

Opinion

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OP-ED

Civics is not partisan. Every student needs it

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As America marks its 250th anniversary, a fundamental question needs to be asked: Do our young people understand what it means to be citizens?

Too often, the answer is no. According to Civics 250, 57% of high school students cannot pass a basic civics test, and only 35% of states require a full year of civics education. As a result, many students graduate without understanding how government works, why voting matters, or how citizens with differing viewpoints can work together in a democracy.

Civics 250, a national initiative of the Hidden Light Institute in partnership with Yeshiva University Global, was created to reignite civics learning in middle and high schools. Civics 250 provides a free, flexible, nonpartisan civics curriculum for students in grades 6-12. Through online modules, classroom activities, discussion guides, primary sources, and assessments, students learn about government, civic participation, civil discourse, and collaboration.

At a time when institutions are often wary of



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political controversy, it is important to remember that civics education is not a Democratic or Republican issue. Teaching students how democracy functions is not about promoting a political ideology. It is about preparing young people to become informed, engaged citizens.

At the heart of the program is now late U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman, whose life and career inspired the curriculum. Through the documentary “Centered:

Joe Lieberman,” students are introduced to a leader known for principled public service and a commitment to working across political and ideological divides.

Students do not need to agree with all of Senator Lieberman’s positions to learn from his example. His story demonstrates that democracy depends on participation, respectful disagreement, and a willingness to put principles above partisanship.

WHY CONNECTICUT SHOULD LEAD

Connecticut has a unique opportunity to lead the nation in civics education because Senator Lieberman was one of its most distinguished public servants. For nearly four decades, he represented Connecticut as a state senator, attorney general, and United States senator. His career reflected many of the values that Civics 250 seeks to teach — most notably bipartisanship and respectful dialogue.

By implementing Civics 250, Connecticut schools can connect national civic lessons to a leader who represented their own state. Students can learn that civic engagement is not an abstract concept, but something that Connecticut citizens have practiced and shaped at the highest levels of government. Senator Lieberman’s legacy provides a powerful local connection to the broader story of American democracy.

The decline of civics education is a national challenge, but Civics 250 offers a practical solution. The curriculum provides ready-to-use resources, multimedia materials, professional development for educators, and free access to the Centered: Joe Lieberman documentary.

As America celebrates its democracy, we owe our students the tools to think critically, participate responsibly, listen respectfully, and understand that their voices matter.

That is what Civics 250 provides. It is what our students deserve.

Clarine Nardi Riddle was U.S. Senate Chief of Staff to Senator Lieberman and the first female Connecticut Attorney General; Laurie Beth Nichols is Project Coordinator, Civics 250.