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# Not Throwing Away My Shot: Civic Education in the 2020 Pandemic

A. Joy Hatcher

# ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, NOT THROWING AWAY MY SHOT: CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE 2020 PANDEMIC, by A. JOY HATCHER, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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NOT THROWING AWAY MY SHOT: CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE 2020 PANDEMIC

by

A. JOY HATCHER

Under the Direction of Dr. Joseph Feinberg

ABSTRACT

Through the twentieth century, the United States faced several health crisis starting with the

Influenza of 1918 that forced decisions about public and civic education. A century later, schools

across the country find themselves once again facing a global health crisis and making similar

decisions on how to maintain education in a pandemic. The purpose of this case study is to

explore the impact of the pandemic on the goals and curriculum decisions made by the Georgia

Center for Civic Engagement (GCCE), a non-profit civic education organization, to shift face-to-

face civic education programs to a distance learning format. The results of this research indicate

that a commitment to their mission goals of educating and equipping students to become

informed and active citizens and pressure from the organization's funders led GCCE to quickly

pivot their resources and programs to continue supporting civic education. Analysis of

asynchronous curriculum data shows a primary focus on cultivating civic knowledge by

providing a variety of source types combined with low level thinking tasks. Conversely, their

hybrid and synchronous curriculum provide more activities designed to help students explore

their own civic identity and identify areas for potential for civic action. Additional observations show the need for GCCE to adapt synchronous programming to address the lack of teacher and student preparation for interaction in a synchronous environment.

INDEX WORDS: civic education, civic engagement, civic learning, digital curriculum, distance learning, pandemic

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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

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Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2023

DEDICATION

To my fiancé Brandy, who pushes me toward endless growth. To my son Andrew, who fills me with pride and hope for a brighter future. To my mom Siri, who taught me to love and care for my community. To my aunt, Trina who supports me always.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# 1 THE PROBLEM

**Journal Entry: Where we are October 30, 2020**
A new school year has begun fully virtual for my son, though there is no consistent response from districts across the state. There's also no statewide mask mandate. Over 40 weeks into a global pandemic, over 40 weeks of transitioning to working from home, a second school year interrupted by crisis. We created three separate computer workstations in our small house for two work from home adults and one virtual student. We've now had to make space around those workstations for the two dogs who are completely fine with all of the extra attention. Infection rates are high in the U.S. but seem to be stable at the moment. There is currently no viable vaccine. The CDC reports over 200,000 people have died in the U.S. related to COVID-19 (*COVID Data Tracker Weekly Review*, 2021). Among those numbers are my brother-in-law and father-in-law who lived on opposite ends of the country, buried only two weeks apart.

As 1918 began, the United States felt unstoppable, leading the world in modernization and innovation. Engaged in war over seas, Americans at home were experiencing a renewed sense of national identity. Automobiles made visiting friends and relatives easier, people went to movie theaters and baseball games as national pastimes, and cities across the country tried to do their civic duty by holding patriotic parades to sell war bonds and bolster morale (Davis, 2018). An invisible threat crept into the country during the Spring of 1918 that would change the culture of the nation.

In the midst of World War I, soldiers and military personnel returning from the war front brought with them a virus that would become the most deadly in American history and the most severe worldwide pandemic of modern times—its name was influenza (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Between 1918 and 1919 this version of the influenza virus killed over 500 million people worldwide, including 675,000 Americans, and threatened the social fabric of the country, beginning with public education. Public education was at the heart of Progressive reforms in the United States at the time and enrollment increased to over 64% of all children between the ages of five and twenty. In addition to cultivating a more intellectual population and

knowledgeable citizens, school officials could monitor student health and potentially curb contagious diseases through school based medical inspection programs. The Influenza of 1918 threatened this progress as schools across the country closed for weeks or months at a time to mitigate the spread of the virus (Stern et al., 2010). In 2020, schools across the country faced a similar threat with the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to many difficult choices relating to public and civic education.

**Public Education During Crisis**

The push for public education began soon after the founding of the country as leaders recognized the need for educating citizens for a new democratic government (Kober et al., 2020). Though often at odds politically, both Adams and Jefferson believed in the importance of public education (Desnoyer, 2014). Both believed that at the heart of the mission of public schools was to instill American values (as determined by those holding power over policy) and prepare students to participate in democracy (Graham, 2005). In several letters, John Adams describes the importance he places on public education. In 1776 he writes: "Laws for the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower class of people, are so extremely wise and useful, that, to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant." In a letter written to John Jebb in 1785, just two years after the United States won its independence, Adams writes:

> the social science will never be much improved until *[sic]* the People unanimously know and consider themselves *[sic]* as the fountain of Power and until *[sic]* they Shall know how to manage it Wisely and honestly. reformation must begin with the Body of the People which can be done only, to affect, in their Educations. the Whole People must take upon themselves *[sic]* the Education of the Whole People and must be willing to bear the expenses *[sic]* of it. there should not be a district of one Mile Square without a school in it, not founded by a Charitable individual but maintained

at the expense *[sic]* of the People themselves *[sic]* they must be taught to reverence themselves *[sic]* instead of adoring *[sic]* their servants their Generals Admirals Bishops and Statesmen. (Adams, 1785)

In 1786, Thomas Jefferson reflects similarly on the possibility of laws regarding public education:

I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised, for the preservation of freedom and happiness...Preach, my dear Sir, a crusade against ignorance; establish & improve the law for educating the common people. Let our countrymen know that the people alone can protect us against these evils [tyranny, oppression, etc.] and that the tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance. (Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2014)

In the early nineteenth century, Horace Mann continued the push for state funded education for all through the common school (public school) movement. The goal was to produce moral, literate citizens as a means to eliminate poverty and reduce crime. By 1870, the percentage of children enrolled in public school grew from 55% to 78% (Kober et al., 2020). As immigration increased dramatically in the United States at the turn of the century, compulsory public education was seen as the only way to teach democracy to people with diverse backgrounds. By 1918—the start of the influenza pandemic—elementary school was required for students in every state in the country (Graham, 1974).

Influenza struck in three waves during 1918-1919: one in spring 1918, the next in fall 1918, and then again in early 1919. When infections rose, schools had to choose whether to continue to send students to school or close the schools. These decisions were made at every level.

Though he did not have the power to institute school closings nationwide, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a series of closure recommendations. New Jersey and Louisiana ordered statewide school closures during the second wave of the pandemic, and North Carolina recommended that communities "consider closing schools if influenza became prevalent in their communities" (Ager et al., 2020, p. 7). Three major cities, New York, Chicago, and New Haven, broke from the majority and decided to keep schools open. Officials in these cities believed that up to 75% of children in urban public schools lived in unsanitary and crowded tenement housing. They thought it was more beneficial to continue the sanitation and bacteriological campaigns of the Progressive Era that were going on within schools. Prior to these reforms, students with serious health conditions were ejected from school, but by the turn of the century school-based inspections helped to diagnose student ailments and provide treatment. Nurses, like the one below, would routinely examine students to check for contagious diseases, diabetes, rotting teeth, and other ailments (Markel, 2020; Stern et al., 2010).

**Figure 1 Weighing and measuring the school children by Red Cross nutrition worker. Cotton plant, Ark., 1919.**

Another reason was tied to the beliefs of the nation's founders that children needed to be educated for proper engaged citizenship, and there were concerns that immigrant "families could not be counted upon to instill either the English language fluency or the values associated with American patriotism" (Graham, 2005, p. 9).

In 2020, one hundred years after the Influenza of 1918 pandemic, the United States was hit with another invisible killer, COVID-19. At that time, there was neither a vaccine nor a cure. Just after March 13, 2020, when President Donald Trump declared COVID-19 a national emergency, many schools made the decision to send students home for a few weeks (Trump, 2020). "Two weeks to stop the spread" morphed into a few weeks of closures, which turned into closing schools in many parts of the country for the remainder of the school year as it became clear that this new pandemic would linger. While in 1918, when the options were to stay open or to close for a period of time, schools in 2020, in theory, could utilize a new option that was not available

in 1918—offering education in a digital format. This new digital/remote education relied on families to have computing devices and access to machines to participate, but even in 2020 there was still great inequity in access to reliable internet.

The Pew Research Center (2019) reported that 96% of Americans owned a cellphone of some kind and 81% of Americans owed a smartphone—a phone that performs the functions of a computer. However, only about 77% of Americans had access to broadband internet (high speed internet with the ability to support multiple formats of digital learning), though that number drops to 56% for lower income groups (Center, 2019a).

> These gaps in basic technology access are particularly stark along socioeconomic lines: In districts with the lowest percentages of students from low-income families, just 1 in 5 leaders reported in late March that a lack of basic technology is a "major" problem, compared with nearly two-thirds of leaders in districts where the highest percentages of students are from low-income families. (Herold, 2020, p. 7)

Connectivity is just one of many issues school systems have encountered while being forced into digital learning. Few teachers had experience with best practices in this type of virtual setting and most had little or no preparation.

**Figure 2 Andrew Hatcher March 17, 2020.**

A national survey of more than 1,200 K-12 teachers taken in March of 2020 found that more

than half believed they are "not prepared to facilitate remote learning" and over 40% percent

were on their own to determine the digital platform and tools they use to teach remotely

(Newton, 2020, p. 2).

**The Problem**

Faced with a myriad of obstacles and the perception of learning loss, some elementary

schools decided the solution was to reduce the content taught digitally. Schools decided to place

the emphasis only on those subjects that are the most important, determined by what is tested at

the state level—mathematics and English language arts. In some districts around the country, this

reduction in content meant minimizing or even removing social studies education from the

school day altogether. In the example below, a first-grade class at Satchel Ford Elementary in

Richland School District One in Columbia, SC, allots the majority of scheduled time to reading

and writing (Raz Kids, Lexia, and Epic), roughly 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., followed after lunch by

fine arts and math.

| Mrs. Chappell's First Grade e-Learning Schedule as of 9/9/2020 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8:00-9:15 | Morning Meeting, Read Aloud, Word Study, Shared Reading, Reader's Workshop Mini Lesson<br>*Whole group on TEAMS with whole group Brain Breaks* | | | | |
| 9:15-9:45 | Ladybugs Meeting with Mrs. Chappell (Monday-Friday 9:15-9:45) | | | | |

**Bumblebees:**

| Monday: | Tuesday: | Wednesday: | Thursday: | Friday: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Raz-Kids 9:15-9:45 | Lexia 9:15-9:45 | Clever Apps or Epic: 9:15-9:45 | Independent Writing Journal time 9:15-9:45 | Clever Apps: 9:15-9:45 |

**Dragonflies:**

| Monday: | Tuesday: | Wednesday: | Thursday: | Friday: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lexia: 9:15-9:45 | Clever Apps or Epic: 9:15-9:45 | Independent Writing (Journal time) 9:15-9:45 | Clever Apps or Epic: 9:15-9:45 | Raz-Kids 9:15-9:45 |

**Butterflies:**

| Monday: | Tuesday: | Wednesday: | Thursday: | Friday: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clever Apps or Epic: 9:15-9:45 | Raz-Kids 9:15-9:45 | Lexia: 9:15-9:45 | Clever Apps or Epic: 9:15-9:45 | Independent Writing Journal Time |

| 10:00-10:30 | Writer's Workshop<br>*Whole group on TEAMS with whole group Brain Breaks* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10:30-11:30 | Small Group Rotation: | | | | |

**Bumblebees:**

| Monday: | Tuesday: | Wednesday: | Thursday: | Friday: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Raz Kids 10:30-11:00<br><br>Meet with Mrs. Chappell 11:00-11:30 | Independent Writing Journal Time 10:30-11:00<br><br>Clever Apps: 11:00-11:30 | Meet with Mrs. Chappell 10:30-11:00<br><br>Lexia: 11:00-11:30 | Clever Apps: 10:30-11:00<br><br>Epic or Independent Reading: 11:00-11:30 | Lexia 10:30-11:00<br><br>Meet with Mrs. Chappell 11:00-1:30 |

**Ladybugs:**

| Monday: | Tuesday: | Wednesday: | Thursday: | Friday: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Epic or Independent Reading 10:30-11:00<br><br>Lexia 11:00-11:30 | Lexia 10:30-11:00<br><br>Clever Apps: 11:00-11:30 | Independent Writing Journal Time 10:30-11:00<br><br>Raz-Kids: 11:00-11:30 | Lexia 10:30-11:00<br><br>Epic or Independent Reading 11:00-11:30 | Clever Apps: 10:30-11:00<br><br>Lexia 11:00-11:30 |

**Dragonflies:**

| Monday: | Tuesday: | Wednesday: | Thursday: | Friday: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Epic or Independent Reading: 10:30-11:00<br><br>Clever Apps: 11:00-11:30 | Independent Writing Time Journal Time 10:30-11:00<br><br>Meet with Mrs. Chappell 11:00-11:30 | Lexia 10:30-11:00<br><br>Independent Reading or Epic: 11:00-11:30 | Epic or Independent Reading 10:30-11:00<br><br>Meet with Mrs. Chappell 11:00-11:30 | Lexia 10:30-11:00<br><br>Clever Apps: 11:00-11:30 |

**Butterflies:**

| Monday: | Tuesday: | Wednesday: | Thursday: | Friday: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lexia 10:30-11:00<br><br>Clever Apps: 11:00-11:30 | Independent Writing Journal Time 10:30-11:00<br><br>Epic or Independent Reading: 11:00-11:30 | Clever Apps: 10:30-11:00<br><br>Meet with Mrs. Chappell 11:00-11:30 | Choice Board 10:30-11:30 | Choice Board 10:30-11:00<br><br>Lexia: 11:00-11:30 |

| 11:30-12:30 | Lunch |
|---|---|
| 12:30-1:15 | Related Arts (PE, Dance, Drama, Music, Art) |
| 1:20-2:30 | Math Workshop, Math Small Groups and End of the Day Meeting (2:15-2:30)<br><br>(Small Group Schedule to follow) |

**Figure 3 First Grade Schedule-Satchel Ford Elementary in Richland School District One, Columbia, SC. 9/2020**

After learning about examples like these from social studies educators and parents around the country, the President of the National Council for the Social Studies crafted a statement to address concerns over the decisions to cut or eliminate social studies during the pandemic.

> However, as I speak to friends and colleagues across the country, I've heard rumblings of further marginalization of social studies. I've heard educators say their district is cutting or eliminating social studies in order to create more time for reading and math…Our students cannot afford to have marginalized access to social studies. Social studies encourage students to be active and engaged citizens and solve complex societal problems. To support social-emotional learning, our students need access to the main area of the curriculum that provides "windows and mirrors." Students have questions about what is happening in the world today and want to use their voice to affect change. It would be an act of injustice to remove or continue to exclude social studies from the curriculum. (Wager, 2020, pp. 7-9)

Unfortunately, the marginalization and reduction of focus on social studies instruction is not a new trend (Lee, 2013). Though the origins of public schools centered on preparing students to be citizens of a democracy, the Council of Chief State School Officers 2018 report *The Marginalization of Social Studies* indicates that "44% of districts surveyed have reduced time for social studies since the enactment of No Child Left Behind" (p. 1). Social studies instruction—content in which civic education is embedded—is even more critical during a pandemic, when families and communities rely on each other to be active and engaged citizens, with everyone doing their part to slow the spread of the virus, support the community, and sustain the economy. At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, as public education became compulsory across the country, national leaders set out to more clearly define and categorize subjects taught beyond reading,

writing, and arithmetic. Recent developments represent a reversal and a shrinking of the curriculum available to students.

