

Parents, If We're Going to Have Smart Government—Teach Your Kids Civics

In the fall of 2012, I excitedly began my senior year government class. I was about to sit through a course on our system of government while also watching it play out right before my eyes on its biggest stage during the 2012 election. Much to my chagrin, nobody else seemed even remotely as thrilled. Throughout the next five months, blank stares and snores engulfed the classroom with unmistakable indifference. In those moments, it hit me just how far we had fallen.

Recently, I was struck by a similar feeling. I came across yet [another](#) condemnation of our system of representative government on Twitter. Waleed Shahid, a former advisor to New York Congressional Candidate and Democratic Socialist heartthrob Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, said the Senate is not democratic enough because less populous states receive the same representation as high-population states. But this is the very point of the Senate. Without equal representation in one house of Congress, large states would be able to run roughshod over smaller states. Yet this fact is continually ignored by civically-illiterate citizens eager to support their points of frustration against Trump's agenda.

And Shahid wasn't alone in his sentiment about the Electoral College. Hordes of American citizens [decried its unfairness](#) following the election, and it has become unmistakably clear that yesterday's bored high school government student morphed into today's angry voter.

Given that a misunderstanding of basic constitutional foundations is a common theme in today's activist politics, this makes sense. Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse touched on this

in a recent [lecture-turned-viral-video](#) during which he criticized his colleagues in Congress for delegating their policy-making responsibility to the judicial branch. Within this 12-minute symposium, Sasse made the point that we don't teach our kids School House Rock civics anymore—thus, they grow to be civically illiterate.

A 2016 [study](#) by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that a mere 26 percent of Americans could name all three branches of the federal government. By the same token, 33 percent of Americans couldn't name any of the three branches. Now, if three-quarters of adults don't know the three federal government branches, it's unlikely they have a firm grasp of their proper roles. This, of course, provides some issues when people go to the polls—or when they hold political office.

In 2010, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) [found](#) that only 24 percent of graduating seniors [rated](#) at or above “proficient”—[down](#) from 26 percent in 1998 and 27 percent in 2006. This shows a concerning stagnation of proficiency ratings among our students. Overall, they are at best, stagnating—and at worst, decreasing.

Our students are ill-prepared to become voting adults, but the blame shouldn't be placed squarely on our schools. As my classroom experience illustrated, and the NAEP statistics have shown, many students simply don't understand the basic functions of our government. Without that understanding of the American constitutional system, there is little hope for our constitutional framework to be sustained. A school, too, can only do so much, and parents bear most of the responsibility for helping kids understand their nation. Without priority placed on civic education in the home, any learning gained in school may go in one ear and out the other. As students lacking civic knowledge grow up to become parents, their priorities are often reflected in their children. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Apples tend not to fall far from the

tree. The only way to beat back this trend is for parents to take it upon themselves to instill civics as a priority in their children.

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