

California Adult Education

Implementation of English Literacy and Civics Education in California



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Implementation of English Literacy and Civics Education in California

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Implementation of English Literacy and Civics Education in California

Introduction

To participate effectively in the education, employment, and civic opportunities of this country, adult English language learners must master English and understand and navigate American institutions and systems, such as government, education, workplace, banking, and health care. English Literacy and Civics Education (EL Civics), funded under Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), expands English literacy services and promotes the development of integrated programs that incorporate English language and literacy instruction and civics education.

EL Civics, as defined in the November 17, 1999, Federal Register, is “an educational program that emphasizes contextualized instruction focusing on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation, and U.S. history and government to help students acquire the skills and knowledge to become active and informed parents, workers, and community members.”

In implementing the EL Civics program, the California Department of Education (CDE) has made a specific effort to build the capacity of agencies serving adult English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The EL Civics program in California requires agencies to:

- Survey students to identify their needs and goals
- Document ways in which students learn to work with community organizations in their neighborhoods
- Develop instructional objectives that match student needs for civic participation and English language development
- Develop and use performance-based assessment plans approved by the CDE to measure the outcomes of civic participation instruction
- Monitor and document students’ attainment of identified goals, learning gains, and other outcomes
- Provide accessible program and classroom resources and technical assistance

Civic objectives developed for this program require students be actively involved in their communities through activities that access various government and community agencies, such as interacting with school officials or health care providers, recognizing and acting upon the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, researching methods of and obtaining suitable housing, and identifying and accessing employment and training resources.

This document examines the implementation of the EL Civics program in California, learner goal attainment and performance data, benefits and barriers to program implementation, and the availability and use of instructional and program resources. Local agency respondents to the *2004-05 Survey of WIA Title II Programs in California*, provide voices from the field, highlighting the impact of EL Civics on learners, their families, their instructional programs, and the communities in which they live and work.

Focus Areas

Agencies funded for EL Civics in California may select from two program focus areas: Citizenship Preparation (programs with a primary focus on preparing learners to obtain their United States citizenship) and Civic Participation (programs with a primary focus on facilitating learners' civic involvement). The WIA Title II Survey asked agency respondents with EL Civics programs to identify their funded focus area: Civic Participation, Citizenship Preparation, or both. Of the 263 total WIA survey respondents, 197 received funding for EL Civics programs. Eighty-seven (33 percent) were funded for Civic Participation, 13 were funded for Citizenship Preparation, and 97 (37 percent) received funding for both program areas.

Both EL Civics programs document learning gains using CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) pre- and post-tests along with additional assessment options. Citizenship Preparation students may take the written CASAS Government and History for Citizenship test and the oral CASAS Citizenship Interview Test, while Civic Participation students have the option of taking up to three agency-developed, CDE approved performance-based assessments.

Program Data

In 2004-05, the CDE funded 304 agencies to provide WIA Title II educational services to 848,220 adult students. Of the 304 agencies, 207 agencies received funding to provide EL Civics to 200,812 adult students. This reflected an increase of 20 agencies and 29,539 students from the previous year. Of these 207 EL Civics funded agencies, 19 agencies were funded for EL Civics, and 188 received funding for EL Civics and WIA Title II, Section 231. Adult schools served the majority of these EL Civics enrollees (nearly 80 percent) followed by community college districts, community-based organizations, and library literacy programs.

Learner Performance Data

EL Civics students, who comprise 23.7 percent of all WIA Title II students, outperformed all WIA Title II students in four major areas: (1) percentage of students who qualified for inclusion in the Federal Tables, (2) percentage of students who took pre- and post-tests, (3) percentage of students who completed an instructional level, and (4) percentage of students who advanced one or more instructional levels.

Table 1.1 compares data from EL Civics learners with data from WIA Title II learners as a whole (including EL Civics learners).

Table 1.1
2004-05 WIA EL Civics Program Learners Compared with Total WIA Learners

	Total WIA Title II**		EL Civics	
	N	%	N	%
Completed Entry Records	848,220		200,863	
Learners dropped from Federal Tables	256,327	30.2	5,001	2.5
Learners qualified for Federal Table 4	591,893	69.8	195,862	97.5
Learners qualified for Federal Table 4B (persisters)*	320,504	54.1	121,047	61.8
Learners completed a level*	201,584	34.1	76,987	39.3
Learners advanced more than one level*	123,315	20.8	49,745	25.4

*Percentages for persisters and level completion are based on the number of learners who qualified for Federal Table 4.