Social studies instruction, and its roots in civic education in the United States, are described in the Report of the Committee on Social Studies of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education of the National Education Association (1916). The goal of civics education is to train students to be contributing members of society by providing knowledge as it relates to the organization and development of society, instilling a sense of responsibility to their country and community, and the will to participate in society (Nelson & ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 1994). Though these goals are essential in times of national crisis, decisions made by schools and districts during our recent crisis are contrary to the civic mission of schools.

Federal legislation and state policies that measure some subject areas and not others through mandated assessments may be driving school-level decisions that marginalize social studies instruction by placing higher value on tested subjects. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 created a greater emphasis on the equity of education, focused on the subject areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, standardized tests were now required to measure student performance in a further attempt to reduce the education gap created by income inequality. Testing however was still only mandatory in reading and mathematics (science was added to the list of federally required tests subsequently in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015). Since each state could create their own standards and tests, there was much debate on comparing results and summarizing nationwide results. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), an organization that was established in 1969 to measure student knowledge in various content areas across the nation, took on the task

of studying those comparisons (*About NAEP: A Common Measure of Student Achievement*, 2021). NAEP facilitated nationwide testing of a variety of content areas through representative samples of students. They began administering social studies assessments in U.S. history and geography to eighth grade students in 1994, civics assessments in 1998, and an economics assessment for twelfth grade students in 2006. Finally, with NAEP social studies assessment administered through many states, there was a national measure for the civic mission of public schools, a mission recognized by the nation's founders after the American Revolution (Kober et al., 2020).

**The State of Civics Nationwide**

The frameworks for the NAEP Civics Assessment include "three interrelated components: knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills, and civic dispositions. Taken together, these components form the essential elements of civic education in the United States" (National Assessment Governing Board et al., 1996, p. 17). NAEP has administered the eighth-grade civics assessment four times since 1998. The assessment is scored on "a scale ranging from 0-300, based on statistical procedures called Item Response Theory (IRT). IRT is a set of statistical procedures useful in summarizing student performance across a collection of test exercises requiring similar knowledge and skills" (National Assessment Governing, 2020, p. 2). Within the scale, scores are categorized into three achievement levels that describe student performance—NAEP Basic, NAEP Proficient, and NAEP Advanced. Below is a table with descriptions from NAEP of each achievement level including the corresponding scale score (National Assessment Governing Board, 2020).

**Table 1.1 NAEP Achievement Level Descriptions for Grade Eight Civics with Scale Scores**

| Achievement Level | Scale Score | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **NAEP Basic** | 134 | Eighth-grade students performing at the NAEP Basic level should have some understanding of competing ideas about purposes of government, and they should be able to describe advantages of limited government. They should be able to define government, constitution, the rule of law, and politics. They should be able to identify the fundamental principles of American democracy and the documents from which they originate, and they should understand the importance of a shared commitment to the core values of American democracy. They should recognize the components of the political process and understand personal, political, and economic rights and responsibilities. They should be able to describe the purposes of some international organizations. |
| **NAEP Proficient** | 178 | Eighth-grade students performing at the NAEP Proficient level should understand and be able to explain purposes that government should serve. These students should have a good understanding of differences between government and civil society and of the importance of the rule of law. They should recognize discrepancies between American ideals and reality and be able to describe continuing efforts to address them. They should understand the separation and sharing of powers among branches of government and between federal and state governments, and they should be able to explain how citizens influence government. They should be able to describe events within the United States and other countries that have international consequences. |
| **NAEP Advanced** | 213 | Eighth-grade students performing at the NAEP Advanced level should have a developed understanding of how civil society helps to maintain limited government and why the rule of law is important. These students should have a clear understanding of issues in which democratic values are in conflict and of past efforts to address the discrepancies between American ideals and reality. They should understand how citizens can monitor and influence government and how responsible citizens support democracy. They should recognize the impact of American democracy on other countries, as well as other countries' impact on American politics and society. |

Though the main goals for social studies education have not significantly changed since the founding of the country, the method and focus on instruction for social studies saw a recent shift. The College Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework, the result of a collaborative effort by

states to present a framework for districts, schools, and teachers to use to strengthen social studies instruction, describes a departure from the previous focus on developing good social studies programs that promote primarily civic knowledge, in favor of a focus on civic action through the inquiry arc for social studies instruction (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). The C3 Framework uses the inquiry arc—developing questions, applying disciplinary tools and concepts, evaluating sources and using evidence, and communicating solutions and taking informed action—as the organizational structure for the framework (p. 12).

The reason for this shift in focus can be attributed to stagnant NAEP scores for the Civics Assessment. The 2018 NAEP administered Civics Assessment represented 20 years of assessing civic understanding at the national level. Figure 3 shows all testing data from the initial 1998 assessment through the latest in administration in 2018 (National Assessment Governing Board, 2007; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2018).
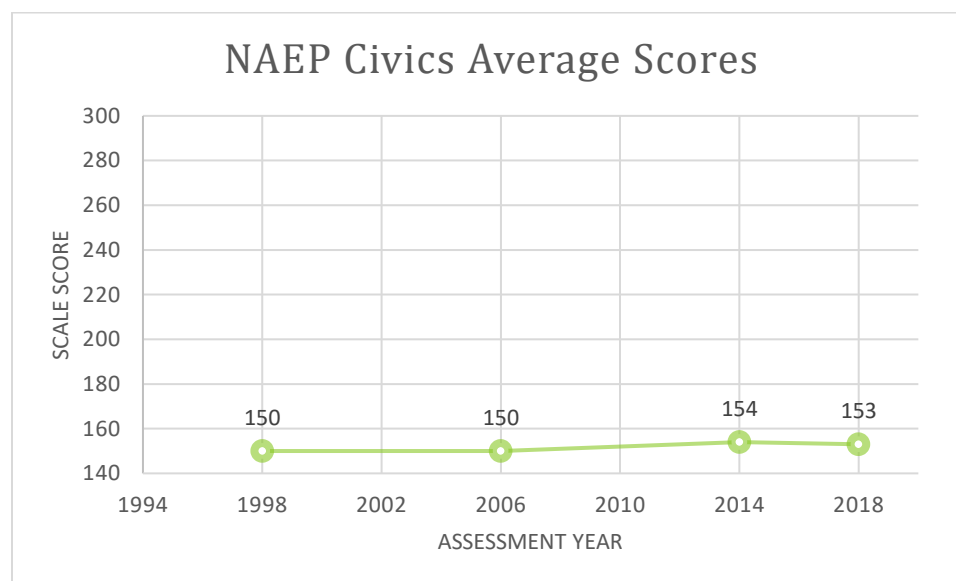


**Figure 4 Trend in Average Eighth Grade NAEP Civics Scores as of 2018**
This data show that on the first administration, eighth grade students nationwide performed at a basic level of understanding, and subsequent assessments show no significant change in scores.

The NAEP civics assessment however is simply a modern quantitative measurement of the long-term national goals of maintaining a thriving democracy described here. The country has seen great progress over the last century. In a 1930 article on good citizenship, Eleanor Roosevelt describes the positive effect of public education and courses in government, history, economics which her own education, before women had the right to vote, did not include. At the turn of the century, Eleanor Roosevelt argues that as President, Theodore Roosevelt "spread abroad the idea that "a service" was owed to the country in peace, and that this could only be rendered satisfactorily when every citizen took an interest in good government." Soon after public education spread nationwide, women earned the right to vote, and courses in civics, government, economics and current events became required learning. Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court was born in 1930, the year Eleanor Roosevelt wrote that good citizenship is the purpose of public education. In 2009, after O'Connor retired from the Court, she founded iCivics, an organization with the goal of transforming civic education through technology and resources. She said iCivics was her most important work and greatest legacy because: "The practice of democracy is not passed down through the gene pool. It must be taught and learned by each new generation" (Our Founder, 2021).

**Figure 5 Family voting day wearing homemade masks—Joy Hatcher (left) and Brandy Roatsey (right). November 3, 2020.**

Despite the progress of the twentieth century, modern political leaders continue to call for an increased national focus on civic education, reflecting the results of the NAEP civics assessments. In 2019, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, John Roberts included this call to action in his midyear judiciary report:

> we have come to take democracy for granted, and civic education has fallen by the wayside. In our age, when social media can instantly spread rumor and false information on a grand scale, the public's need to understand our government, and the protections it provides, is ever more vital.

Americans across the country reading this quote in 2021 after the January 6 Capitol Hill riot following false claims that the 2020 election was corrupt, might see it as a prophetic warning about the dangers of minimizing the importance of civic education. On December 9, 2021 President Biden announced the Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal whose goal is to bolster de-

mocracy and defend human rights globally (Biden, 2021a). As a part of this initiative, the President plans to work with Congress to fund programs that provide digital literacy and promote information awareness and education. Additionally, The Department of Education will:

> [P]repare a toolkit of resources and strategies for increasing civic engagement at the elementary school, secondary school, and higher education level, to help more than 67 million students — and their families — learn about civic opportunities and responsibilities. The Department will also remind educational institutions of their existing obligations and encourage institutions to identify further opportunities to assist eligible students with voter registration. (Biden, 2021b)

**The State of Civics in Georgia**

The need for increased focus on civic education is no less dire in Georgia. Testing requirements are dwindling; however, the Georgia Standards of Excellence for Social Studies include civics standards in grades kindergarten through 8 and require a course in American Government/Civics for high school graduation. The Georgia, *A+ Education Reform Act of 2000*, required a social studies test in grades 3 through 8, in addition to high school United States History and Economics, and participation in NAEP assessments for grades 4, 8, and 12 (Education, 2012). Recently the State Board actions and legislation focused on reducing statewide testing to the federal minimum (Amy, 2019). Since 2014, Georgia has seen a dramatic reduction in social studies testing from eight tests—one for each grade, 3 through 8, and two in high school—to two tests, one in eighth grade and one for high school United States History and the elimination of all social studies related NAEP testing in Georgia (Education, 2020c).

The remaining grade 8 social studies assessment in Georgia Studies does include civics as one of the four domains of standards assessed within the End of Grade (EOG) Milestone Assessment (Georgia Department of Education, 2020). The assessment includes questions relating to six content standards within the government/civic understandings domain including the following topics: foundations of Georgia's government, the role of the legislative branch in Georgia, the role of the executive branch in Georgia state government, the role of the judiciary branch in Georgia state government, the treatment of juvenile offenders in Georgia courts, and the role of local governments (Education, 2016). The specific content asks students to make connections between state and national government. Additionally, the standards describe which skills should be mastered and applied at each specific grade including map and globe skills, information processing skills, and literacy skills for history and social studies.

The Georgia Milestone Assessment System also categorizes student scores in achievement levels of beginning, developing, proficient and distinguished learners. However, in order to provide more data about specific domains within a content area, student scores are also reported in terms of domain mastery of the following: history, economic, geography, and government/civic understandings. Below are descriptions of each category of student achievement as it relates to mastery of specific domains.

- A student who achieves Remediate Learning is performing well below mastery on a domain and should consider additional study or instruction opportunities on that domain. In particular, the domain performance suggests that the student has less than a 40 percent chance of being at or above the proficient cut score on the Georgia Milestones assessment.

- A student who achieves Monitor Learning has not consistently demonstrated mastery-level performance on a domain, and thus, additional information should be gathered to further evaluate their mastery of the domain. In particular, the domain performance suggests that the student has between a 40 percent chance and an 89 percent chance of being at or above the proficient cut score on the Georgia Milestones assessment.

- A student who achieves Accelerate Learning has demonstrated achievement on the domain that is consistent with students who were proficient (or above) on the assessment and as such reflect an area of strength. In particular, the domain performance suggests that the student has a 90 percent chance of being at or above the proficient cut score on the Georgia Milestones assessment. (Education, 2020a)

Figure 4 below shows the percentage of students that score in each of the three categories of mastery for the government/civics domain of the eighth grade social studies EOG assessment (Education, 2020b).

**8th Grade End of Grade Government/Civics Scores**
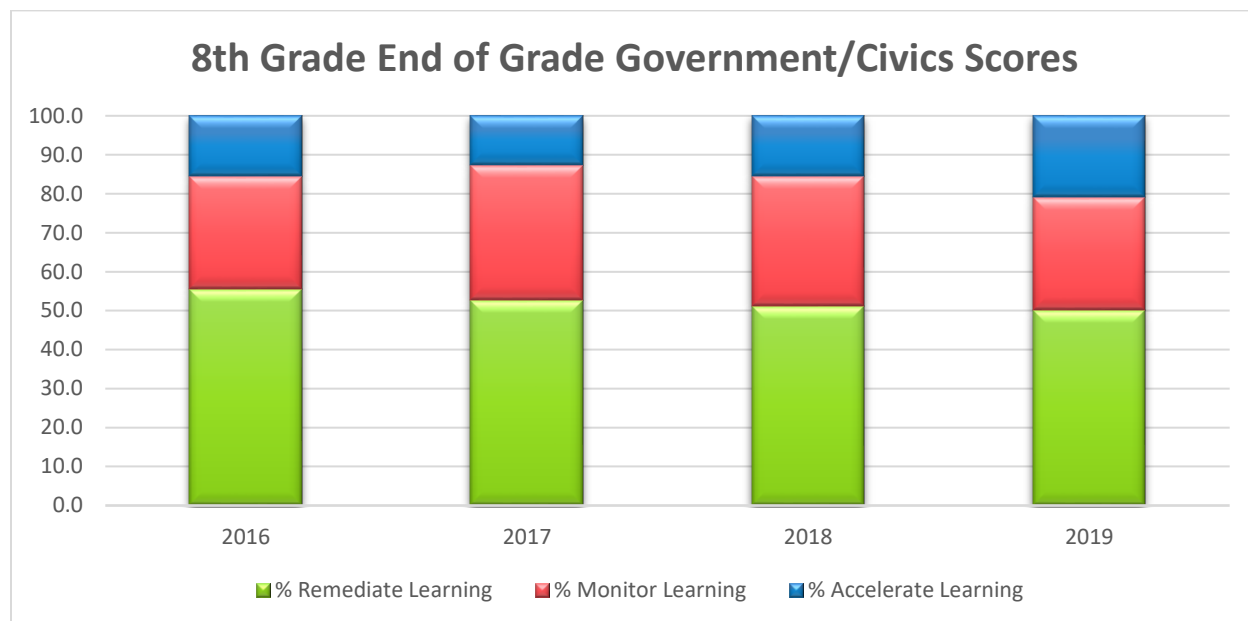


**Figure 6 Government/Civics Domain Data from the Eighth Grade EOG
in Social Studies 2016-2019**

In each administration of the social studies EOG, over 50% of the students scored in the remediate learning, the lowest category of domain mastery. Though there is some growth in moving students from the monitoring to the accelerated learning category of domain mastery, the vast majority of Georgia students mirrors the nation in the assessment of civic understanding with scores that have not seen significant growth in the last several years. Some political leaders in Georgia are taking action to focus on civic education as well. In November of 2021, the Georgia Department of Education announced one of its 2022 legislative priorities for expanding opportunities for students will be to "strengthen Civics Education and students' understanding of American government and our nation's history."

