



CIVIC REASONING AND DISCOURSE SKILLS WERE SORELY LACKING AMONG THE PERPETRATORS OF LAST WEEK'S ATTACK ON THE CAPITOL. WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO HELP?



Preparing students for the rights and responsibilities of life in a democratic society has long been a core mission of the public schools. Last week's [attack](#) on the U.S. Capitol was a stark reminder that not everyone receives or absorbs those lessons.

So when the dust clears, what can schools do to help lessen the likelihood that a President lying about election results again incites a crowd use violence to halt a democratic process?

Some guidance can be found in the [Civic Reasoning and Discourse](#) initiative from the National Academy of Education (NAEd), which is led by NEPC Fellow [Gloria Ladson-Billings](#) of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The initiative began four years ago and is led by a steering committee that includes NEPC Fellow [Kris Gutiérrez](#) of the University of California, Berkeley.

The initiative “aims to advance high-quality research in civic reasoning and discourse for use in educational policy and practice.” Its creation was inspired in part by *The Political Classroom*, a 2015 book by Diana E. Hess and Paula McAvoy. According to a [statement](#) released by the NAEd in response to last week's events:

[O]ur members and fellows learned [from the Hess and McAvoy book] that classrooms were becoming more difficult places in which to have open and respectful conversa-

tions about controversial issues. We learned that some students thought it was a sign of disloyalty or family betrayal to read certain newspapers or periodicals.

So far, the initiative has resulted in a workshop consisting of five panel discussions on research related to topics including history of civic education, digital literacy, philosophy/morals, and learning climates. (The panel discussions can be viewed [here](#).) A plenary session was held in November. And a report that includes research-based recommendations will be released soon.

The NAEd statement concludes as follows:

We do not believe anything that happened during that violence aids the cause of democracy. We hope that students at every level—elementary, secondary, and college—will have an opportunity to experience what it means to learn about and participate in a democratic society. And we hope to never see this kind of social and civic destruction again.

NEPC Resources on Democracy and Education

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