**Including EL Civics

CASAS 2006

Program Structure

Citizenship Preparation

EL Civics Citizenship Preparation programs focus on students whose goal is to obtain United States citizenship. Students in these programs benefit by learning about the types of questions that may appear on the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) citizenship tests. In addition, they gain confidence to respond to questions in both written and oral form in their daily lives.

Of the 11,913 Citizenship Preparation students who took the Government and History for Citizenship test, 81.6 percent (9,719) passed. Of the 4,197 Citizenship Preparation students who took the oral CASAS Citizenship Interview Test, 70.5 percent (2,957) passed. Some students attended and were assessed in both Civic Participation and Citizenship Preparation classes.

One comment from a Citizenship Preparation focus group¹ participant identified the following benefit:

More oral language and ESL skills being taught in citizenship classes help students to go on to more English and job skills study and training. Students also feel more confident.

¹ Throughout the year program administrators, coordinators, and instructors participate in regional focus groups to discuss selected topics. Focus groups convene on an as-needed basis to discuss issues as they arise, record ideas, and submit recommendations to the CDE. As the need to convene a focus group arises, the invitation to participate is sent to funded agencies.

Another focus group participant identified an additional benefit of these programs, stating that, “Students in Citizenship Preparation classes often return to share their USCIS testing experiences with other students, thereby helping to build the confidence of classmates about to take the exams.” This sharing of experiences is a key factor in student success, since individuals who are not enrolled in an educational program often face a number of barriers in their attempts to pass the USCIS test. Focus group participants also discussed diminishing barriers in their programs as they work with students to prepare them for their citizenship exam. Some of the barriers include:

- Misunderstanding the naturalization process
- Fear of the USCIS system
- Sporadic student attendance
- Not understanding the legal terminology
- Not allowing for enough hours of instruction prior to participating in the USCIS interview

Civic Participation

Agencies with Civic Participation programs may select from a list of 45 pre-approved civic objectives or may develop new civic objectives, with accompanying language and literacy objectives, to meet learner needs. For example, an agency may choose the civic objective of “access the health care system and be able to interact with the providers.” This objective has corresponding language and literacy objectives (such as “develop a list of questions to ask community health care providers” or “describe symptoms of an illness using body-part identification nouns and descriptive adjectives”). Agencies select and teach the language and literacy objectives that best match their students’ needs and that will assist students in attaining the civic objective.

Civic objectives used in California Civic Participation programs must meet the following criteria:

- Integrate English language and literacy instruction into civics education
- Focus on content that helps students understand the government and history of the United States; understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens; and participate effectively in education, employment, and civic opportunities in their communities
- Integrate active participation of the learners in community activities