As schools closed for the 2019-2020 school year, many students missed several months of civics instruction, and many civic education programs closed. Some programs made the decision to convert their curriculum into a digital experience to continue engaging students at home. One such organization is the Georgia Center for Civic Engagement (GCCE), whose mission is to

"provide programs for our youth which promote self-esteem, leadership skills, and a sense of moral and civic responsibility" (Georgia Center for Civic Engagement, 2020a). Faced with cancelling its summer and fall programs, GCCE found grant funding to re-envision their work in a distance format. This research focuses on why and how the GCCE made the program work during a pandemic.

**Research Questions**

The questions of focus for my research are:

1. What impact did the pandemic have on curriculum decisions for youth civic leadership programs?

2. What were the curriculum and process changes made to student civic programs because of the pandemic?

3. How did virtual curriculum impact the program goals and program leaderships' expectations?

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of a pandemic on decisions made to change civic leadership programs from in-person to digital, and to describe how the pandemic changed the curricular activities and goals of that program.

**Significance of the Study**

Though there is research on many facets of civic education, there are very few studies on civic engagement in a digital environment, and no studies on civic engagement in the United States during a pandemic. Kahne's (2016) research signals that the digital age is drastically changing research-based best practices surrounding civic education. These researchers call on educators to explore the use of new digital tools for learning about the government, engaging in

civic and civil discourse, and discovering new ways to participate in active citizenship. "Thus, it is vitally important that scholars of civic education examine the digital dimensions of civic learning as well as the digital dimensions of civic engagement, and that they examine the relationship between civic education (whether digital or not) and these digital forms of participation" (Bowyer & Kahne, 2020, pp. 1-2).

**Delimitations and Assumptions**

This research includes the programs of a single educational organization to support civic education during the first summer and fall semesters of the pandemic. This research was done after the program concluded. The programs are designed for middle and high school students, however since this research focuses on the decisions and processes of the program itself and not student outcomes, only program artifacts, the program staff, and district teachers were included in the research. This program was selected because it was the only civic leadership program in the state of Georgia to shift its normal face-to-face programs and support to a digital format. This research assumes that: (a) the Civic Engagement Center provided access to all curriculum and instructional documents from the original face-to-face and the digital program; (b) responses received from staff and teachers accurately reflect their opinions and observations; (c) responses received from staff include answers for all questions that are open and honest (Roberts, 2010).

**Overview of the Study**

I began this chapter by describing the civic mission of schools and connecting decisions made about public education, specifically social studies and civic education, during the pandemics of 1918 and 2020. I also established the problem of the marginalization of social studies and the stagnation of civic learning at the national level in comparison to Georgia, where this study was based, and introduced the significance of the study in the need for research on transitioning

civic education to a digital format, which is the focus of this research in the context of a global pandemic. In this chapter I include the purpose statement, research questions, assumptions of the researcher, and the definitions of terms to be used throughout the dissertation.

The next chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature on the theoretical frameworks, history of civic education, and description of best practices in digital learning, civic education, civic education in digital formats. Chapter 3 explains the overview of the case study methodology specific to this research, chapter four provides a summary of the research findings and chapter five provides the conclusion and suggestions for further research.

**Definitions**

*Active and Engaged Citizenship* is reflected in the ways people express themselves and participate socially and politically and includes measures such as social connectedness, community involvement, and political action choices (Georgia Family Connection Partnership, 2019).


*Asynchronous learning* refers to activities and materials that students engage with on their own time. Synchronous learning refers to live meetings held on virtual platforms such as Skype, Zoom, Google Hangout, or Microsoft Teams (Levy, 2020).


*Blended learning* refers to teaching that includes a combination of online and face-to-face instruction (Rennie et al., 2020).


*Civic education* refers to learning opportunities that cultivate knowledge of social issues and local and national government, facilitate student involvement in community and political activities, and foster student's sense of responsibility.

*Civic identity* refers to "the sense of one's readiness and willingness to assume citizenship responsibilities and the belief that one can make a difference" (Trammell, 2014).

*Civic knowledge* refers to a basic understanding of the structure and functions of government, individual rights and responsibilities, and how history, geography, and economics shape the world (*What is Civic Learning? Developing Effective Citizens*).

*Curriculum* refers to the system of instruction that includes learning goals, content, resources, assessment, and teaching strategies (*The Glossary of Education Reform: CURRICULUM*)

*Digital learning* is a term that can encompass a variety of leaning experiences within a digital platform such as exchanging emails, using a virtual chat room, engaging through social media, synchronous or asynchronous opportunities, or face-to-face meetings using video conferencing software (Liimatainen, 2018).

*Digital literacy* is "the ability to understand and navigate the world of digital media" (Rennie et al., 2020) .

*Distance learning* refers to a "form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teacher and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication" (Berg & Simonson, 2016).

*Face-to-face learning* refers to classes that take place in person with people in the same physical place (Rennie et al., 2020).

*Flipped classroom* refers to a type of learning where students are introduced to content and direct instruction at home and work though analysis and practice at school.

*Pandemic* refers to a global outbreak of a virus (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

*Reflective Thinking* refers to "awareness of one's own knowledge, assumptions and past experiences" (The Open University)

*Virtual learning* refers to "learning that can functionally and effectively occur in the absence of traditional classroom environments" (Simonson, 2019, p. 233).

## 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

**Journal Entry: Where we are March 31, 2021**
Over half a million Americans have died from COVID-19 (*COVID Data Tracker Weekly Review*, 2021). My great aunt and a cousin are amongst those numbers now. We are all still moving through life virtually at our three makeshift desks that have slowly become more permanent. It will officially be a full year of virtual learning for my high school sophomore. There is hope on the horizon as there are now three available vaccines. The beginning of January saw the highest infection rates, but thankfully distribution of two vaccines beginning in January helped dramatically. With the third option now available, the numbers are finally beginning to fall. At first, availability was for healthcare workers and those who are high risk, so last month my mom, aunt, and mother-in-law were all able to get their shots. The rest of our family has either received the first shot or has it scheduled. There is concern about variants and resistance to the vaccine, but there is still hope.

## Introduction

This research is situated in the intersection of distance learning and civic education in times of national crisis. Because the COVID-19 pandemic is the first in this country to disrupt public education nationwide when a digital alternative is available, there is currently no research base to ground discussion about civic education in a digital setting during a national crisis. In-stead, this chapter focuses on the lack of research specifically in civic education through digital learning, and consequently on the lack of recommendations for best practices in distance learning and civic education.

In March of 2020, cities and states across the United States took drastic measures to curb the spread of a global pandemic. Schools shut down, some to reopen sporadically during the 2020-21 school year, with many remaining digital for the foreseeable future. In August of 2020, over 90% of countries around the world and 93% households with school-age children in the United States implemented some form of distance learning during the pandemic (McElrath, 2020; United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). My son, along with other students across the country learned exclusively in digital classrooms for more than a year, with teachers unprepared

to teach in a digital, distance learning environment. While seemingly foreign and new, 2020 was not the first attempt at distance learning during national and regional crises. The following section provides background information regarding examples from the last century in the United States where distance learning occurred in large cities or states caused by emergencies such as an epidemic, or nationwide from a pandemic.

**Distance Learning During Crisis**

Similar to now, in October of 1918, during the deadliest wave of the Influenza pandemic in the United States, the Surgeon General issued closure recommendations for public places and many schools across the country. As schools began closing, problem-solving led to innovation, or at least creative solutions. Some cities, such as Los Angeles and Cleveland, instituted mail-in homework, also known as correspondence education, and home school projects to allow students to continue their learning at home (Barbour, 2018; Taylor, 2020). In 1918-19 U.S. schools closed for 36 days on average, compared to 43.1 weeks during the COVID pandemic as of January 2021 (Ager et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

Health crises continued to spur innovation in distance learning during polio epidemics in the mid twentieth century. By the 1930's, a new technology, the radio, had found its way into many American homes, with over 80% of households having at least one radio (Craig, 2004). Radio programs and advertising helped build a common culture and shared national identity and provided a way to keep communities informed in their own homes. Almost 20 years after the pandemic of 1918, U.S. cities began experiencing polio outbreaks. Once again, schools closed, and children were sent home. A few cities, like Chicago, used radio technology in 1937 to address education at home during what was becoming a polio epidemic (Strauss, 2020). The schools and teachers worked closely with the media to take distance learning to new heights.

Each morning, the local newspaper would print class schedules, assignments, and any additional

information. Then the radio would transmit a 15 minute live on-air lessons for each grade. These

radio lessons were delivered by teachers, in collaboration with principals and a committee of ad-

visors described as subject experts (Foss, 2020). Six Chicago radio stations participated in this

distance learning experiment by donating radio time.



Chicago, Sept. 10 —(AP)— Chi-
cago's 317,000 elementary school
children, barred from classrooms
by an outbreak of infantile para-
lysis, will be taught their lessons
during the emergency by news-
papers and radio.

School Superintendent William
H. Johnson announced the new step
today as physicians proceeded to
fight the disease with a nasal
treatment, convalescent serum and
mechanical respirators after 12
new cases were reported.

Starting Monday, radio stations
WLS, WIND and WJJD will do-
nate time to permit daily broad-
casts from 7:15 to 11:45 A. M., Dr.
was planned to have the daily les-
sons printed in newspapers the
preceding night.

**Figure 7 Chicago Children to Be Taught By Radio, Press Until Polio Subsides.**
**Dixon Evening Telegraph. 9.10.1937**

Subject areas were paired together and scheduled for three alternating days of the week, Monday through Saturday. Social studies was paired with science, while English was paired with mathematics. Teachers started utilizing radio broadcast tactics to make lessons more entertaining such as inviting guest stars, which improved the numbers of those tuning in. Schools encouraged parental involvement though telephone hotlines that provided support for questions and comments, as well as recommendations to set aside time each day for study (Strauss, 2020).
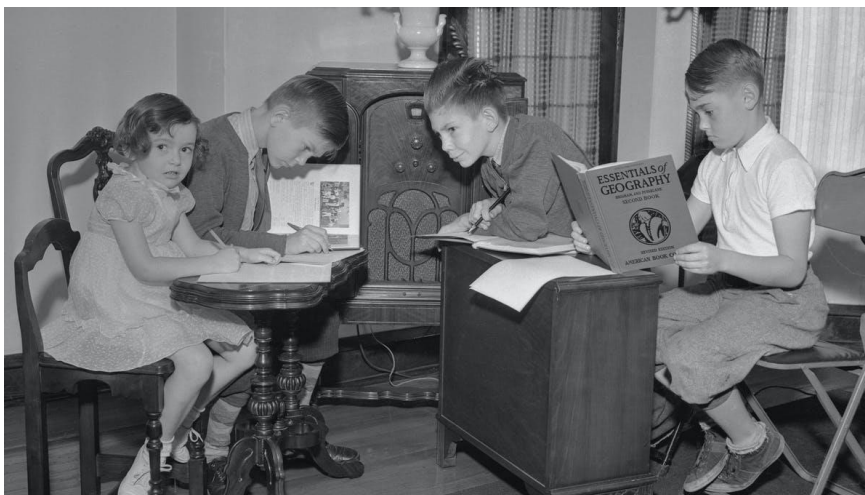


**Figure 8 Radio instruction in the 1937 polio epidemic.**

Some families reported success with distance learning by radio. Some created designated study time and workspaces for their children at home, and many were able to take advantage of the call center supports. However, for countless families, obstacles caused by location and socioeconomic status made remote learning an impossibility. At least 20% of families did not own radios and still other households did not receive a clear signal for the radio they owned. Additionally, some parents were not equipped to support learning at home as they were unable to dedicate time and physical space to student learning, or they were confused with instructions or unsure how to complete assignments themselves (Strauss, 2020). Distance learning via mail and radio was not as effective as it had the potential to be, but those early experiments did help set a framework for future innovation and success when the technology would allow.

**Advances in Technology Supporting Distance Learning**

There have been numerous advances in technology over the last century that were promoted as magical cure-alls for education and instruction. The book *Teachers and Machines* (Cuban, 1986) examines the extent to which three 20th century technologies—film, radio, and television—changed instructional practice. Silent films made their way into classrooms in the U.S. at the turn of the 19th century, with the radio just a few decades later in the 1920's, followed by television in the 1940's (Haworth & Hopkins, 2009). Though research into the benefits of these technologies pointed to a revolutionary change in day-to-day instruction because of their ability to engage the learner, many teachers were reluctant to make consistent use of these expensive instructional tools. "The tools that teachers have added to their repertoire over time (e.g., chalkboard and textbooks) have been simple, durable, flexible, and responsive to teacher-defined problems in meeting the demands of daily instruction" (Cuban, 1986, p. 58). Put another way, teachers could count on their physical instructional tools to aid them in making the most of in-person learning. Problems with signal, equipment, and programing schedules made film, radio, and television less practical than their instructional tool predecessors. Each time, teachers lost instructional time dealing with changing program schedules, poor broadcast signals, or struggled with usability of the device, teachers would minimize time spent with these instructional tools.

Moving past instructional tools, *Teachers and Machines* (Cuban, 1986) predicted that the personal computer may have the best chance at changing teachers' day to day tasks outside of specific instruction, such as recording grades and attendance. Similar to film, radio, and television, computers would see inconsistent implementation and teachers still showed reluctance to change. Though the federal government began supporting computer technology in public schools

as early as the 1950's, the technology did not see widespread use until decades later (Parker &

Davey, 2014).

> Between mid-1981 and the fall of 1983, the percentage of elementary schools with one or
>
> more microcomputers jumped from 10 percent to over 60 percent. During that same pe-
>
> riod, the percentage of secondary schools with five or more microcomputers grew from
>
> 10 percent to well over 50 percent. (Becker, 1984, p. 23)

As the personal computer grew in acceptance and usage in businesses and households, and with

the introduction and advances of the internet, education began moving into the digital age. In

1994, only 3% of public schools had instructional rooms with access to the internet but by the

fall of 2002, that number jumped to 99% of United States public schools (Kleiner & Lewis,

2003). By 2009, 97% of classrooms in the United States had one or more computers and the ratio

of students to computers was five to one (Purdue Online, n.d.).With significant technological ad-

vancements in the last few decades, schools today should find themselves much more equipped

to facilitate emergency distance learning through digital instruction.

**Distance Learning in the Digital Age**

The ideas behind synchronous and asynchronous forms of distance learning using digital

technology were still being developed when Cuban was researching technology in the classroom.

Two forms of digital learning—asynchronous and synchronous learning—emerged in the late

1980's when colleges and universities began to look at online environments as a viable vehicle

for education.

Asynchronous learning involves students learning in an environment separate from each

other with intermittent ability to access information, submit assignments, and communicate with

peers and their teacher over great distances (Carr, 2012). Asynchronous learning does not require

a live or real time connection, which only became possible with the development and improvement of video conferencing software. Though the ideas for video conferencing originated more than a century ago with the earliest experiments of moving pictures, it was not until AT&T created the world's first working television that transmitted video in 1927 and debuted the first picturephone in 1970 that the idea was even a remote possibility (Editorial Staff, 2019). Video conferencing, combined with the birth of the internet in 1983, and improvements in accessibility and the speed of the internet in the late 1980's and 90's, became the building blocks for distance learning in a digital environment (*A Brief History of the Internet*, n.d.). Arguably, the instruction that occurred through mail-in homework in 1918, and through newspaper and radio in the 1930's and 40's were early forms of asynchronous learning. Modern technology has simply increased the efficiency of that communication using online platforms via digital resource libraries, emails, discussion threads, and chat rooms.

