

**Educating for American Democracy**  
**Summary of the March 2021 Report and Roadmap**  
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*“Excellence in civic and history education...should be a foundation of our national civic infrastructure.”*

Released to the public in March 2021, Educating for American Democracy (EAD) is a call to action for the nation, states, and communities to make **a concerted, well-resourced, and long-term commitment to the improvement of history and civic education** on a par with our commitment to STEM.

Articulating the problem before us, EAD makes the case that **“we as a nation have failed to prepare young Americans for self-government**, leaving the world’s oldest constitutional democracy in grave danger, afflicted by both cynicism and nostalgia, as it approaches its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The time has come to recommit to the education of our young people for informed, authentic, and engaged citizenship.”

It further acknowledges that **polarization in public life has been a major contributor to the breakdown** in civic and history education because “Americans deeply disagree about some of the fundamental issues that arise in those disciplines, and adults have not managed such disagreements productively and constructively. Often it has seemed easier to neglect civics and history than to court controversy about content or pedagogy.” As a result, generations of young Americans are concluding their K-12 experiences with neither the content knowledge nor the skillsets needed to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens and community members.

EAD calls for the use of **collaborative federalism** in the implementation of a solution, setting general expectations in a structured framework but **offering neither standards nor curriculum**, which are established at the state and local levels. This approach parallels the constitutional structure of the academic subjects at hand.

Initiated in 2019 with U.S. Department of Education funding through the National Endowment for the Humanities, EAD is the product of work by “hundreds of ideologically, philosophically, and demographically diverse historians, political scientists, and educators.” The project’s initial report is a **product of the compromise and healthy disagreement** held up as an objective for civic and history education.

EAD proposes these ambitious **goals to be accomplished by 2030**:

1. 60 million students will have access to high-quality civic learning opportunities, where high-quality is defined as excellence in teaching of civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions; also, a diverse supermajority will be actively engaged in earning civic learning credentials.
2. 100,000 schools will be “civic read” (have a Civic Learning Plan and resources to support it in place), prioritizing excellence in teaching of civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions.
3. 1 million teachers will be EAD-ready (having received excellent pre- and in-service professional development).

## Key Characteristics

1. EAD lays out an **inquiry-based approach** to content that is organized by major themes and questions, and vertically spiraled across four grade bands: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12.
2. EAD provides a **roadmap, not standards, offering the kinds of questions that should be asked** and engaged. “The question of precisely how to help learners engage with these rich questions is left to state and local educational leaders and educators.”
3. EAD **favors depth over breadth**, countering a tendency for state standards to be too lengthy and too detailed for effective coverage with available resources.
4. EAD calls for a move past divisions over unity and diversity in the national narrative to reach “a third stage of thinking” that brings “diversity and inclusion for civic purposes” in support of a **recommitment to *E pluribus unum***.
5. The EAD Roadmap for **content is structured thematically across seven areas** that span the K-12 experience.
6. **Six pedagogical principles outline the commitment necessary** to train and equip effective classroom educators.
7. **Five design challenges** span the seven themes and identify the tension inherent to the teaching of history and politics. They point to the need for continuous review and improvement of EAD throughout the period of implementation.

## Key Terms

1. **Constitutional Democracy:** The purpose of EAD is to help educate young Americans to participate in and sustain our *constitutional democracy*. The project’s contributors adopted this term through a process of compromise that recognizes the primacy placed on the notions of *republic* and *liberty* by some, and on the notions of *democracy* and *equality* by others. Self-government depends on both liberty and equality, both order and participation. The republic organized by the founders has evolved through the expansion of suffrage rights and broader use of direct election. “The United States is thus a *republic* that is organized as a *constitutional democracy*.”
2. **Civil Disagreement:** EAD promotes robust debate but also “norms and civic virtues about public debate that are essential to sustaining a constructive and healthy political order.” These civic virtues include civil disagreement, characterized by “a commitment to honesty, trustworthiness, charitable interpretation, and moving forward together.”

3. **Civic Friendship:** A closely related virtue is civic friendship, the notion that “we should all regard one another as fellow Americans capable of sharing ideals, principles, and constitutional forms of self-government even as we vigorously debate our philosophical or policy differences.”

### The Seven Themes

1. **Civic Participation:** Focuses on engaging young people as civic participants and preparing them to assume that role successfully.
2. **Our Changing Landscapes:** Explores the geographic and demographic development of the United States, the importance of place, and the development of political communities.
3. **We the People:** Explores how members of a nation can share political ideals and institutions while also regularly disagreeing about their meaning and efficacy. How does *e pluribus unum* forge one political people out of diverse experiences?
4. **A New Government and Constitution:** Explores the social, political, and institutional history of the United States in the founding era, and the theoretical underpinnings of our constitutional design.
5. **Institutional and Social Transformation—A Series of Refoundings?:** Investigates which moments of change have most defined the country and how the American people have changed society and political institutions.
6. **A People in the World:** Explores key historical events in international affairs and the principles, values, and laws at stake in debates about America’s role in the world.
7. **A People with Contemporary Debates and Possibilities:** Explores how historical narratives, values, and information shape current political, social, and economic arguments, and their bearing on the fulfillment of the promise of our constitutional democracy.

### The Six Core Pedagogical Principles

1. **Excellence for All:** Teaching a full and multifaceted history and civic narratives and assuming all students’ capacity for learning complex and rigorous content.
2. **Self-Reflection and Growth Mindset:** A commitment to continuous and rigorous professional development.
3. **Building an EAD-Ready Classroom and School:** Setting expectations that all students know they belong and contribute to the classroom community, and for an environment that enables students to engage courageously in rigorous discussion.

4. **Inquiry as the Primary Process for Learning:** Using EAD Roadmap inquiry prompts as entry points to teaching content, as well as cultivating students' capacity to develop their own inquiries about American history and civic life.
5. **Practice of Constitutional Democracy and Student Agency:** Modeling the constitutional principle of "We the People" through democratic practices and promoting civic responsibilities, civil rights, and civic friendship in the classroom. Engaging with real-world events and problem-solving about issues in their communities.
6. **Assess, Reflect, and Improve:** Using assessments to gauge student comprehension and promote self-reflection and improvement by educators.

### Success Factors

1. Continuing **strengthening of the teacher corps** for history and civic education through improved pre-service training and in-service professional development.
2. **Implementation from the ground up**, rather than from the top down, including commitment to EAD principles by classroom educators, administrators, parents, and civic organizations.
3. A **commitment of adequate classroom time**.
4. **Cross-disciplinary approaches** for integrating history and civic learning with ELA and STEM courses.
5. Significant and ongoing **financial commitment**.
6. **Accountability measures** devised through innovation in state and federal partnerships.

The EAD Report, Roadmap, and additional resources are available at <https://www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org/>.