Benefits of Civic Participation

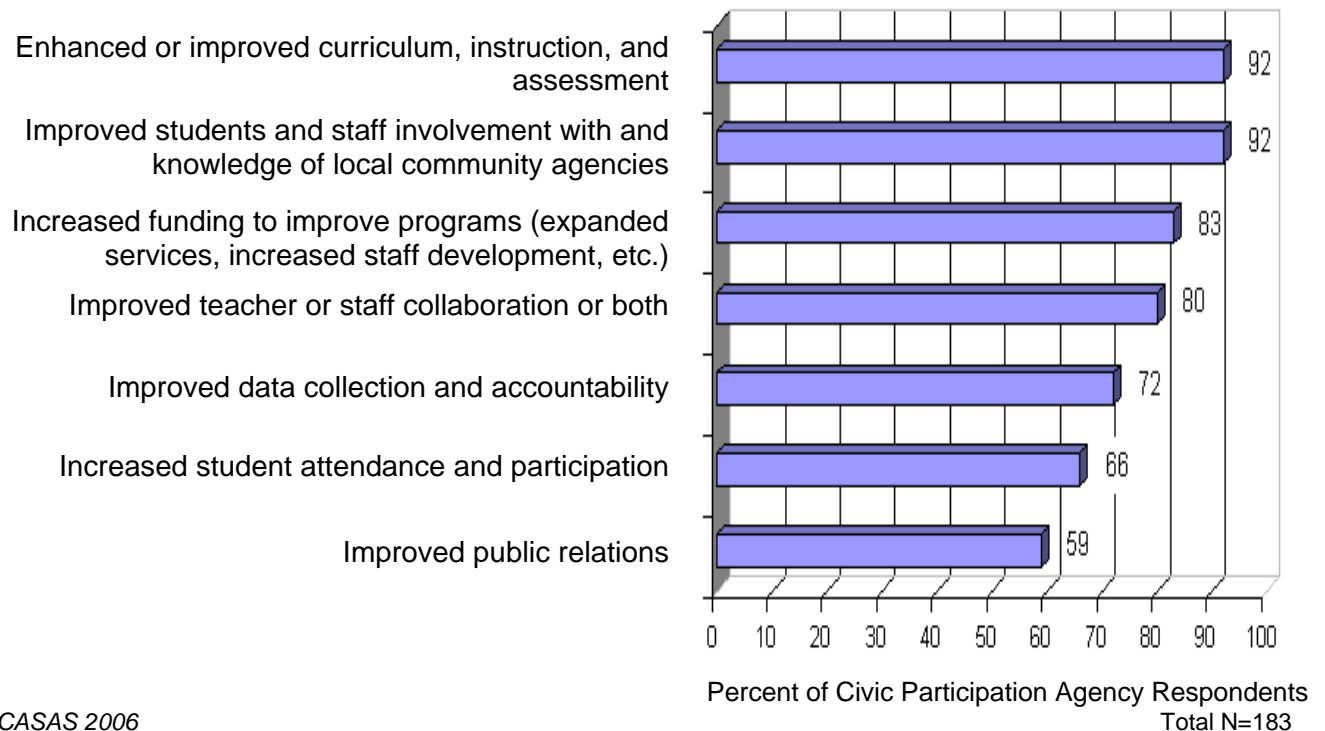
Benefits to the Agency as a Whole

To identify and effectively document the benefits and barriers to agencies and students involved in Civic Participation, the WIA Title II Survey included several EL Civics questions specifically targeted toward respondents with Civic Participation programs.

The survey asked agency respondents to indicate the benefits of Civic Participation program implementation that have affected their agency as a whole. More than 80 percent of the respondents selected the following four benefits: (1) enhanced or improved curriculum, instruction, and assessment, (2) improved student and staff involvement with and knowledge of local community agencies, (3) increased funding to improve programs, and (4) improved teacher or staff collaboration as the top four benefits to their agencies.

In addition to CASAS pre- and post-tests administered to all WIA Title II students, California EL Civics Civic Participation programs assess students through use of additional performance-based assessments selected or developed to measure student attainment of identified civic objectives. Statewide, students passed 119,983 (83.2 percent) of the 144,210 Civic Participation additional performance-based assessments administered to them.

Figure 1.1
2004-05 Benefits of Civic Participation Program Implementation That Have Affected the Agency As a Whole



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The following comments provide examples of how agencies are facilitating program improvement through involvement in Civic Participation activities:

Enhancing curriculum

[The most beneficial component to students is] a project-based learning curriculum which enhances student familiarity and comfort with the community. Students have shown a marked improvement in their use of English outside of the classroom and in their participation in community activities. (small adult school)

The enhancement of improving the curriculum has been the most beneficial. The focus of the program became much more concise and directly responsible for student goal setting. (medium-sized adult school)

The curriculum and additional assessments are based on real-life experiences and information needed to live in today's society. This component is very important to the success of the EL Civics program. (small community based organization)

EL Civics has helped make the curriculum more alive — the students like it. (medium-sized adult school)

We are a new school that had no curriculum or a decent program. The Civic Participation program helped us put a program together that would benefit our students; it gave us direction. (small adult school)

Involving learners in the community

Improved student and staff involvement with, and knowledge of, local agencies have not only helped students but have improved staff knowledge of their own communities. (small community based organization)

EL Civics has been central to building public relations and community collaboration. (medium-sized community based organization)

[EL Civics has] increased involvement of local community agencies and improved public relations due to increased student involvement in local issues. (small community based organization)

EL Civics has helped teachers and students equally in connecting instruction with real life learning situations. (medium-sized adult school)

Improving accountability

Our teachers are communicating about assessment in meaningful ways, and our students are enjoying being tested on “What they can do.” Teachers have more accurate data to make decisions about promoting students.
(medium-sized community college district)

We can’t say enough about the good this program has brought to our school and community. I would like to see more funding ties to EL Civics to push our field (ESL in adult education) toward this higher level of program quality.
(medium-sized adult school)