In contrast, synchronous learning simultaneously engages students and the instructor in real-time learning environments and has increased in popularity in the last two decades. Prior to the pandemic, many school systems across the country offered select online courses to a small population of students, so some research does exist to support digital learning as a viable alternative to face-to-face instruction in grades K-12. (Fisher & Frey, 2020)

As technology becomes more accessible, and connectivity more readily available and mobile, the look, feel and function of the digital classroom continues to evolve at a rapid pace (Rennie 2019).

> The potential mixture of approaches to learning in the medium of online digital communications is immense. Combining audio recordings, video clips, discussion boards, live webinars, online libraries and image banks, and many other digital resources (see Rennie

and Morrison, 2013) offers almost limitless opportunities to provide educational experience.

One advancement in software that combines synchronous and asynchronous capabilities is the development of learning management systems (LMS). A learning management system is a web-based application that schools and districts use to facilitate instruction in a digital classroom space. LMSs allow the teacher to deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance in their online classroom (Kirvan & Brush, 2023). Within their LMS classroom, teachers can deliver direct instruction, provide access to learning materials, facilitate group work and chats, assign tasks and assessments (Bradley, 2021).

Implementation of LMSs in K-12 schools emerged with the growth of Moodle in 2007. The next significant growth came between 2012 and 2015 with the introduction of Google Classroom. Despite the potential benefits of integration of LMSs in a variety of classroom environments, the growth of LMSs saw a steep decline between 2015 and 2019 (Ménard, 2020). The pandemic shattered this trend. Faced with the necessity of providing a platform for teachers to offer instruction in a distance learning setting, and with access to new federal funding to prevent learning loss, numerous districts made the decision to purchase LMSs and the growth trend for new implementations skyrocketed between 2020 and 2021 ("Every Student Succeeds Act," 2015; Ménard, 2022).

Given the variability of options in digital learning classrooms, and the potential for rapid change with the introduction of new technologies and enhanced infrastructure, researchers and authors of articles and books on best practices in this area tend to highlight some of the same elements of face-to-face teaching, but with a focus on digital classrooms. This focus is evident in

the description of best practices of distance learning from a recent book published mid-pandemic, *The Distance Learning Playbook, Grades K-12* (Fisher, 2020).

**Best Practices in Digital Learning and Social Studies**

As computers began to integrate heavily into public schools, Larry Cuban (1986) investigated the unfulfilled promises of classroom technology since the introduction of films in the 1920's. His research sought to understand how technology was used and what factors influenced teacher use of technology, in order to uncover patterns that support a healthy balance between instruction and innovation. His findings described indicators that helped to determine the successful integration of technological tools. The factors that contributed to the success or failure for instructional technology included accessibility of the technology, how it was introduced, its prescribed use, teacher training, the logistics of the technology's maintenance, and the flexibility of instructional time (Cuban, 1986). Cuban concluded that utilization of technology by teachers has been limited because they have little involvement in determining technology uses and planning, and the logistics of many technologies—like reception or specific times for programs on the radio—lack the flexibility needed to adapt to the challenges of the class day. Cuban argued that computers would only see widespread use if these factors were addressed by school leadership.

Ten years later, computers were prevalent in classrooms across the country. Through it, teachers could utilize instructional tools such as audio and video that previously took several devices to access. Teachers could access the internet which was both a repository of knowledge and a means of communication. A review of technology related topics in social studies research journals found that "technology issues appear to have a low priority for social studies educators" and

called for social studies educators to research and explore beyond the hardware and software associated with the computer and focus instead on the changes the information age will bring to the relationship between technology and social studies (Martorella, 1997, p. 512).

Taking up this call to action in 2000, the journal *Theory & Research in Social Education* published a special issue called "Technology in Social Studies Education." The introduction acknowledges that schools have not successfully integrated technology and argues that technology must be tied to both content and process in order to effectively impact instruction (Diem, 2000). Echoing earlier findings, Diem (2000) cites teacher preparation, technical support, and training as key factors for successful integration of technology. In 2001, more than a decade after Cuban chronicled the efficacy of technology in the classroom, he wrote a new book *Oversold and Underused: Computers in the Classroom.* Though massive investment in classroom computer technologies have seen substantial progress in creating the infrastructure necessary for the transformation of teaching and learning. "As for enhanced efficiency in learning and teaching, there have been no advances (measured by higher academic achievement of urban, suburban, or rural students) over the last decade that can be confidently attributed to broader access to computers" (Cuban, 2001, p. 178). Additionally, Cuban's research found that teachers' use of computer technology in instruction is limited and infrequent.

A more recent review of research focused on identifying research based best practices in digital learning. In *An Exploration of Longitudinal Studies of Digital Learning,* Harju and colleagues (2019) reviewed longitudinal primary and secondary education studies that focused on the effect of technology on student learning and development conducted from 2012 through 2017. Although they reviewed over 64 publications, only 13 met the research criteria and were included in the review. The authors categorized the focus of reviewed research into six aspects of

digital learning. It is important to note that many studies overlapped and were coded with more than one of the categories identified. Those aspects and descriptions as described in this study are as follows:

- Affection, attitude, and motivation—Motivation and willingness to do a certain activity. Engagement in the learning process and the ways a technology is used (e.g., is use in accordance with the pedagogical aims?). Feeling or attitude towards a certain object or activity (p. 393).

- Subject-specific knowledge and skills—Knowledge acquisition or content understanding; learning of skills related to a certain discipline or subject (p. 394).

- Transversal skills—These skills include critical thinking, knowledge creation, communication, and digital skills (p. 394).

- Learning experience—Experience of, or beliefs about, one's own learning. (p. 394).

- Elements of the learning environment—Material and social resources of a learning environment (p 394).

- Identity—Construction of identity by using digital technology (p 394).

After an in-depth analysis of these studies, researchers determined that "no straightforward conclusions about the influences of digital technology use on students' learning can be made: it is not possible to confirm clearly that student learning benefits from the use of digital technologies over extended periods of time" (Harju et al., 2019, p. 402) In other words, eighteen additional years has provided no concrete, discernable, correlation between digital learning and student learning outcomes.

**Digital Learning in Social Studies**

More than a decade after the *Theory & Research in Social Education* journal published

their special issue on technology in social studies education, the National Council of the Social

Studies Board of Directors (2013) issued the "Technology Position Statement and Guidelines."

The introduction includes a call to action for all social studies educators to take up the challenge

of preparing students for a digital world.

> In a time when as a field social studies struggles for relevance, social studies educators
>
> need to recognize and promote how they are uniquely qualified and situated to enable
>
> young people to effectively use mobile technologies as a citizen, learner, and member of
>
> a democratic society in a global setting and to explore the civic, economic, and social im-
>
> plications of such technologies across time and place. (NCSS Board of Directors, 2013)

In 2014 researchers analyzed and compared social studies journal articles between 2001 and

2011 to "provide insight into the state of digital social studies education" (Bennett, 2014, p. 381)

As it relates to social studies instruction, they examined articles to determine what technology

was included, the NCSS Theme, Blooms Taxonomy levels that were associated with the articles,

and the pattern for inclusion of technology. Journal article topics included emerging social media

and mobile technologies, online courses, and cloud-based programs. The conclusion was that

rapid improvements in technology generated cycles of both opportunities and obstacles in social

studies education and that future generations of social studies educators must be willing and able

to adapt to this ever-changing landscape of technology. This review of literature however does

not include any description of the challenges associated with improvements in technology usage.

More recent research on technology and social studies explores what Diem (2000) describes as

content, the social studies information and material used in instruction, and process, the inquiry based instructional planning and activities.

**Research on Digital Social Studies Instruction**

Communication between instructors and students and among peers is an essential element of inquiry based social studies and civics classrooms. The College Career and Civil Life Frameworks published by the National Council for the Social Studies (2013), which outlines best practices in social studies inquiry, requires students to communicate their ideas in a variety of forms (p. 60). Additionally, one of the six practices for effective civic education identified by the National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement (NCLCE) (2014) is to "Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom" (p. 10). Several studies found that using asynchronous online communication software can increase the frequency and depth of classroom communication and discussion while facilitating the development of a culturally diverse learning community (Mason & Berson, 2000; Merryfield, 2000).

One study focused on the role social media plays in creating convergence culture—the relationship between media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence—in social studies classrooms (Krutka, 2014). This study followed a group of pre-service teachers preparing to enter middle and high school classrooms as they learned to incorporate social media into instructional lesson planning. Results of the study suggest that by shifting communication to a virtual format, the use of social media as an instructional tool for discussion can create a larger virtual community in which learning is participatory, student centered, and authentic, by transforming the way students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders communicate. The conclusion also suggests that social media can foster "global citizenship by incorporating more voices from more places" (Krutka, 2014, p. 297).

Another study surrounding online discussions highlighted the ways that social technologies—digital platforms that include the ability to participate in online discussion—can help to facilitate meaningful classroom discussion of social issues (Humphries & Washington, 2014). Connecting to chapter 1 in this dissertation, this study also suggests that participation in social technologies creates a new culture, incorporating both participation in a virtual community and also inclusion of diverse voices. Researchers analyzed two seventh grade social studies teachers who already utilized social technologies for classroom discussion. An important recommendation from these findings is to encourage teachers not to replicate traditional classroom activities in digital spaces but instead, to reinvent learning to fit the technology by utilizing the strengths and functionality of the tool. An issue associated with this finding is the lack of and/or inconsistent training and support educators receive for utilizing technology which has existed as a problem since technology was introduced into the classroom (Cuban, 1986). In 1995, the Educational Testing Service from Princeton conducted a nation-wide survey on classroom infrastructure as it relates to computer usage. Their findings indicate that only 15% of teachers had nine or more hours of training and there are no technological proficiency requirements for obtaining a teaching licenses in 18 states (Parker & Davey, 2014).

Hostetler (2014) describes a similar theme of creating a culture of participation with diverse voices and a call for teaching specific skills related to online discussions. Researchers looked at how students in different high schools demonstrate the democratic skills of "talking to strangers" and "listening across differences" using blog entries. Findings suggested that using blogs can support these skills, but that it also creates the opportunity for students to display un-

democratic interaction—acts that involve dominating discussion, using words or tone that exclude other voices—via this digital platform. Their recommendation was to specifically teach dispositions and skills consistent with digital media literacy (p. 342).

Huizinga (1955) argues that using play as an learning strategy was part of human culture in many ancient civilizations. Many educational games for social studies are students centered and involve the application of knowledge in play towards an objective which align with best practices in inquiry-based instruction described in the C3 frameworks. Because gaming and technology can be highly engaging to students, some games have transitioned to digital spaces. One such program is iCivics, an organization created by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra O'Connor, dedicated to non-partisan civic education through digital games for middle and high school students (iCivics Staff, 2022). A study on civic learning through digital gaming using the iCivics platform found similar conclusion relating to digital media literacy skills (LeCompte & Blevins, 2014). Though the findings were more of an indictment of students' lack of civic knowledge and the marginalization of social studies nationwide, the researcher(s) also looked at how students gain civic knowledge and 21st Century Skills through gaming in the iCivics platform. A short portion of the conclusion, which mainly speaks to public policy surrounding social studies legislation and testing, indicates that students need to be taught how to navigate digital information, similar to the studies on classroom discussion. Moreover, gaming technologies such as iCivics have the potential to engage students in citizenship activities beyond the classroom, such as service learning. A more recent study of the these games completed in 2021 by iCivics, during the pandemic where many students experienced some form of distance learning, found

that students improved their content knowledge on average by 26%, and 38% of students expressed greater personal interest in civic topics and a willingness to participate in them (Neher, 2021).

**Research on Digital Social Studies Content**

As digital content becomes more available for educational purposes, evaluating that content for educational use is critical. One study looked at whether United States government websites designed for students are useful and appropriate for younger learners (Bisland, 2014). This exploratory study found that evaluation tools commonly used to evaluate websites focused on the site's validity (purpose, author, and accuracy), and technological features (connectivity, appearance, links, and quality of visuals), which did not address the utility of the site for instruction in specific content areas and with different grade levels. To address this issue, they designed a new evaluation tool with a focus on usability in a social studies classroom with elementary students. This usability instrument included ten criteria: age appropriateness, clear instructions, effective beginning, maintains attention, pace, student progress, summarization feedback/evaluations, transitions, and learning modalities. The average score for the 17 websites evaluated was halfway between good and very good on a Likert scale. Their research concluded that before students access the content, teachers, especially in elementary grades, should evaluate websites to determine if and how the site can be used to teach social studies.

Bolick's (2014) study evaluating the use of digital content to teach social studies focused specifically on digital textbooks. This study did not focus on the technology associated with digital textbooks, rather, Bolick focused on whether the digital text was more inclusive than traditional textbooks, and whether the text challenged the traditional historical narrative. The re-

searcher's analysis of seven digital textbooks related to United States history using the key topics/issues identified from James Loewen's (1995) book *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong,* found that with few exceptions, digital textbooks mirror the flawed narratives of traditional textbooks.

Many of the digital practices in social studies education mentioned in these studies can be seen in social studies classrooms today. In the few years since its publication, a tsunami of advancements in digital instructional tools and resources are making their way into education and await evaluation and research. Future studies may evaluate the role of public health crises in the rapid adoption of digital practices.

**Best Practices in Distance Learning**

Computers have been in public education classrooms for almost forty years. Billions of dollars have been spent to transform education through computer and digital technology and after decades of inconclusive results, researchers continue to call for districts and schools to include and focus on supporting teachers with technology integration. The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic left many teachers in a world of distance and digital learning relying on their own digital skills to facilitate classroom experiences for students. Whereas in a face-to-face setting, technology could be used as a substitute for a single instructional task, during the pandemic many teachers were forced to teach in a completely digital format which forced them to assess their own preparedness.

In 2020, researchers conducted a survey of Greek teachers' perceptions of their own digital skills (Perifanou et al., 2021). The survey found mixed results. Two thirds of teachers use digital tools in developing and teaching lessons, and almost half also use digital tools for self-study, student formative assessment, developing student assessment, and communicating with students.

However, more than half of the teachers did not use at all, or they used a little digital tools for the following activities: i) curriculum development & management, ii) generating research and innovation in education, iii) planning and scheduling the teaching and educational resources, iv) managing the course, the students, the educational resources and activities, v) monitoring the students and the educational resources, vi) guidance and feedback to the students, vii) self-reflection viii), ix) adapting the instruction, x) evaluating the students (summative assessment) and the educational resources, and xi) revising the educational resources, teaching, and assessment. (Perifanou et al., 2021, p. 244)

The researchers concluded that though teachers seem to integrate technology into their daily teaching, they should receive training on integrating digital technologies into all aspects of education and planning for the development of digital schools and digital education.

