

# Writing Samples

This document consists of three posts that I drafted for the CEO of iCivics to publish on her personal LinkedIn account. We have a strategy of posting monthly to keep her thought leadership relevant. The idea is that posting regularly will mobilize her vast network of leaders in the civic education space.

## Staff Retreat Reflection

Since Sandra Day O'Connor founded iCivics in 2009, educators have been our strength, our spark, and our sustainers.

In my 10+ years of leading this organization, I have witnessed over and over again the impact educators have on our work. Not only do we serve more than 180,000+ educators, but we are honored to have many of our own staff members come from the education field. We draw upon their experiences as classroom teachers, district administrators, and college professors to best support our network of educators.

That's why iCivics' annual staff retreat, which we held in early May, was so energizing.

It's incredible to be surrounded by such skilled people whose collective power and wisdom drive forward our charge to provide high-quality civic education to each new generation. And it's amazing to see how working with young people helped cultivate this talent.

Being together is also a reminder that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, both as individuals working in a larger organization and as an organization contributing to shaping the future of our constitutional democracy

Our staff members feel deeply the pressure and complexity that educators across America feel at this moment of disruption and change. We see them trying to balance current events with state standards and the topics students are asking about. We see them walking the political tightrope, taking extra caution not to say anything that may indicate how they personally feel. And we know they're feeling exhausted, anxious, and stressed by working in such an environment.

Educators are uniquely positioned to bring people together, challenging students of all backgrounds to converse with, listen to, and learn from one another. And civic education is the best tool we have to unify our nation around a set of principles and laws we will stand for. Our nation's educators are needed on the frontlines of civic work more than ever, and we stand with them.

Seeing our staff together, united behind these thousands of educators, is a reminder of our mission as an organization and the mission that the Declaration of Independence set forth for us as a nation: that we support each other in the protection of our democracy.

## Call to Action for July 4

*“...we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.”* –The last line of the Declaration of Independence

With all of the fanfare surrounding the Fourth of July, it is almost too easy to forget that we are commemorating the courageous decision of our founders to list their grievances and declare independence from tyranny. But a declaration is meaningless without collective action, so we should also give thanks for the sacrifices made by people across our history to advance liberty, while asking ourselves: What will I do to ensure the promise of freedom is preserved for future generations?

One thing we can all commit to is seeking out and supporting new voices in civics who are finding fresh and engaging ways to deliver civic knowledge where it is needed most – among young people. According to new findings from The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University (CIRCLE), “only 16% of 18- to 29-year-olds believe democracy is working well for young people.” A recent study from the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School showed young Americans are disengaging from our democratic systems at alarming rates.

We have to start meeting students and other young people with civics where they are, not where things were decades or generations ago. With that in mind, I want to lift up some new approaches designed to make headway on student engagement. We need these innovative ideas now more than ever.

- “Civics Made Easy” (<https://www.pbs.org/show/civics-made-easy/>) – This new PBS series, hosted by Ben Sheehan, breaks down the complex world of American government and civic participation into clear, digestible lessons.
- National Civics Bee (<https://civics.uschamberfoundation.org/national-civics-bee/>) – This initiative of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation is an annual competition that inspires young Americans to engage in civics and contribute to their communities.
- Civic Star Challenge (<https://vision.icivics.org/civic-star-challenge/>) – This groundbreaking initiative from iCivics and the Bill of Rights Institute allows educators to seamlessly integrate the themes of the Declaration of Independence into their curriculum for the 2025-2026 school year with the chance to win incredible prizes.
- iCivics Youth Fellowship (<https://vision.icivics.org/get-involved/students/>) – This paid fellowship helps high school students across the U.S. develop leadership and communication skills and explore how civic education can become more relevant to all youth in the United States.

There are so many more promising approaches out there that deserve greater awareness and support. With just one year until the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we have a generational opportunity to bring civics back to the center. Leave a comment if you have a person or organization doing great work to engage young people in civics to share. And please have a safe and happy July 4th!

## Reflection of Hill Day

*“Every story matters. And when we share them, we help decision-makers understand what’s really happening.”*

It’s one thing for members of Congress to hear from CEOs, celebrities, or other politicians. It’s another to hear from students, teachers, and everyday citizens who value the civic traditions and responsibilities of our constitutional democracy. That’s what made our first Hill Day with the CivxNow Coalition so powerful. The people who joined us in Washington, D.C., from all over the country had a message for policymakers and for us: civic learning is our path to much-needed unity in our country and a powerful tool to prepare young people to navigate an increasingly more complex world.

Nearly 50 advocates shared their personal testimonials about the importance of civic learning with members of Congress across the political spectrum. The voices of young people were particularly resonant and compelling. Six students joined our group of advocates on Capitol Hill. They met with members and staff from across the political spectrum and explained why they believe civic education must be a nationwide priority.

“My little brother’s in elementary school and doesn’t know the three branches of government. I’m in middle school, and I don’t get civics either. I think it’s a travesty,” a middle school student shared during a meeting. Her courage and clarity in sharing her story resonated deeply with everyone in the room..

There were many more moments like this. Our first-time advocates found the experience transformative, noting how powerful it felt to be the “experts” in the room. The breadth of our delegation—students, teachers, veterans, nonprofit leaders—sent a compelling message: the time to prioritize civics in classrooms across America is now. The public is strongly behind us on this point, as well: [more than 70% of Americans support increasing civic learning opportunities in school.](#)

My deep appreciation goes out to all the advocates who engaged in our first of what we hope will be many Hill Days to come. We had more than 20 partner organizations participate, and six of our Advisory Council members attended. Thank you, Shay’na Fields (Walmart), Verneé Green (Mikva Challenge), Donna Phillips (Center for Civic Education), Sterling Speirn (Bridge Alliance), Audra Watson (Institute for Citizens & Scholars), and Andrew Wilkes (Generation Citizen). And a huge thank you to our CivxNow team and additional staff members—Shawn Healy, Lisa Boudreau, Abbie Kaplan, Diana Leo, Tanisha Pruitt, Andrea Benites, Christina Ross, and Bryan Schmidt—without whom this could not have happened.