EL Civics agencies are aware the benefits of the Civic Participation program outweigh the barriers agencies may encounter in implementing it. The following quote from an adult school respondent summarizes the feelings of many agencies involved in EL Civics:

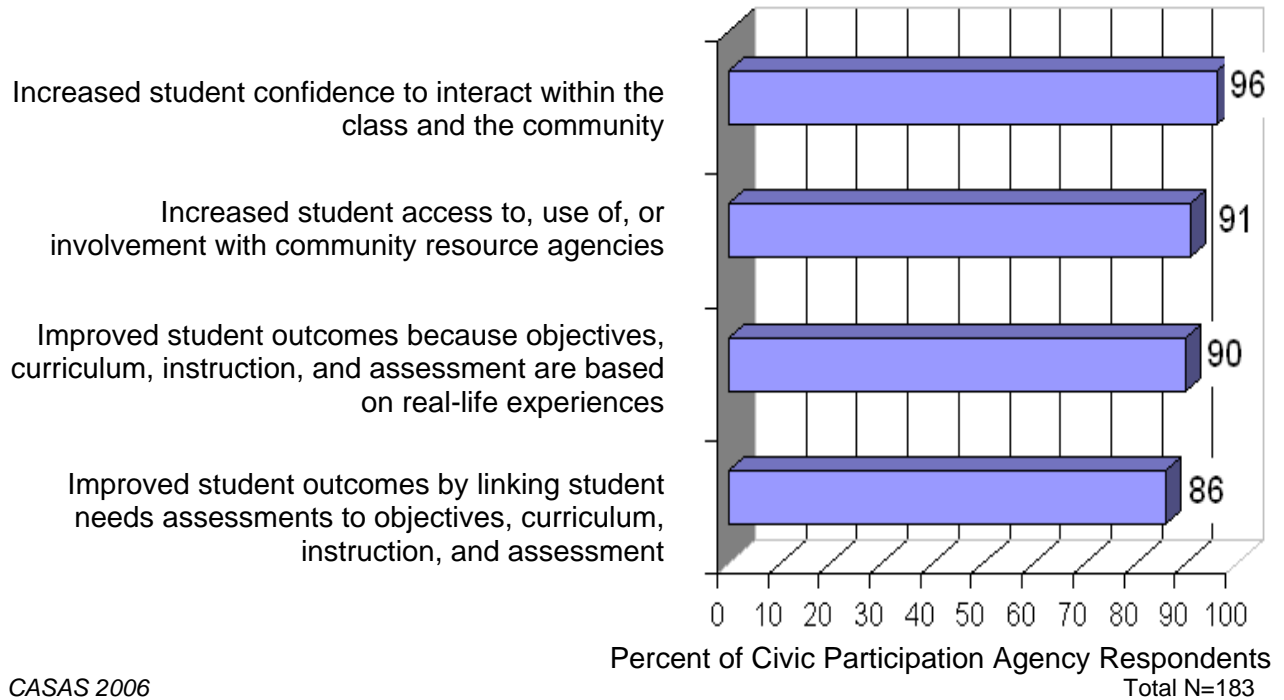
Being an EL Civics agency has afforded us many benefits. [Our school] has been able to purchase computer labs and additional curriculum (thus improving instruction). Student knowledge of community agencies has increased, teachers are collaborating more (this area still needs work but we are making progress), services have been expanded — more childcare, instructional aides in the classrooms. Data collection is better this year than in years past as a result of having more staff. Students are more involved in their education... I could go on and on. EL Civics has been such a blessing.

Benefits to Students

The survey asked agencies to indicate the benefits their Civic Participation program implementation have had on students. The most frequently cited benefit was increased student confidence in interacting with others within the class and in the community.

Additional benefits noted include the increased student access to, use of, or involvement with community agencies; improved student outcomes because objectives, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are based on real-life experiences; and improved student outcomes by linking student needs assessments to objectives, curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Figure 1.2
2004-05 Benefits of Civic Participation Program Implementation That Have Affected Students



CASAS 2006

When asked to indicate the most beneficial element of the Civic Participation program to their students, 31 of the 184 respondents cited more than one element with responses divided among four categories:

- Improved student confidence to interact within the class and community – 85
- Increased student access to, use of, or involvement with community agencies – 70
- Objectives, curriculum, instruction, and assessment based on real-life experiences – 54
- Student needs linked to assessments, curriculum, instruction, and real-life experiences – 39

The quotes below provide examples of many of these benefits:

Improved student confidence

[The most beneficial element to students is] the fact that our students feel a lot more confident in their interaction with the community and in their classes. (medium-sized adult school)

The EL Civics students have repeatedly stated how much their confidence has improved as a result of our classes. They are no longer intimidated by the school system; they are able to actively participate in their children's classrooms. They have participated in the parent/teacher association meetings, which is something that they never thought they'd do. (small adult school)

Students acquired a new self-awareness and self-confidence. Their ability to communicate in the schools, at the work place, and to health professionals increased dramatically. (medium-sized adult school)

Improved student outcomes

[The most beneficial component to students is] improved outcomes because objectives, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are based on real-life experiences. (medium-sized adult school)

Students are able to go out and interact with people and agencies in the community much more successfully than before. (medium-sized adult school)

Based on student feedback collected, the students appreciate developing skills they can actually apply in their daily lives. They also view EL Civics as an opportunity for increased multicultural understanding within their classes. (medium-sized adult school)

Increased student involvement with community agencies

The students are more aware of the resources that are available to them in the community and know how to access them. They are learning to feel more comfortable with the police and fire departments realizing that those agencies are here to serve them. (medium-sized adult school)

Students increased their knowledge and use of community resources. The advanced students who want to get a GED or high school diploma have benefited because they have increased their amount of reading and (have been) challenged to gather information from source materials. (medium-sized adult school)

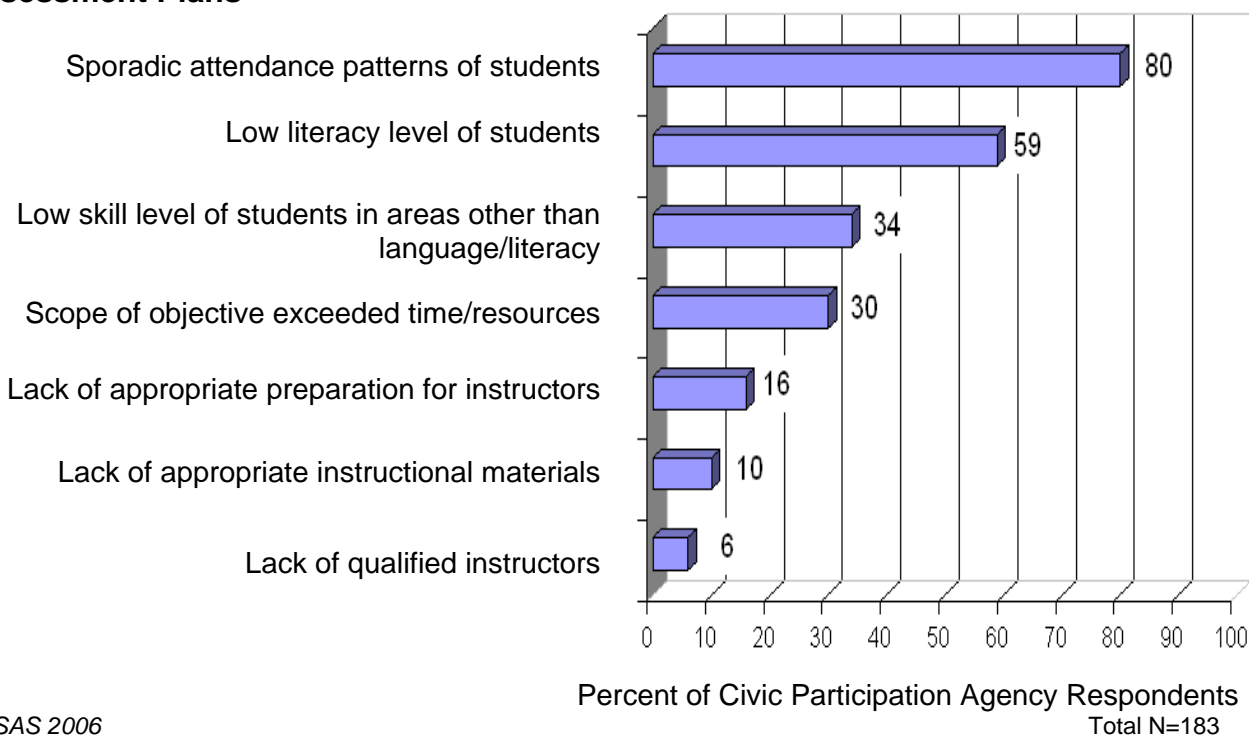
We have noticed more interaction between the students and their children's teachers. (medium-sized adult school)

Agency Barriers to Implementing Civic Objectives and Additional Assessment Plans

As stated previously, California EL Civics Civic Participation agencies assess student attainment of civic objectives using performance-based additional assessments in addition to standardized pre- and post-tests.

