

CLDE Coalition Progress Report November 2023

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► The CLDE Coalition

The Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Coalition (CLDE Coalition) was founded by higher education and policy organizations in response to the serious challenges facing democracy at home and abroad. Those challenges have not abated and our work to involve all college students in civic inquiry and democracy engagement has become even more urgent.

With this progress report, we provide an overview of our guiding principles and the highlights of our work over the past two years—with leaders from dozens of partner organizations—to expand and accelerate the college civic learning movement.

The CLDE Coalition put forward a September 2021 Shared Commitment Statement that states: “to fulfill higher education’s civic mission, we need to make civic inquiry and democracy engagement part of each student’s educational pathway.” More than 75 groups and organizations have endorsed this statement and—over the past two years—several thousand individuals have participated in forums and actions related to the Coalition’s long-term goal.

We are grateful to the Endeavor Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, and the Teagle Foundation for their support of the CLDE Coalition’s work. We also want to thank the leaders from literally dozens of partner organizations who have contributed to our several advisory and working groups, and helped shape the resources and strategies we describe below.

And most important, the Coalition team is profoundly grateful to the lead partners—American Association of Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, College Promise, Complete College America, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association—who formed this Coalition and who have devoted countless hours to our shared endeavors. Their capacities and ongoing programs are essential resources both for higher education’s work on college civic learning and for a democracy in need of renewal.

► The CLDE Coalition’s Guiding Principles

The principles articulated in the Shared Commitment Statement continue to guide the CLDE Coalition’s work. These include:

- post-secondary education should help students gain motivation and capacity for purposeful civic engagement and active collaborative problem-solving to renew democracy;
- this civic-minded and democracy-oriented focus should extend across each students’ college pathway and should include curriculum, co-curricular activities, and relationships and engagement with a range of groups and communities beyond the institution;
- higher education should enlist policymakers and influencers as champions for higher education’s public good mission.

► The CLDE Learning Framework

Consistent with these principles, the Coalition has developed a learning framework that broadly describes the knowledge, skills, and experiences that contribute to students’ purposeful civic

engagement both during their post-secondary education and in their careers and civic life. The learning framework builds on work already well advanced across higher education to:

- foster students' civic engagement, purpose, and agency;
- strengthen their engagement with democracy's guiding principles, ongoing challenges, and levers for change;
- develop their skills in collaborations across difficult differences;
- and prepare them to work productively on problem-solving and innovation.

Each of these reform priorities is vital; the learning framework shows how these aspects of civic learning can come together in students' educational pathways. The learning framework remains a draft, open for revision. The final version will be included in a report on making the case for college civic learning that we'll release in 2024.

► Collaborative Scaling Initiatives for Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement

The CLDE Coalition has focused primary attention on initiatives that bring educational leaders and policy influencers together in promoting civic learning and democracy engagement: the Multi-State Collaboration for College Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement and the Accreditation Commission Initiative for College Civic Learning. The overall strategy for these initiatives is to pursue a communities of practice model for change at scale, which might be variously described as “networks of networks” or “coalitions working together” to make civic learning and democratic engagement the norm for higher education.

This strategy honors and extends the rich array of existing global, national, state, and campus-based civic learning organizations and leaders that are working actively—in potentially complementary ways—to foster intentional curricular pathways, active learning pedagogies, and reciprocal community-based partnerships that involve students not just in learning about democracy but in “doing democracy” with diverse community partners. The Coalition supports these efforts by creating and disseminating resources to benefit and amplify the work. Examples include cases and models of full participation CLDE by design, research on the benefits of civic learning, and resources on democracy engagement as a student success strategy (profile and session recording).

The CLDE Coalition is applying the communities of practice strategy in the context of policy making through two new major initiatives. The first is the new Multi-State Collaborative (MSC) for Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement organized by the Coalition founding partner the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) in cooperation with the National System of Association Heads (NASH). The MSC builds from work that was already proceeding in several states and brings together additional states and state systems that have varying but complementary approaches to College Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. The MSC now includes a dozen state systems, each with state-wide, campus-based civic and democratic learning leadership groups, and each contributing to MSC working groups on such issues as assessment,

equity and inclusion, expanding community college participation, alignment with K-12 civic learning reforms, and faculty and staff development.

A similar initiative—the Accreditation Initiative—involves the seven formerly regional accrediting commissions, all of which have endorsed the CLDE Coalition’s Shared Commitment call to action. And they are taking action themselves. The Higher Learning Commission has made civic engagement part of its accreditation standards since 2020. In 2023, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges added civic responsibility to the general education framework as part of the student success standard. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges issued a 2023 Board-approved position statement declaring “civic literacy and civic engagement as an essential outcome for every graduate.” Others are tying their diversity and inclusion work to students’ civic learning and engagement. Each commission has appointed a liaison to the CLDE Coalition and is now exploring additional ways to highlight civic learning and engagement as a theme in the self-study practices that are core to reaccreditation.

► Working Together Toward Shared Goals

To promote a shared direction for the college civic learning movement, the CLDE Coalition, with support from foundations and in partnership with the University of Virginia’s Karsh Institute of Democracy, held five major forums over the last year that brought together representatives across the full range of civic learning efforts. The CLDE forums were designed to help educators and policy leaders place the college civic learning movement in a larger national and global context, discern the connections across discrete areas of work (e.g., civic requirements in general education, dialogues across difference, and applied civic learning), explore ways to link civic learning with equity and student success plans, and examine research about the benefits of civic learning for students and the deep disparities among students who participate.

The final forum of the series took place as part of Democracy360, an event hosted by the Karsh Institute to bring together thought leaders, journalists, policymakers, scholars, activists, artists and students of all ages to explore ways to collectively shape a thriving democratic future.

The CLDE Coalition hosted sessions on:

- Engaging Students with Democracy’s Contested Questions
- Teaching the Arts of Productive Engagement Across Difference
- The New Momentum to Make College Civic Learning Universal
- In Search of Crosswalks: Connecting the K-12 and Postsecondary Civic Learning Movements
- Bringing Civic and Ethical Lenses to Students’ Career Preparation
- Race, Learning, and American Democracy

Find links here to the wealth of resources featured in those sessions.

In addition, the Coalition has presented plenary and/or well-attended concurrent sessions in numerous national settings, both lead partners' meetings and other major meetings. All these sessions have called for making civic learning inclusive and equitable, and all have featured institutions where all students already participate in and benefit from college civic learning.

► Trailblazers and Pacesetters

We are filled with gratitude for those doing this work with creativity and commitment. Whether they are working on campus or with an organization, it is their collective effort and achievements that make it possible to reach toward full participation for all college students in civic learning and democracy engagement.

We expect to continue to expand these areas and develop new lines of work and we warmly welcome ideas and suggestions about how to advance this movement. Please contact us at info@collegeciviclearning.org.

The CLDE Coalition Team

Martha Kanter, CEO, College Promise

Carol Geary Schneider, Senior Advisor, CLDE and President Emerita, AAC&U

David Paris, Senior Advisor, CLDE and Professor of Government Emeritus, Hamilton College

Siah Annand, CLDE Program Manager

Carol-lynn Swol, CLDE Program/Research Associate