In the midst of the pandemic crisis, other researchers focused on providing a guide for best practices in distance learning. Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey and John Hattie (2020) released *The Distance Learning Playbook, Grades K-12: Teaching for Engagement and Impact in Any Setting,* which highlights research and evidence-based strategies that the authors believe teachers can utilize in a virtual environment. In this book, the discussion of distance learning is tied to both synchronous and asynchronous digital learning. Information is organized in modules based on John Hattie's research on Visible Learning—a synthesis of hundreds of studies on factors that affect student achievement. Modules include instructions and examples for setting up a distance classroom, building relationships with and between students, and teacher credibility and clarity. Since it was written and published during the pandemic in 2020, authors clarify in the first few pages that "the pandemic teaching of 2020 was really not distance learning. It was crisis teach-

ing" (p. 2). This quote speaks to one of the key distinctions of the topic of focus in this dissertation—this is not merely a study of digital learning, it is a study of digital learning during a pandemic and crisis.

The introductory section on visible learning and distance learning written by John Hattie, cites similar information to the exploration of longitudinal study (Harju et al., 2019) explaining that research of over 200 meta-analyses on the effect of distance learning on student achievement yielded only a small beneficial effect; however, Frey and colleagues (2020) emphasize the statistical significance does not mean it is ineffective. What is included in each research-based module is the connection between what is known about effective face-to-face teaching tied to the distance learning settings within the structure of instructional planning. Hattie (2009) describes good face-to-face teaching practices that can transfer to a digital or distance setting:

- Fostering student self-regulation is crucial for moving learning to deep and transfer levels.

- Learning accelerates when the student, not the teacher, is taught to be in control of learning.

- There needs to be a diversity of instructional approaches (not just direct instruction followed by off-line independent work).

- Well-designed peer learning impacts understanding.

- Feedback in a high-trust environment must be integrated into the learning cycle. (p. 2)

*The Distance Learning Playbook* (2020) not only echoes previous recommendations to incorporate digital tools in all aspects of educational practice and planning, but provides practical instructions and suggestion for engaging in the work. There are, however, factors beyond teacher

preparedness for digital instruction and resources to support best practices in distance learning, that influence the use of technology in instruction.

A 2020 study in Saudi Arabia focused on identifying factors, from a teachers perspective, that affect the use to technology based teaching in social studies (Hjoujj, 2021). Hjoujj surveyed hundreds of elementary teachers and found that the factors teachers believe most influence technology-based teaching include support from administration, ongoing specialized training, and technical support. I acknowledge that the research included in this section done during the pandemic regarding teacher preparedness and implementation of technology have been in countries outside the United States and that, since education is reflective of a country's cultural norms, the results may not be fully generalizable to the educational setting in this country. In an attempt to find research specific to the impact of the pandemic in U.S. schools, I conducted a review of the seven issues of the journal *Theory & Research in Social Education,* which is the top index rated social studies research journal, published since the start of the pandemic, between April 2020 and December 2021. I searched for articles and research involving anything related to virtual, digital, distance, hybrid, synchronous, asynchronous, or pandemic learning. None of the 35 articles addressed any of these topics.

The National Council for the Social Studies publishes the journal *Social Education* which focuses on theories and practices related to content and instruction. There have been many articles in this journal that provide support for teacher pandemic topics as they relate to the content and that provide tips for using specific digital tools in inquiry-based instruction. There are two articles that provide some description of distance teaching in social studies during the pandemic. As the pandemic began, the first article asked six elementary through high school teachers to share the obstacles and successes they faced in the quick transition to distance teaching (Social

Education Staff, 2020). The obstacles they describe surround student equity in access to reliable internet and support at home for technology troubleshooting. Teachers indicated that best practices in face-to-face-instruction work well for distance learning as well, which correlates with those described in *The Distance Learning Playbook* (2020), and include student voice and choice, simplicity of instruction, and consistency. More than a year later, Manfra and Grant (2021) reached out to five middle and high school teachers to again identify challenges in social studies distance learning. Teachers shared that their greatest challenges include finding high quality, adaptable, digital resources for student use; pacing the digital curriculum to be flexible and rigorous for all students; preparing for and mediating critical conversations in a respectful online learning environment.

In the last issue of the 100th Anniversary edition, Berson et al. (2021) describes social studies and technology at a crossroads. While Berson and her co-authors acknowledge the successes seen in utilizing technology to achieve some learning goals, they argue that social studies teachers have simply replicated traditional forms of teaching instead of looking to technology as a means for educational reform. The authors suggest that the rapid evolution of technology leaves NCSS with an "imperative to innovate while promoting social justice in a digitally connected world" (Berson et al., 2021, p. 344).

**Best Practices in Civics Education**

All of the research mentioned on distance and digital learning thus far relate directly or indirectly to one or more of the six practices for effective civic education identified by NCLCE (2014) listed below.

1. Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy (Meirick & Wackman, 2004).

2. Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives (Hess, 2009; Torney-Purta & Wilkenfeld, 2009).

3. Design and implement programs that provide students with opportunities to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction (Billig et al., 2008).

4. Offer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities (Kahne & Sporte, 2008).

5. Encourage student participation in school governance.

6. Encourage students' participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

Each of these practices helps to contribute to the civic mission of schools because they create an environment where students learn the structure and functions of government, how to gather and evaluate information, and to support their ideas and positions with evidence. These practices support a wide range of social, community, and political activities that encompass the definition of active and engaged citizenship described in the National Civic Health Index (Georgia Family Connection Partnership, 2019).

Cultivating active and engaged citizens through civic education is most critical during times of public crises, such as epidemics and pandemics, as the country addresses critical issues that impact large portions of the community, state, or nation. "[R]esearch makes clear that students who received high-quality civic learning are more likely than their counterparts to understand public issues, view political engagement as a means of addressing communal challenges, and participate in civic activities" (Gould, 2011, p. 6).

**Digital Citizenship**

An important intersection between civic education and digital learning is the concept of digital citizenship. Because the focus of this dissertation is civic education though distance learning in a pandemic, which occurred in a digital environment, it seems logical to include a definition of a digital citizen in order to examine this aspect of civic education. However, in searching for a basic definition of digital citizenship to include, I found many differing descriptions with no clear definition.

When the term digital citizen was first gaining traction, Jason Ohler wrote *Digital Community, Digital Citizen* (2010). In the book Ohler suggests that as students first became connected globally through technology, the term digital citizenship was associated with specific issues unique to a digital space like cyberbullying, sexting, or illegal downloads. Ohler argued that instead of focusing on these issues, there is an opportunity to redefine citizenship using characteristics that we wish to see in a global digital society and that educators have a role in promoting digital citizenship in the classroom. Using the evolution of the definition and description of the term digital citizenship, Ohler describes four key points of connection: engaging in issues and opportunities in the local community, engaging in a global community, engaging in issues and opportunities of digital culture and community, and participating as a citizen of local, global, and digital communities simultaneously.

A 2016, study explored existing research in order to determine what elements constitute a cohesive concept of digital citizenship (Choi, 2016). Using concept analysis as she searched through text, Choi found four major categories of digital citizenship: Ethics, Media and Information Literacy, Participation/Engagement, and Critical Resistance. She concluded that digital citizenship is a multidimensional concept that connects students on and offline. Additionally,

similar to Ohler's four key points, Choi believes that social studies educators should provide awareness of digital citizenship as a primary goal by helping their students become responsible, informed and active at the local, national, and global levels.

One of the largest organizations focused on educational technology is the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). ISTE provides access to research based professional learning and resources that support virtual, digital learning. Their mission is to "use technology to innovate teaching and learning, accelerate good practice and solve tough problems in education by providing community, knowledge and the ISTE Standards, a framework for rethinking education and empowering learners" (ISTE Staff, 2022a). ISTE's student standard for a digital citizen is one who "recognizes the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of living, learning and working in an interconnected digital world, and they act and model in ways that are saft, legal and ethical" (ISTE Staff, 2022c). Included in the educator standards for digital citizenship (2.3), ISTE includes four factors that positively contribute to responsible participation in a digital learning environment:

2.3.a Create experiences for learners to make positive, socially responsible contributions and exhibit empathetic behavior online that build relationships and community.

2.3.b Establish a learning culture that promotes curiosity and critical examination of online resources and fosters digital literacy and media fluency.

2.3.c Mentor students in safe, legal and ethical practices with digital tools and the protection of intellectual rights and property.

2.3.d Model and promote management of personal data and digital identity and protect student data privacy. (ISTE Staff, 2022b)

**Conclusion**

My conclusion of my review of the literature is that there are fundamental areas of intersection between best practices in digital learning, best practices in distance learning, and best practices in effective civic education. The factors affecting learning included in all sets of best practices are student engagement in the learning process, student interaction, diversity of learning environments, real world application, and content specific knowledge and skills. In all of the research, allowing students to be involved in the learning process and to have some measure of control regarding their participation and movement through the content, positively affect their self-confidence and learning outcomes.
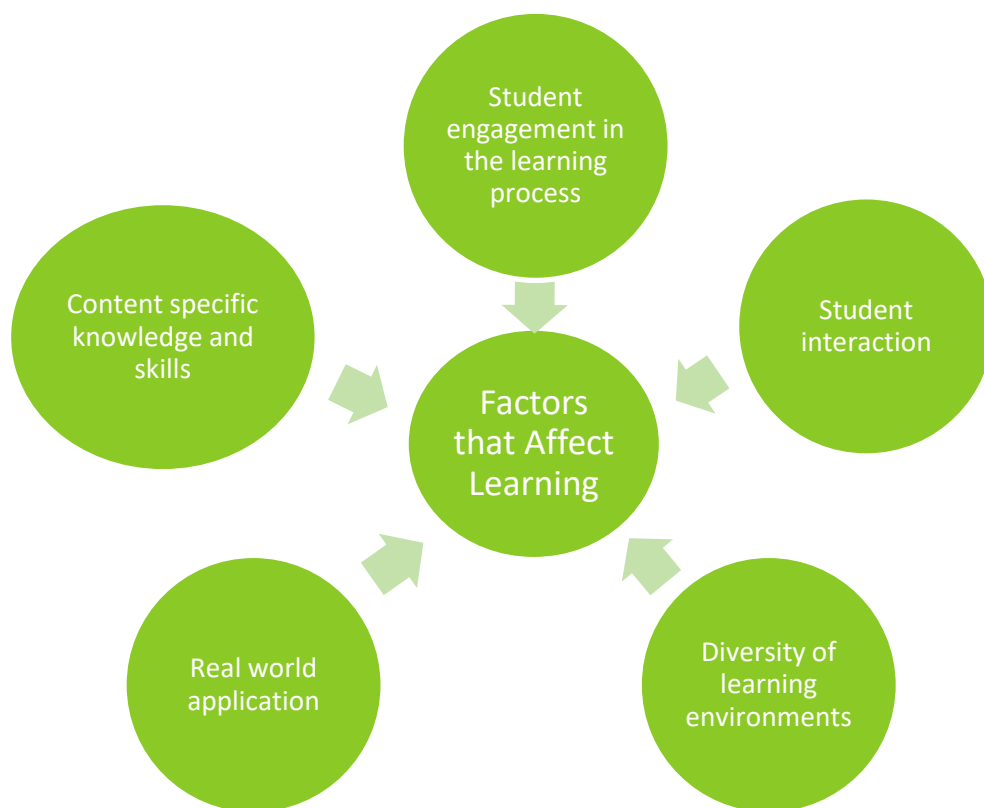
**Figure 9 Factors that Affect Learning Included in Best Practices for Distance Learning, Digital Learning, Social Studies Education, and Civics Education**

Additionally, the research I reviewed indicates that allowing students a range of experience interacting with other students—individual work, small group, whole group, written and oral expression, etc.—as well as a variety of learning environment—different types of activities, different platforms, etc.—within the same classroom led to student success. Finally, focusing both on the skills and knowledge associated with the specific content while helping students to make a connection to real world application allows them to see the relevance of their learning.

# 3 METHODOLOGY

**Journal Entry: Where we are September 3, 2021**
We all felt optimistic this Summer as infection rates dropped and vaccines were available to everyone over the age of twelve. That optimism was tempered by the number of Americans unwilling to be vaccinated. In Georgia, the percentage of those vaccinated is in the forties, well below the national average (*Georgia Coronavirus Vaccination Progress*, 2021). That percentage was even lower before the delta variant of COVID-19 began to make a significant increase in infection rates. Several of my vaccinated family members and friends were infected but survived, many believed they would have died without the vaccine. This week newspapers announced that COVID-19 is officially the U.S.'s most deadly pandemic, surpassing the death toll of 675,000 people during the Influenza of 1918 (*COVID Data Tracker Weekly Review*, 2021). Almost all schools in Georgia started the 2021 school year face-to-face—some school systems instituted a mask mandate, most did not. We are thankful that my son was able to start his junior year of high school in a semi-normal environment thanks in part, I believe, to his district's mask mandate. Schools yo-yo between being fully open and closed for two weeks. Most schools who had hybrid classrooms have discontinued that option. Students move in and out of quarantine with only paper packets of work or asynchronous assignments completed independently. Today it is difficult to see an end to the crisis.

Whereas quantitative research often seeks to determine causes or effects of events, predict outcomes, or describe relationships between events and phenomenon, qualitative research attempts to understand and interpret people and their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are five features of research described by Bogdan and Bilken (1998) that define it as qualitative. These traits include (a) a natural setting that is a direct source of information and provides context; (b) descriptive data that goes beyond numbers to paint images in the mind; (c) an emphasis and focus on process not outcomes; (d) inductive analysis built from collected data; and (e) capturing meaning from multiple perspectives and experiences.

The goal of this research is to explore civic education during crisis, specifically during the pandemic in which we all still teach and in which students still learn. Researching this topic in a specific organization during the pandemic is imperative to understanding the context of the

questions being asked. Since there have been only a few times in the history of U.S. public education where distance learning was studied during public health crisis and since technological innovations have exploded in the past few decades, the data collection and analysis of this research should paint a picture for future researchers that allows them to understand the multiple perspectives, decisions and processes for shifting civic education from face-to-face to distance learning during a time of crisis. This research embodies all five of these qualitative traits, this study was conducted through a qualitative lens. The specific qualitative method chosen is a case study.

Though many researchers explain case study with different parameters, Bogdan (1998), Merriam (2016), Stake (1995, 2010), and Yin (2009) all identify one defining characteristic that differentiates a case study from other qualitative research which is that a case study is bounded or limited by a specific case or cases—subject, event, setting, etc.—not a specific topic. Yin (2016, 2018) describes case study as a relevant method of research when the research is asking how or why questions about a contemporary or unique event in which the researcher has little or no control. Stake (1995) describes this as an intrinsic case study, where the case itself is most important not a specific issue. In this case, many factors converged to make this setting unique; there is a global pandemic affecting the setting of public education, though many organizations choose to cancel programming the Georgia Center for Civic Engagement (GCCE) made the decision to adapt and transform their resources and support, and they had not previously prepared for a shift from face-to-face to distance or digital learning. These factors make this case uniquely appropriate for case study research.

**Case Study Design and Context**

The Georgia Center for Civic Education (GCCE) who has given permission to use their organization and staff names, was chosen for this study because it was one of the few programs

in the state of Georgia to decide fully to adapt their civic learning programs for middle and high school students into a distance learning experiences at the start of the pandemic through the fall of 2020. They received funding through a grant to create a unique online platform for students that contained civic content modules. Their programs operated in a manner similar to a flipped classroom model which included asynchronous content followed by synchronous lessons facilitated by GCCE Staff. They also developed completely asynchronous modules to support middle school civics and government. Though GCCE is located in north Georgia, participants of their program are from many areas across the state. This case study focuses on why and how the Georgia Center for Civic Engagement—who have graciously given permission to include their name in this study—adapted their programs to a distance format during the pandemic.