The survey asked respondents to indicate barriers they encountered in implementing their additional assessments. The most commonly specified barrier was the sporadic attendance patterns of students. Two other significant barriers appear to be students' low literacy levels and their low skill levels in areas other than language or literacy.

Figure 1.3
2004-05 Barriers to Implementing Civic Participation Objectives and Additional Assessment Plans



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The following agency comments provide insight into the barriers agencies encountered:

Sporadic attendance

The most difficult for our agency is the sporadic attendance patterns of our students, due to other commitments: work and families. Also, the scope of the objectives often took more time and resources than planned for or expected. (small community based organization)

Because of the sporadic attendance patterns of some of our students, it has been difficult to implement the civic participation objectives in the suggested number of hours. (medium-sized adult school)

Many of our learners go to Mexico for several months in the winter and work 12 hours a day in the summer. It is hard to have them continue coming to class. (small community based organization)

Sporadic attendance has been worse this year. Also, two teachers have had less supportive attitudes which make it difficult to have a consistently implemented program at all levels. (medium-sized adult school)

Low literacy level of students

[The most difficult barrier is] students with low literacy levels in their own language and lack of experiences and background knowledge to draw from. (medium-sized adult school)

The low literacy levels, low skill levels of students, and sporadic attendance patterns of some students have been challenging for our agency. (small adult school)

The scope of the objectives exceeding time and resources created the barriers we experienced as a new agency. (small other type agency)

Really, the only major problem we have is getting all of the required student outcome data sets (SODs), as our population is migrant. (medium-sized adult school)

EL Civics Resources

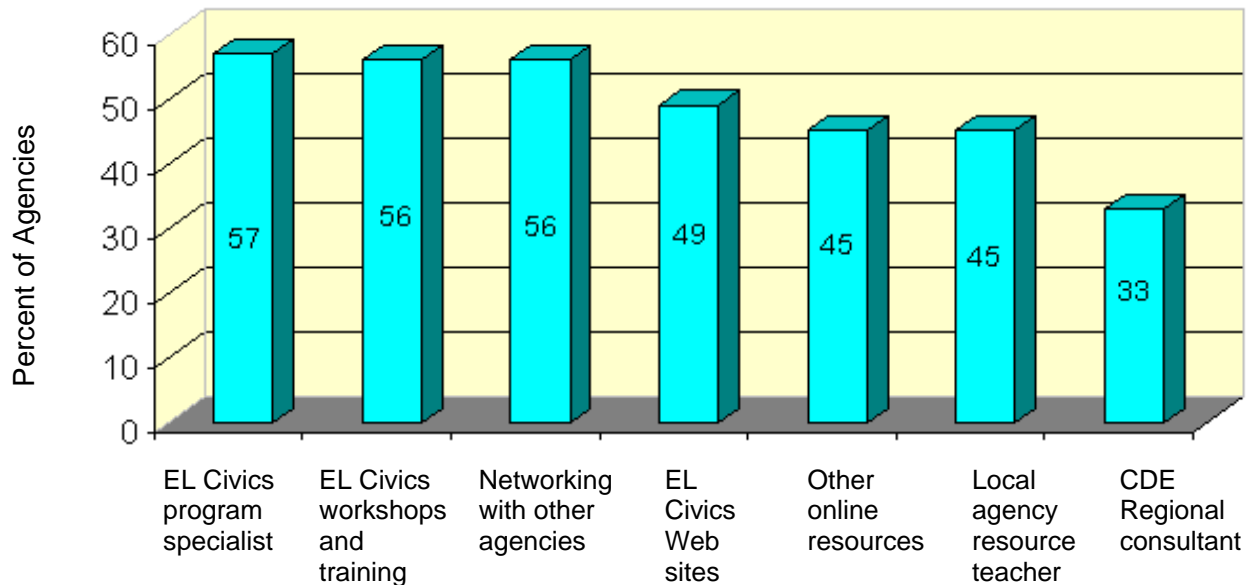
EL Civics agencies have taken advantage of the resources provided through the CDE and the four state Leadership Projects. These organizations, which include CALPRO (California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project), CASAS, CDLP (California Distance Learning Project), and OTAN (Outreach and Technical Assistance Network) assist in the development of EL Civics programs. EL Civics program specialists have worked closely with the CDE adult education consultants to provide comprehensive professional development and capacity-building technical assistance that addresses compliance, program implementation, and continuous improvement issues. The EL Civics Web site provides agencies with easy and immediate access to EL Civics curriculum, materials, and information which includes an alignment of CASAS Instructional Materials Quick Search materials to EL Civics materials. Agencies report the assistance provided by OTAN in developing and implementing technology plans is especially beneficial to their agencies. Not only have staffs become proficient in the use of technology, but students also have benefited as they have learned to use technology as a means to access and increase their involvement in community activities.

