance on student-led civics projects. For example, we seek to assess the extent to which students engage in collaboration, iterative work, research, and planning.

Illuminating students' experiences will help ensure that schools and educators are supporting student-led projects that meet the criteria for high quality active learning experiences. The DKP's focus on the processes of student projects, rather than their outcomes, is consistent with the priorities of the state mandate, and it also helps ensure that students are able to choose projects that matter to them, not just those that appear easy to complete.

Assessment Specifications

Civic Engagement in Our Democracy (Grade 8)

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