Unlike quantitative research which relies on validity and reliability for generalization of the study, Merriam (2015) explains that the rigor of qualitative research comes from "the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description" (p. 191-192). These aspects of research design are considered in the data collection and analysis described below.

Some of the qualitative methods of data collection identified by Stakes (1995) and Yin (2019) as most appropriate for case studies was included in this study: interviews, documentation, archived records, observation, and artifacts. Merriam (2015) emphasizes that "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" which is particularly important since time period chosen for this study occurs prior to data collection (p. 108). Bogdan and Bilken (1998) describe using interviews in two ways, as the strategy for data collection or in conjunction with observation and analysis. Two 60-minute

interviews were conducted with each of the members of the GCCE staff who were involved in creating the civic engagement programs, before and during the pandemic. The first interview was conducted before curriculum research began and focused on topics related to the research questions. Interview structures were informal and semistructured as defined by Merriam (2015). Questions were open-ended and conversational which helped me understand the big picture and develop themes for data collection and analysis. The initial interview included an opener question that served to "lead into the subject, to elicit non-directed, unstructured replies, and to provide the background for interpreting the more detailed and specific questions that may be asked later" (Payne, 1951, p. 34). The following questions included "follow-up," "reason-why," and "argument" type as defined by Payne (1951).

1. If someone asked you, "what is GCCE?," what would you tell them?

2. Why did you choose to continue the programming in a virtual space?

3. What are some examples of changes you made to the programming from a face-to-face to a virtual setting?

4. What do you think would be lost by postponing all programming during the pandemic like other programs did?

The second scheduled interviews were completed after the analysis of curriculum data with a focus on clarifying any questions derived from analysis and gaining a deeper understanding of the program as it relates to the research focus. To be flexible to the needs of participants and as this research was done during the on-going pandemic, virtual options for interviews were offered via email or through video conferencing software however GCCE staff preferred to be interviewed in person. With the consent of participants, interviews were recorded for transcription to ensure accurate data collection and to assist in the coding process (Roulston, 2010).

In addition to interviews, data was collected in the form of documentation of electronic and/or video correspondence, project plans, lesson plans, meeting minutes and agendas, digital curriculum platforms, and archived face-to-face lessons and programs. Collecting and analyzing a variety of data sources, sometimes referred to as triangulation of data, helps to address multiple perspectives and viewpoints and allows the researcher the opportunity to trace concepts and themes across multiple data forms (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Though observation is included as one of the methods of collection ideal for a case study, the focus of this research is on development of programs that happened in past months making observational data unattainable.

The qualitative data analysis software package NVivo was used to assist in the organization, visualization, and examination of data from interviews and curriculum documentation (QSR International). As the data is compiled and disassembled into smaller pieces based on the research questions and theoretical framework, coded was used the inductive analysis method to generate themes (Roulston, 2010; Yin, 2016). Analytic memos were utilized while coding data to allow for deeper reflection on coding choices and categorization of information (Saldaña, 2021; Stake, 1995).

Yin (2016) emphasizes the role of the researcher influences every aspect of the study and urges researchers to be methodical with every aspect of the study from the development of questions to analyzing and interpreting data. This is especially important when interacting with those studied. Bogdan and Bilken (1998) recommend informing subjects of the purpose of the study, information about confidentiality, and reassuring those in the study that they have the opportunity to review the analysis of their work to ensure accurate representations of their thoughts and experiences.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research explores the decision making and processes behind the shift of a civic leadership program from a traditional face-to-face setting to a complete virtual one, and how this affected the goals and expectations of the program. The questions this research addressed are:

1. What impact did the pandemic have on curriculum decisions for youth civic leadership programs?

2. What were the curriculum and process changes made to student civic programs because of the pandemic?

3. How did virtual curriculum impact the program goals and program leaderships' expectations?

The core beliefs of the Georgia Center for Civic Engagement (2020) are that successful civic education focuses on civic knowledge, civic identity, and civic engagement. GCCE uses two theoretical lenses to ground their work: civic identity theory and transformative learning theory (Trammell, 2014). Through these lenses they develop curriculum and learning opportunities for students, and professional development for teachers.

*Civic identity theory* – In Erikson's theory of the stages of psychological development, adolescence is described as the developmental stage where young people ages 12-18 begin to look at the future and explore their own possibilities related to occupations and adult responsibilities. They begin to form an idea of self in relation to other people in society (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Identity formation is described as "an outward-looking process in which youth anticipate their lives as adults and struggle to understand who they are within a social and historical framework" (Yates & Youniss, 1998, p. 495). Civic learning opportunities can influence students' self-confidence and their civic identity.

*Transformative learning theory* – Mezirow (2000) theorized that when confronted with a situation that is incongruous with the norm, humans evaluate and reformulate meaning. Though this transformation happens in the course of normal life events, teachers can also create experiences that facilitate this process. Active learning can reshape one's worldview when it involves a critical examination of beliefs and assumptions. Civic learning opportunities that allow students to engage in active learning can foster this transformation. Rizzo and Marlow's (2020) research shows that three pedagogical approaches—study abroad, service learning, and integrative studies—have great transformative potential. These types of learning opportunities, described in chapter two as research-based practices include but are not limited to; participation in civic and civil discourse, analysis of multiple perspectives, critical reflections, and participation in civic action (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012; Kahne et al., 2007).

These theoretical lenses are appropriate for the work of GCCE as their focus is on student outcomes in relation to best practices in civic education. Since the focus of research is on the civic education lessons and programs developed, the theoretical lens used is the Action Civics curricular framework which encompasses the best practices in civic education. The phrase Action Civics was used in a call to action by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in 2011 in which he paraphrased Justice O'Connor to describe civic education that goes beyond memorization to engages students in civic action (CIRCLE Staff, 2013). The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) describes action civics curriculum and programs as "an iterative process in which adults scaffold opportunities for students to launch youth-driven civic projects by going through a multi-step process" (Gingold, 2013, p. 6). Curriculum and programs combine learning with practice participating in authentic democratic activities and typically includes questioning and identification of an issue, research, communication of results—

developing and supporting a claim, reflection and taking informed action (CIRCLE Staff, 2013).

There are several additional examples of case study research in Action Civics in the areas of ser-

vice learning, classroom discussion, and simulations that help situate the case study methodology

in civic education (Hess, 2009; Maker Castro & Cohen, 2021; Shalabi, 2020).

**Data Collection and Analysis Process**

After IRB was approved, data collection began with the initial interview of GCCE staff. Two

staff members were available and willing to be interviewed Chief Executive Officer Dr. Randell

Trammell and the Director of Educational Services Dr. Angela Hargis, both participants signed

and completed the written consent form in Appendix A indicating their willingness to participate

in the research for both an initial and follow up interview. Though GCCE had two additional

staff members during the time period this research focuses on, they have since found new jobs

and did not respond to requests for an interview. Figure 6 below provides a visual representation

of the research process after IRB approval.
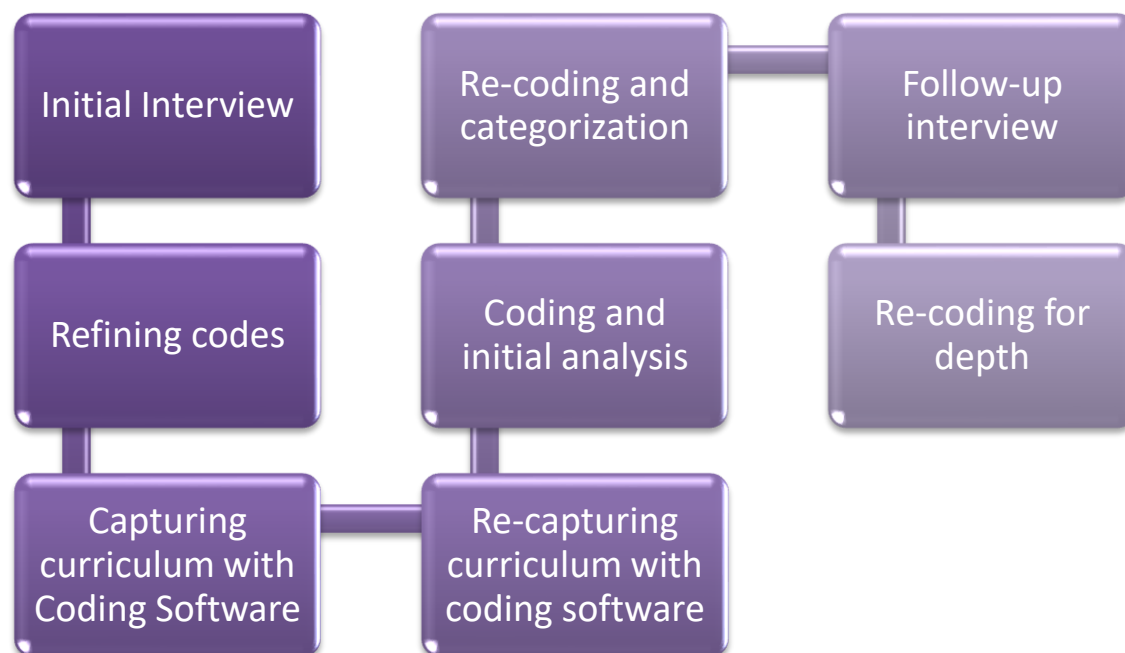


**Figure 10 Research Process After IRB Approval**

Per the request of GCCE, both pre and post interviews were conducted with both participants together at the same time. The goal of the initial interview questions was to identify possible themes for data analysis and to provide context and situate myself in the data collection and analysis.

Initial data capture of GCCE's curriculum platform caused errors that resulted in dozens of blank PDF pages. Content had to be pasted from each page within the module into a word document for all five digital modules: Youth in Government 6th Grade, Youth in Government 7th Grade, Youth in Government 8th Grade State and Federal Government, Youth in Government 8th Grade Local Government, and Youth in Government Georgia State Legislature Program. Each module is saved as a unique document and uploaded to NVIVO for coding. The original platform used by GCCE that housed the digital modules was no longer available, so they transferred the modules to a new platform in the midst of data capture, but GCCE indicated the content and tasks included are the same on both platforms.

Many codes utilized originated from the major concepts used to describe the problem in Chapter 1. The research questions for this study focus on curriculum which include course goals, content, instruction, and assessment in distance learning formats. Coding related to major facets of civic engagement were selected that help identify what the curriculum was asking students to do in the distance learning environment and what if any protocols were in place to address student interaction in a digital environment. Major concepts explained in Chapter 1 and 2 used for coding are described in Table 2.

**Table 2 Initial Codes with Frequency and Sample**

| Initial Code | Number of Excerpts | Sample Quote |
|---|---|---|
| Civic knowledge contains information, resources related to government or historical understandings. | 190 | "Let's just start with the standards." (Hargis, 2023) |
| Civic identity data relates to student situating themselves within government or historical understandings and readiness and willingness to assume citizenship responsibilities. | 94 | "We're really trying to equip them with the processes so that they understand it, so that…they have a favorable disposition towards active participation in their democracy." (Trammell, 2022) |
| Civic action includes mentions or evidence of social interaction, community involvement, or political action | 38 | "We did several of those town hall kind of things where kids can submit questions ahead of time and then they can also come to the [virtual] lobby and ask questions." (Hargis, 2022) |
| Digital citizenship involves engaging with issues, engaging with digital communities, and participating as a citizen locally and globally in digital communities. | 13 | "What we found that worked the best was inserting high school students to lead the middle school program [virtual breakout room]." (Trammell, 2023) |
| Distance learning where there is physical separation of teacher and students during instruction and various technologies are used to facilitate learning and communication. | 64 | "In our mind …the kids are at home. If they don't see their teacher for the rest of the year, at least they can see each thing they click on… [is] the standard I'm supposed to be learning." (Hargis, 2023) |

After initial coding of curriculum documents and interviews, additional subcodes and new codes were identified and utilized in a second coding of the data, which helped provide a deeper analysis of the research questions. Subcodes added during the second round of coding related to the "reasons for shifting to a distance learning format" and "obstacles to distance learning" that hinder progress or achievement of goals. Several new codes were introduced: "teacher support" includes data that relates to providing resources for educators or teacher; "successful outcomes" includes data relating to positive result for students, teachers, or GCCE.

**Table 3 Codes for the Second Round of Analysis**

| Initial Code | Number of Excerpts | Sample Quote |
|---|---|---|
| Reasons for shifting to a distance learning format | 72 | "The platform was a triage response to class-room teachers not having the support or re-sources immediately available in those areas" (Trammell, 2023) |
| Obstacles to distance learning | 16 | "It was really hard to make that connection to being active because they're all at home." (Hargis, 2023) |
| Providing resources specifically for teacher support | 63 | "The idea was to go in and give a resource to teachers to get kids involved in simulations." (Hargis, 2022) |
| Successful outcomes for students, teachers, or GCCE | 5 | "…we had the students complete a pre-test, pre-participation assessment to get a benchmark level of their civic knowledge, as well as their levels of civic identity and dispositions…After they completed the participation in the experi-ence, we did a post assessment which allowed us to compare their growth or lack thereof in civic knowledge and dispositions. And actually, we saw growth in both knowledge and disposi-tions." (Trammell, 2022) |

After coding the digital modules and initial coding analysis using frequency of student tasks with existing codes, I found distinct differences in the balance of student tasks between grades six, seven, and eight. Coding revealed additional information about the purpose of each module was needed for analysis and though social studies in grade eight has a mandatory statewide as-sessment and there was not a mention of the assessment in the initial interview or in the digital modules for that grade level. A follow up interview was scheduled with both GCCE staff mem-bers to provide additional information and clarification. Below are the questions for the follow up interview:

1. What were the goals for each grade level curriculum/program?

2. Why are the content and student tasks different for each module?

3. How did you imagine the asynchronous modules would be used?

4.  How did statewide testing play into decisions you made in creating resources and facilitating programs?

5.  If you could do it over again, what would you do differently?

In the follow up interview, discussions about decisions made regarding the type of content to include in digital modules led me to realize that the analysis should include a detailed description of the types of content students were provided for examination. The reason this information is relevant relates to the importance of presenting students with a variety of sources for analysis. NCSS recommends that students "gather information from a variety of sources" and the NCLCE guidebook encourages instruction to include different perspectives in a variety of formats (Guilfoile & Delander, 2014; National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). This led to another round of coding to include a new code, "content" to describe the types of sources provided. Subcategories were created for "content" to identify different types of sources provided. Subcategories include:

*Text* includes primary and secondary print sources.

*Video* includes sources that combine audio and visual components.

*Visual* includes charts, graphs, photographs, illustrations, and other sources that require analysis of images.

*Game/simulation,* is one of the "six proven practices for effective civic learning" (Guilfoile & Delander, 2014). It includes sources presented to students in multiple formats that imitate a scenario, environment, or event where students apply knowledge and utilize skills in the context of a problem or play (Jones & Barrett, 2017).