Beginning in 2003, the CDE, in collaboration with the four State Leadership Projects, has supported enhanced EL Civics program development and implementation through:

- The development, maintenance, and regular updating of an EL Civics Web site, www.casas.org/elc, a dynamic, interactive site that provides a single online location for all California EL Civics information. The Web site provides access to a standardized database of 46 pre-approved Civic Participation objectives with accompanying language and literacy objectives and additional assessment plans. Using the Web site in its interactive mode, local providers can electronically select, and customize if desired, their own program objectives based on the identified needs and goals of their students. The centralized EL Civics Web site facilitates and streamlines communication among the funded agencies, the CDE consultants, and the EL Civics program specialists.
- Training and technical assistance in multiple modes on all aspects of implementing the EL Civics program — from needs assessment, additional assessments, and accountability to the evaluation and application of student learning in real-life contexts. This process allows agency staff to attend regularly scheduled regional training workshops and networking meetings, access Web-based training and other online resources, and use on-site training modules in VHS and DVD formats.

Agencies noted the EL Civics resources they have relied on most extensively in providing support for EL Civics project(s). The most popular resources were the EL Civics program specialists, opportunities to network with other agencies, and the EL Civics workshops and trainings.

Figure 1.4
Percent of EL Civics Agencies and the Resources They Used Most Often in 2004-05



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Total N=183

Agencies cited a variety of additional resources they relied upon such as *Crossroads Café*, *English for All*, *Rosetta Stone*, newspapers, and magazines. Their comments provide examples of the wide range of resources available to EL Civics instructors:

Teachers use specific chapters from text books that correspond to the units being taught. (medium-sized adult school)

We provide textbooks, workbooks, videos, composition notebooks, CDs and laptops. (small county office of education)

Instructional priorities are based on instructor requests and budgeted accordingly including workbooks, DVDs, field trips, and videos. (medium-sized adult school)

When asked to indicate the most helpful EL Civics resource, two-thirds of the 174 responding agencies cited more than one “most helpful” resource: 78 cited their EL Civics program specialist and 54 indicated networking with other agencies. A fifth of the agencies cited EL Civics workshops and training, their CDE consultant, their local resource teachers, and the EL Civics Web site as vital. The following quotes are examples of agency comments:

The regional consultant is well trained, informed, and does an excellent job managing the multitude of questions each agency has. She seeks out questions, sends out notices, and e-mails us directly. She provides support and keeps us on track. She is organized and has excellent communication. We are encouraged to be involved and are given opportunities to ask questions and receive the assistance we need. She finds out the answers to our questions, and I appreciate all of the technical support she has provided. (medium-sized adult school)

My EL Civics program specialist has been extremely helpful, as have workshops and trainings. (small community based organization)

The EL Civics Web site is exceptional, and the CDE regional consultant is just a phone call away. (small community based organization)

The EL Civics program specialist has allowed us the resources to connect the school with the community in a practical and productive way. (medium-sized adult school)

Our local resource teacher organized materials that gave teachers the resources they needed to teach the EL Civics objectives. This was extremely helpful at the classroom level. The local network of program coordinators was also very helpful in learning from others and sharing ideas and

information. The EL Civics consultants did a great job of keeping us informed as to the latest info from the state. (large adult school)

The most frequently used instructional resources provided for EL Civics instructors in the classroom were curriculum materials, lesson plans, and work packets; textbooks; and video and audio materials.

EL Civics agencies also rely upon computers, Digital Video Discs (DVDs)/Compact Discs (CDs), guest speakers in the classroom, field trips, and video cameras as instructional resources.

The following comments cite examples of resources provided to EL Civics instructors:

Our instructors get a teacher's resource binder containing suggestions for instruction, interactive classroom exercises to prepare for assessments, and testing guidelines. There is a site resource binder of instructional materials related to each objective, an agency developed packet of community resources with flyers for objectives on community resources as well as videos of additional assessments for speaking tasks to be shown to students and teachers as examples of what is expected of students. (large community college district)

We provide textbooks, videos, a list of media resources including online, interactive CDs, work packets, and guest speakers. (small community based organization)

Instructors are provided with supplemental resources from textbook publishers. A large notebook of support materials for each EL Civics objective with related books and videos is available for check-out. Related newspaper articles or information on potential resources are distributed. (large adult school)

Our agency provides a custom-designed binder for each objective filled with activities, handouts, and lesson plans. We also have additional videos and textbook sets. (medium-sized community college district)

Our EL Civics instructors are provided binders that were designed specifically for each EL Civics objective taught during the school year. Each binder is accompanied by a video that addresses one of the language objectives of the unit. (medium-sized adult school)

EL Civics — Promoting Student Success

EL Civics continues to have a positive impact on the delivery of English language instruction in California. The design and implementation of EL Civics in California provides an opportunity for EL Civics students to apply what they have learned in the classroom

and to make a positive impact on their lives and in their communities. The following examples illustrate some of the ways in which students have made successful transitions from classroom activities to community action:

Job Shadowing Local Government Officials

- EL Civics students at one adult school job shadow local supervisors from their county Board of Supervisors. Students spend time in the supervisors' offices learning about a supervisor's duties and responsibilities, sit in the Board Chambers with the supervisors as they hold the open session of their weekly board meeting, and accompany supervisors to the podium when they make public commendations. Students from the class who are not shadowing a supervisor, attend sessions in chambers to watch county government in action. In the past three years, 15 students have been able to shadow a supervisor, and another 100 have attended sessions. These students have learned they have the right to participate in local decisions and have the power to help shape how their local government operates.

Developing a Community Resource Directory

- At another adult school, EL Civics students spent the last three years creating a Directory of Community Services. This directory focused on accessing the resources available in the community. Students then organized a community resource fair, open to the public. The May 2005 fair, which included many of the agencies listed in the directory, showcased 55 community agencies with 1,250 students and community members participating. A comment made by one student involved in the project sums up the benefits to the students and the community: "It's easier to find a solution to a problem. I know the people are able to help me. I'm able to help my neighbors with any problem through the community resources."

Navigating the Health Care System

- A third adult school is training EL Civics students to become community change agents in dispelling the myths and fears the Hispanic community has about navigating the health care system. Students learn to use the health care system themselves and then to present that information to others. One student has already received an offer of employment, several others have spoken at local organizations and all students will serve as mentors to other students.

Training in Disaster Preparedness

- A fourth adult school class studied disaster preparedness, what constitutes an emergency, and the appropriate actions to take in reporting a crisis. The class then trained 22 other ESL classes, ultimately training more than 1,100 students last year. As a result of their involvement at school, four students made presentations in their community, with one student providing disaster preparedness training at his apartment complex and another at his church. One student is now serving on the local Community Advisory Committee.

The Impact of EL Civics

Agencies report they are investing major amounts of time, talent, and other resources into making the EL Civics program highly successful and valued by students. Teaching English in the context of Civic Participation or Citizenship Preparation, the two EL Civics program options, is meeting the needs of adult students well beyond the goal of the program while increasing participation of students in their communities. In many cases students have had life-changing experiences that have allowed them to be an integral part of their newly adopted country. One of the most significant benefits of the program reported by EL Civics agencies is increased student confidence when interacting in the classrooms and the community.

The following quotes reflect the positive impact the EL Civics program is having in California:

I continue to believe that EL Civics has brought a significant change in the quality of instruction and learning to our program. Basing instruction on student needs, using authentic materials and designing lessons on student projects and community involvement has brought new energy and excitement to our program and increased our visibility within the community. It is a win/win for everyone involved. (adult school administrator)

EL Civics funding has allowed us to develop curriculum and assessments tied to our priority outcomes for 7 levels of instruction. Through this project, our instructors are able to meaningfully integrate assessment with instruction and develop performance assessments that address student needs in their roles as workers, parents, life long learners, and community members. I can't think of another funding initiative that has provided such meaningful program results. (community college ESL/EL Civics coordinator)

We've come a long way! It was a painful process getting started but it was well worth it. (small agency representative)