As I prepared to review content for connection to civic knowledge, I also needed to connect student tasks to civic identity and action. As this study is in Georgia where curriculum is

tied to statewide assessment, I decided to use Depth of Knowledge (DOK) to measure the level of thinking students were asked to complete. This measure was chosen as it is the measurement used by Georgia teachers on classroom assessments, district benchmarks, and statewide assessments. The Georgia Department of Education uses DOK to measure cognitive complexity. DOK measures the student thinking required to complete a task on a scale of 1 to 4. Level 1 requires only recall or identification of information and Level 2 includes basic reasoning using multiple levels of thought. As DOK Levels 1 and 2 require only basic recall, description, or explanation, these levels are more closely associated with the civic knowledge component of civic education.

Higher levels of DOK include Level 3 which requires complex reasoning and could require justification with evidence while Level 4 requires extended reasoning, additional planning, and significant understanding of content (Georgia Department of Education, 2020). As DOK Levels 3 and 4 require students to use investigation skills, create their own argument, select appropriate justification, and make connections across place and time and between content areas, these DOK levels are more closely associate with the civic identity and action components of civic education. Descriptions of student tasks in the sections below, describe the cognitive complexity of student tasks as they relate to best practices in civic learning and social studies instruction.

It is important to note that during data collection and analysis, no direct comparison was made between the curriculum offered by GCCE before COVID and the programming offered in a distance learning setting. The reason for this is because this study focuses on describing the programs and support provided during the pandemic. Additionally, IRB approval did not include interviews with students or teachers or direct analysis of student work or teacher feedback. Analysis of data reflecting participant learning and experiences were reported by GCCE staff.

**Positionality**

My first twelve years as a social studies educator were dedicated to high schools classified by the state as "needs improvement" or "priority." This classification means the achievement of all students in the school is among the lowest 5% in the state, the school did not show enough progress toward achievement, and the graduation rate is below 60% for the previous two years (The Governor's Office of Student Achievment, 2021). As a result, my school leadership was always hyper focused on test scores and course pass rates because the perception—and often the reality—was that teachers and leaders would be replaced if achievement goals were not met in the short term. After my second year of teaching, the district replaced the entire science department because of low scores on the state assessment. This experience of hyper focus on test scores as the only measure of success shaped my views on what success looks like in a social studies classroom. I routinely practiced quantitative evaluation of student data each week in all of my classes, even when leadership did not ask for such analysis. Though I have never changed this aspect of my work practice, even in my current position, teaching for seven years in an alternative school with a high population of students that struggle academically challenged me to reevaluate and adapt my mental model of successful teacher from on that focuses strictly on a quantitative threshold to one that focuses on growth. As my own practice emphasized quantitative analysis for my entire career, shifting this research to a strictly qualitative evaluation required that I practice and focus on a different set of skills.

Though Georgia is a local control state, my current role as the state social studies program manager makes this dissertation topic on civic education relevant to my position, in which I can influence civic education across the state through professional learning and resources. My role also provides me some ability to view civic education and distance learning in social studies

classrooms during the pandemic at a macro level. Finally, in this role and as a classroom teacher, I have worked with the Georgia Center for Civic Engagement on statewide projects for students and teachers in the past. Because of this relationship, I disclosed any potential views of personal experience that could impact my evaluation by closely adhering to my analysis framework and member checking.

**Conclusion**

This chapter describes the rationale and processes for this research methodology, including an explanation for and description of the organization and program of study. I explained the data collection methods and connection to the theoretical framework and described the research instruments. I discussed the process of analysis and described positionality.

# 4 FINDINGS

**Journal Entry: Where we are October 31, 2022**
A few months ago the country reached a traumatic milestone when the recorded deaths due to COVID-19 reached one million (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Over the last year we have seen new variants, a decrease of the recommended time in quarantine, mask mandates are starting to lessen and in most cases are not legally enforceable, vaccines recommended for everyone over the age of five, and recommendations for vaccine boosters ages 12 and up (U.S. Department of Defense, 2023). In August my son started his senior year of high school face-to-face, most schools have done away with hybrid classes, some districts have maintained fully digital classes and even created online schools. I caught COVID from my father and his wife, he and I recovered, she passed away on August 24. Two weeks later on September 9 my mother had a stroke, followed by another set of strokes in October. Doctors cannot find a cause for the strokes. I am her primary caregiver.

This chapter contains the data collection and analysis results of the exploratory case study conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What impact did the pandemic have on curriculum decisions for a youth civic leadership program?

2. What were the curriculum and process changes made to student civic programs because of the pandemic?

3. How did virtual curriculum impact the program goals and program leaderships' expectations?

The data was analyzed in four stages: (1) analysis of initial interview for additional codes; (2) analysis and coding of synchronous and asynchronous program materials; (3) development of follow-up questions based on coding analysis; (4) analysis and coding of follow-up interviews; and (5) recoding for additional detail. In the following sections, the analysis process is described first then followed by research findings, which are presented in the context of the research questions. The documents analyzed and relevant codes are described in each respective section.

**Question 1: What impact did the pandemic have on curriculum decisions for youth civic leadership programs?**

Data aligned to this question comes primarily from the pre and post interview data of GCCE staff. Codes and subcodes used for analysis include civic knowledge, civic identity, civic action, successful outcome, teacher support, digital citizenship, and distance learning, and purpose. After initial coding of the interviews, reports were pulled in NVivo for associated codes and analysis completed. Several themes became apparent relating to the decision to continue programming during the beginning stages of the pandemic, they are Teacher Support and Resource Accessibility, Adaptation and Response to Crisis, and Capitalizing on Civic Learning Opportunities.

*Teacher Support and Resource Accessibility*

The first theme highlights the need for immediate response to address teachers' support and resource deficiencies during the educational crisis caused by distance learning during the pandemic. The quotes in the Figure 7 support the goals and intent of GCCE during a limited time period. Their goal was to equip teachers with relevant tools and resources that are easily accessible in one centralized location while ensuring continuity of student education, even in remote or limited face-to-face settings. The quotes also acknowledge the initial learning curve faced by teachers when adapting to new tools or methodologies. Additionally, they emphasize GCCE's role of acting as a bridge between the classroom, teachers, and external organizations that seek to support but may require guidance.
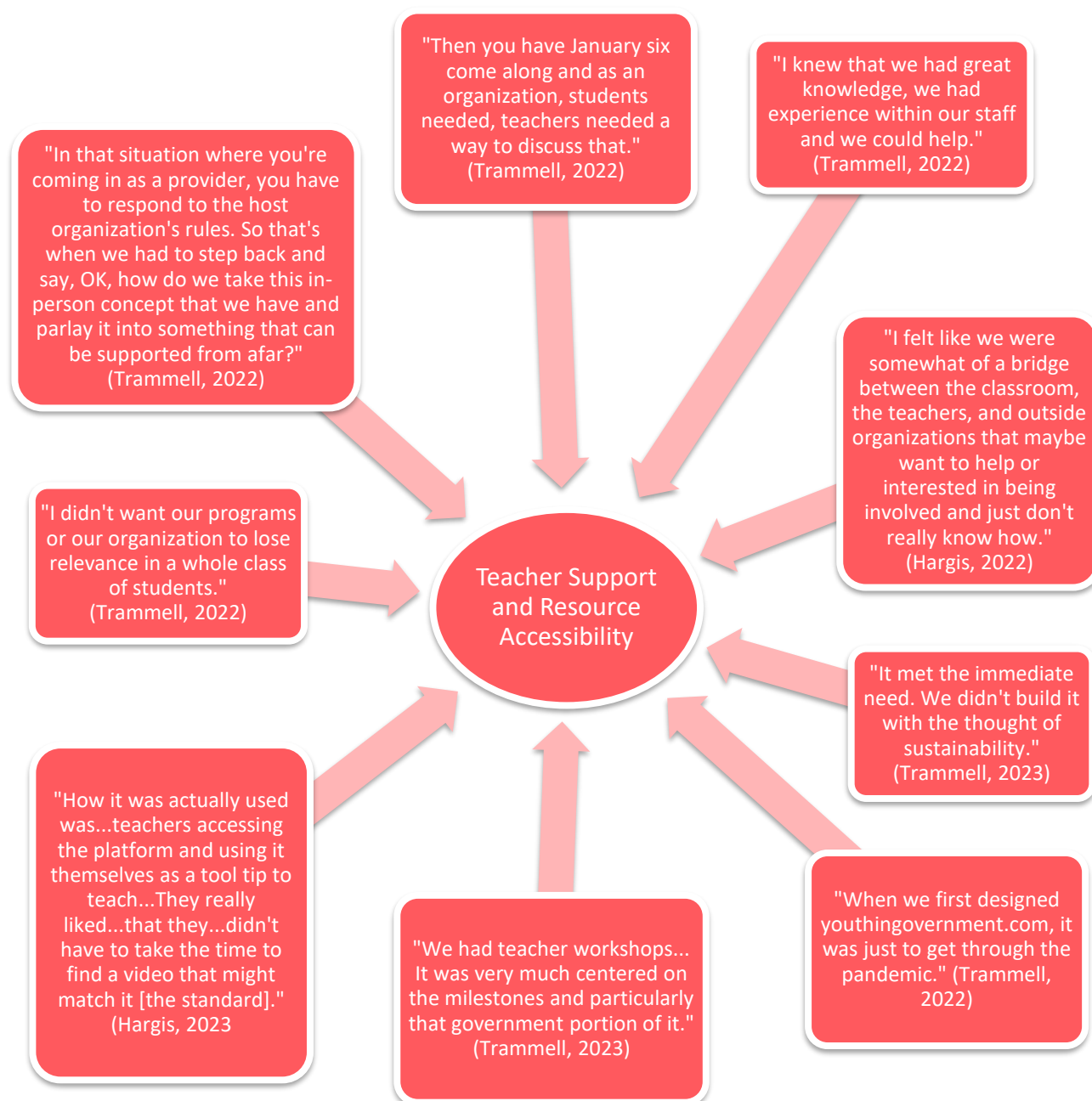
**Figure 11 Teacher Support and Resource Accessibility**
(Trammell & Hargis, 2022; Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

*Adaptation and Response to Crisis*

The quotes aligned to this theme highlight the organization's efforts to address the immediate needs of teachers and students, equip them with relevant resources, and navigate the challenges brought about by the abrupt transition of learning environments from face-to-face to distance learning as a direct result of the COVID crisis. Analysis of this theme led to the creation of two subcategories: providing support and resources and addressing donor concerns.

The subtheme "offering support and resources" highlights the organization's response to the crisis by providing support and resources to address the immediate needs of teachers and facilitate a smooth as possible transition to deliver relevant online civic content to students. Their aim was to centralize resources and provide meaningful tools that facilitate remote learning and continuity in education. GCCE's decision to offer support and resources in a distance learning setting was not solely based on their organization's mission. The subtheme of "addressing donor concerns" reflects the organization's need to meet the donors' expectations, who funded in-person programming and teacher professional development before the pandemic. The pandemic not only created a crisis in public schools but also to organizations whose business model depends on supporting public education, which forced them to implement distance learning options. Dr Trammell indicated that GCCE felt pressure from donors to pivot from their normal programming to provide the support teachers needed and there was fear that suspending programs would cause the organization to loose relevance (Trammell & Hargis, 2022). In order to keep grant funding, the organization had to navigate the transition from in-person to remote or adapted programming while ensuring they were effectively utilizing the donor's funds. In the quote below, Dr. Trammell describes the role that GCCE donors played in the decision to provide distance learning support in the first stages of the pandemic.

And, you know, the last pandemic that we had addressed like that was 100 years ago.

So…it gave us an opportunity… I didn't want us to lose relevance. I'm not a sit back and

wait kind of guy…I saw that our teachers needed help desperately and …just…who we

are, our DNA is to help. And so I think that that perfect combination is why we decided

to move forward (Trammell & Hargis, 2022).

"Back in the back of my mind, I still have...these individuals and donors and foundations and and corporations who have invested in our mission. And I have felt disingenuous to say, well, I can't do anything because of the pandemic. I still felt like the mission must move forward." (Trammell, 2022)

"The idea was to go in and give a resource to teachers... that was meaningful enough that if they never saw their child again, face-to-face and the tool worked through that platform, they could at least have exposure to what the DOE felt like were the most basic things." (Hargis, 2022)

"We also had a donor that had made a significant contribution to our work that had been based on the in-person programming and teacher professional development, et cetera. And that donor was saying, OK, what are you doing with my money?" (Trammell, 2022)

"Triage response to... classroom teachers not having the support or resources immediately available." (Trammell, 2022)

"The pandemic is here. We're not going to see the kids for a while...What can we do they can't take field trips? Let's help them take a field trip. So we just started with that virtual tour...let's see how many standards we can fit into this." (Hargis, 2023)

Adaptation and Response to Crisis

"We had a staff that was sitting around not doing a lot...as a business leader, I felt like I had to in order to be a good steward of the funds that are invested in us through individuals." (Trammell, 2022)

"Equip the teachers to do that in a way that was as relevant as possible for students." (Trammell, 2023)

"Put all the resources in one spot." (Trammell, 2023)

"At the beginning of that process, there was a huge learning curve for teachers." (Hargis, 2022)

● Provision of Support and Resources
● Addressing Donor Concerns

**Figure 12 Adaptation and Response to Crisis**
(Trammell & Hargis, 2022; Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

*Capitalizing on Civic Learning Opportunities*

In figure 9, the theme *Capitalizing on Civic Learning Opportunities* highlights the organization's focus on promoting civic knowledge, engaging students, and leveraging current events as teachable moments. The relevant quotes can be further grouped into three subcategories: promoting civic knowledge and engagement, seizing learning opportunities from current events, and differentiating from other organizations.

The subtheme "promoting civic knowledge and engagement" emphasizes the importance of civic content knowledge and understanding, which highlights GCCE's aim to provide students with a strong foundation in the civic/government understandings that are required by the state standards. GCCE also stressed the need to engage students through activities that push them along the civic continuum, while enabling the students to develop civic identity and take action.

The next subtheme "seizing learning opportunities" focuses on the organization's recognition of the significance of current events and their impact on civic learning. The organization views these events as valuable teaching opportunities to help students process civic issues in everyday life and understand the principles and foundations of government. GCCE believe using current events is an opportunity to foster critical thinking, civil discourse, and the understanding of differing perspectives.

The final subtheme involves GCCE's attempt at "differentiating from other organizations," even when other organizations may have chosen not to move forward with programming during the pandemic. GCCE recognizes this as a chance to differentiate itself, increase its efforts, and expand its influence in the civic education landscape in Georgia.

**Figure 13 Capitalizing on Civic Learning Opportunities**
(Trammell & Hargis, 2022; Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

*Interconnectedness of Themes*

In this section, three distinct themes are introduced. Deeper insight in the relationships between themes is represented in the Venn Diagram below (see Figure 9). Those relationships include: Addressing Immediate Needs and Ensuring Relevance, Empowering Teachers, and Flexibility and Relevance.



**Figure 14 Relationships Between Themes**
One relationship connecting the themes of Teacher Support and Resource Accessibility and Adaptation and Response to Crisis is Addressing Immediate Needs and Ensuring Relevance.

Both major themes revolve around GCCE's response to the immediate needs of teachers and students, as well as their efforts to adapt and remain relevant in changing circumstances, which underscores their commitment to supporting teachers and students. The connected theme Addressing Immediate Needs and Ensuring Relevance reflects their responsiveness to the evolving educational landscape and their dedication to providing timely and meaningful resources for effective teaching and learning.

Another relationship between the themes Teacher Support and Resource Accessibility and Capitalizing on Civic Learning Opportunities involves "Empowering Teachers." Although they have differing focus, both categories share the overarching goal of cultivating teacher's confidence, knowledge, and skills that support their ability to provide effective education. Teacher Support and Resource Accessibility emphasizes equipping teachers with the necessary resources and tools to aid in delivering relevant instruction through distance learning while the emphasis of Capitalizing on Civic Learning Opportunities, is promoting civic knowledge and opportunity among students.

The connection between the themes Adaptation and Response to Circumstances and Capitalizing on Civic Learning Opportunities is "Flexibility and Relevance." This understanding comes from GCCE's willingness to respond to crisis by adapting their traditional support to changing circumstances and modifying curriculum content and sources so that students feel connected to their learning. GCCE recognized the need for an online platform (youthingovernment.com) to provide a way for students and teachers to continue and support their work remotely during the pandemic and demonstrated flexibility by reevaluating their in-person concept and finding ways to make it work online. They saw the pandemic and the world events as opportunities to teach students about the constitution, civil discourse, and the role of citizens as change

agents. By seizing these opportunities, they ensured that education remained relevant and meaningful despite the challenges of the pandemic.

**Question 2: What were the curriculum and process changes made to student civic programs because of the pandemic?**

Data associated with this research question came primarily from the digital modules and programs created by GCCE. Codes associated with and analyzed for this question include: civic action, civic identity, civic knowledge, and content—with secondary codes text, video, visual.

GCCE initially decided to keep the same curriculum and schedule for their summer leadership program shifting to a hybrid model where the teacher led lessons were available in an asynchronous digital platform with synchronous group meetings and student interactions were held utilizing digital conferencing software. Dr. Trammell describes how GCCE came to this decision below.

> Five days a week for an hour a day…we had a specific civics course, and we use virtually the same curriculum…So in my mind there were two different projects going on. There was how do we take those doing with classroom teachers in this curriculum and try to do it, but in a way that they can actually deliver it and at the same time…and it just made sense that one of the things they needed was a platform, a place fit that if the kids did have the ability to go online, they could go to one place and kind of get resources. And so that's really how that, that part of the work started this way. We just found a platform that we can put stuff out there for the teachers to use. (Trammell & Hargis, 2022)

Teachers were responsible for making sure students completed the asynchronous modules and for familiarizing them with an age-appropriate version of Robert's Rules of Order which

they called "According to Bob" (Trammell & Hargis, 2023). This resource broke down parliamentary procedure and participant interaction while providing tutorial videos and examples and served as the synchronous meeting guidelines. Robert's Rules of Order are guidelines for parliamentary procedure that provide guidance for interaction and structure for lawmaking bodies (Robert's Rules Association, 2023). As it is very similar to the processes used by state legislatures, many student governments and legislative simulations utilize this resource. Teachers and students accessed the Youth in Government Georgia State Legislature Program through a digital platform created by a software company specifically for GCCE. As they built the modules for the leadership program and spoke with teachers, they serve about the need for resources appropriate for distance learning, the decision was made to build digital modules for all middle grades social studies courses that address the required state standards. Data regarding usage of the platform are discussed in a later section. The next section, the Youth in Government Georgia State Legislature Program is described in detail.

*Digital Modules: Youth in Government Georgia State Legislature Program*

As the Youth in Government Georgia State Legislature Program was designed as a synchronous event, I analyzed it separately from the digital modules. Data associated with this program came both from its synchronous digital module and interview questions associated with the synchronous program created and facilitated by GCCE. Codes and subcodes associated with and analyzed for this question include civic action, civic identity, civic knowledge, teacher support, content—with subcodes text, video, visual--and distance learning with the subcode digital citizenship.

This program is designed to model all three categories of civic education as they participate as a representative in a model e-legislature. Students are presented with source material in a

variety of formats that address basic knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of the Georgia Legislature. Presenting diverse types of sources is important for addressing multiple learning modalities within instruction. Modalities are sensory pathways—which include kinesthetic (movement), visual, auditory, and tactile—in which learners receive and store information. Different types of sources address different modalities. For example, text and images use visual pathways, music uses auditory pathways, videos use both visual and auditory pathways, and games may use all four pathways. Providing information in different formats that connect to learning modalities can lead to successful learning outcomes for all learners and represents best practices for social studies instruction (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013; Samples, 1992). Content presented to students in the context of a simulation also align to the successful practices of civic learning (Guilfoile & Delander, 2014).

The table below (Table 2) shows the frequency of the types of sources provided to students for analysis in the Model Georgia State Legislature Digital Module which is intended to increase civic knowledge. It is important to note that synchronous sessions with students were not recorded so there is no data for analysis outside the descriptions provided by GCCE.

**Table 4 Variety of Sources in the Georgia State Legislature Digital Module**

| Georgia State Legislature | | |
|---|---|---|
| Type of Source | Frequency | Percentage |
| Text | 33 | 62% |
| Video | 2 | 4% |
| Visual | 18 | 34% |

Over half of the digital source material provided to students for analysis was text based. A third of sources were presented as visuals that support the content and a very small amount of source material was presented in the form of video. GCCE indicated that the digital modules, represented in the table above, included background knowledge and research required by students to

do on their own time or with their classroom teacher which protected synchronous time for student interaction in the simulation through committee meetings, debates, and legislative sessions.

Simulations presented multiple times for different districts followed a similar protocol. After source material is presented, students are tasked with independently identifying their own opinions and political ideologies, and then research current issues on a variety of topics following guidelines provided in the digital module. Finally, students are asked to take action on their beliefs and ideology by choosing an issue that they would like to address and use their research to write a bill that will go before the e-Georgia Legislature. This aspect of the curriculum which asks students to situate their own interests in the context of learning about government processes aligns closely with "Proven Practice 2: Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives." of the Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning (Guilfoile & Delander, 2014). The digital module guides students through writing each part of their bill. Once every student has submitted a bill, every bill is discussed synchronously in committee. Students were sorted into groups by GCCE prior to the synchronous session and participated in discussion in small group chat rooms. Bills that pass student committee are discussed and voted on by the whole e-Georgia Legislature. As this program involved extended reasoning and includes a deeper understanding and application of the content so each student can create their own unique bill, it reaches a DOK 4 level of cognitive complexity and addresses elements of civic identity and action.

As this program includes discussion and debate in a synchronous virtual space, the program includes tips for discussion and building consensus among peers, and committee guidelines for legislative actions. Protocols for legislative settings in the form of Robert's Rules of Order is

content that is addressed by the classroom teacher prior to the discussion and debate portion of the program (Trammell & Hargis, 2023, p. 10:14). The synchronous portions of the program are facilitated by GCCE staff, selected student moderators, and classroom teachers.

Each of GCCE's asynchronous digital modules for grades six through eight directly align to the state standards for the respective grade level. Content standards in these grades are divided into domains associated with social studies disciplinary thinking and include historical, government/civic, geographic, and economic understandings (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). In Georgia, social studies content in grades six and seven focus on modern world studies. Each grade highlights different regions of the world. Social studies in grade 6 focuses on Europe, Latin America, Canada, and Australia and grade seven focuses on Africa and Asia. The focus of grade eight is Georgia Studies, beginning with European exploration through modern day and includes some personal finance (Georgia Department of Education, 2022). The next section describes the digital curriculum models that focused on modern world studies.

*Digital Modules: Grade Six and Seven*

Prior to the pandemic, GCCE programming included a focus student engagement on the local, state, and national level. Though these grade levels have a global focus, GCCE decided to include content from all of the domains, because awareness of multiple perspectives—awareness of one's own knowledge, assumptions, and experiences—and exploring other communities support reflective thinking, which is a key component of civic identity and preparing students to be citizens of a global community (Crittenden & Levine, 2018; The Open University).

Digital learning modules for grades six and seven include sources and assessment of all 33 content standards in grade six and 29 content standards in grade seven. The modules do not explicitly address the required skills standards in each grade level, which include 12 map and

globe standards, 17 information processing standards, 10 reading standards, and 10 writing standards (Georgia Center for Civic Engagement, 2020b).

Each digital module provides a summary of the content for student analysis using various types of sources including text, video and/or a visual. Assessment items focused solely on civic knowledge of the content presented in each section and either asked students to summarize the issues addressed or to match vocabulary with text. Tables 3 and 4 below show the variety of sources in each grade level and the frequency of student tasks that provide connections to the importance of presenting students with a variety of sources from different perspectives describes in the beginning of the chapter.

**Table 5 Variety of Sources in the Grade 6 Digital Module**

| | Grade 6 | |
|---|---|---|
| Type of Source | Frequency | Percentage |
| Text | 76 | 40% |
| Video | 74 | 39% |
| Visual | 40 | 21% |

**Table 6 Variety of Sources in Grade 7 Digital Module**

| | Grade 7 | |
|---|---|---|
| Type of Source | Frequency | Percentage |
| Text | 88 | 43% |
| Video | 75 | 36% |
| Visual | 43 | 21% |

GCCE utilized the teacher notes resource provided by GaDOE for the text excerpts in each section in addition to links for specific articles; videos included news agencies, other teachers, or educational organizations; and visuals included photographs, infographics, maps, and political cartoons (Georgia Department of Education, 2022; Trammell & Hargis, 2022). Data represented in the table shows a balance in the types of sources and learning modalities presented to students

in grades 6 and 7. Dr. Trammell indicated that the modules in grades six and seven were provided as a "triage" to support teachers who indicated they did not have access to content materials. GCCE created these digital curriculum modules to focus heavily on providing source material directly to students to support knowledge of the standards (Trammell & Hargis, 2023). Dr. Angela Hargis described a disparity between how the modules were intended to be used, and how teachers actually used them.

> How we visualized it is we knew they [students] were all at home and needed access to information, which is why for us, it was easy…let's just start with the standards. And in our mind, we were thinking it was going to be from a student's perspective…If they don't see their teacher for the rest of the year, at least they can see each thing they click on and they're saying, here's the standard I'm supposed to be learning. They're reading your teacher notes…if I don't learn anything else, at least I've learned the very basic that I'm supposed too. That was really kind of where we started and hoping that…even if they couldn't read, we made it so that they could listen to it. So, we try to set it up so that individual kids can go in if they were so motivated or if their teacher assigned it…We create these little activities where they're hopefully interacting with whatever they read and going beyond the standard a little… How it was actually used was more of teachers accessing the platform and using it themselves as a tool tip to teach. Especially, they really like the fact that the videos were already found for them. They didn't have to take the time to find a video that might match it [the standard]. (Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

In addition to source material that addresses each of the standards, GCCE indicated that activities were included that addressed the content provided to students. The next section will examine the data from student activities in these modules.

Research on social studies and civic education support the conclusion that curriculum requires students to interact with a variety of sources, situate their thoughts and ideas with the content are provided the opportunity to cultivate their civic identity and when that curriculum also provides opportunities to connect with the issues, people, and organizations in their community are more likely to take civic action. Students who are civically engaged are more likely to be successful with their school, college and career choices (Georgia Family Connection Partnership, 2019; Levine, 2006; National Council for the Social Studies, 2013; Torney-Purta & Wilkenfeld, 2009; Youniss, 2011). Descriptions of the activities in the digital modules for grade six and seven utilized DOK to measure cognitive complexity and to make connections to best practices as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

The table below shows data as it relates to the frequency of all student tasks included in digital modules by grade level and type.

**Table 7 Analysis of Instructional Tasks by Grade Level**

| Student Task | Grade 6 | | Grade 7 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Summarize the issues in the lesson/video… | 51 | 81% | 71 | 92% |
| Drag the words into the correct boxes. | 12 | 19% | 2 | 3% |
| Fill in the blank… | 0 | 0% | 2 | 3% |
| Describe natural features… | 0 | 0% | 2 | 3% |

This data represents instructional tasks reaching DOK Level 1 (recall-drag words into boxes and fill in the blank and describe) and DOK Level 2 (summarize issues) with an overwhelming majority of tasks focusing on summarization. As these tasks primarily address understanding of concepts, the data supports GCCE's stated goal of civic knowledge for these modules.

*Digital Modules: Grade Eight*

Though the digital modules in grade eight were developed for the same purpose as grades six and seven, there are significant differences in grade eight modules which focuses exclusively on the government/civics standards within Georgia Studies. Dr. Hargis indicated that this difference in the content relates to the necessary information required for students' analysis of the government/civic understandings within each course, the time teachers allot to the standards, and the expertise of GCCE.

> Sixth and seventh grade were a totally different focus than eighth grade. In eighth grade we really just looked at those government standards in sixth and seventh grade because it's world studies and they…need to look at all those parts [geography, history and economics to be able to really think about that country. So that's why…we went over pretty much every standard because it was all kind of relevant to the study of that country, the eighth grade we had the decision to make. Are we going to go over every standard? Because then it just felt like…this is really getting out of our wheelhouse as far as the work that we're doing…So Eighth Grade is very short as far as actually how much content is covered because there's only a handful of days that they do government and civics that as it relates to us. (Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

Whereas grade six and seven which had a single module per course, there are two grade eight modules, one on local government that covers one standard and one on state and federal government covering five standards. Below is a description of the content and tasks included in the grade eight modules.

Similar to grades six and seven, each digital module in grade eight provides a summary of the content for student analysis using various types of sources including text, video, and/or a

visual but these modules also include games and simulations for student exploration. Text excerpts in each section include original content created by GCCE, some of which came from their face-to-face curriculum prior to the pandemic, in addition to links for specific articles; videos were included news agencies, other teachers, and educational organizations. Table 6 below shows the variety and frequency of sources in grade eight for the local, and state & federal modules. Similar to the previous digital modules, this data provides the opportunity for deeper analysis of source material as it relates to modalities and best practices in social studies instruction and civic learning referenced earlier in this chapter.

**Table 8 Variety of Sources in the Grade 8 Digital Modules**

| Grade 8 | State & Federal | | Local | |
| Type of Source | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Text | 50 | 57% | 3 | 38% |
| Video | 26 | 30% | 3 | 38% |
| Visual | 11 | 13% | 2 | 25% |

The Local Government Module appears to include far less content for student analysis, however this module includes a video simulation not included in the table as it combines source material and student activity. The simulation allows students to select choices that result in different outcomes. GCCE used a scripted simulation previously included in their face-to-face curriculum and hired actors to role play each potential scenario based on what action the student viewer decided to take. Though this style of simulation includes limited choices, it does address student choice and connection with differing perspectives as they hear arguments from students, businesses, community members, and councilmen. GCCE used the footage to create an asynchronous simulation included in the Local Government Module.

Though the State & Federal Modules seem to highly favor text-based sources, there is one additional source that GCCE created specifically for this module that is not represented in

the table above because it does not fit the source types described. GCCE developed a virtual field trip of the Georgia State Capitol so that teachers could incorporate field trips as a source in their instruction (Georgia Center for Civic Engagement & Georgia Humanities, 2021). The virtual field trip allows students to explore multiple parts of the state capitol and surrounding capitol grounds including: Liberty Plaza, Capitol Interior and Rotunda, the view from the top of the Capitol, the House of Representatives, State Senate, and the Office of the Governor. In addition to viewing and walking around the grounds, students can interact with paintings, sculptures, and physical objects to examine additional information in the form of photos, videos, and text pro-vided by Georgia Humanities and Georgia Public Broadcasting. The next section will describe the student tasks for the eighth grade modules.

Student tasks in the "State & Federal Modules" include seven DOK 1-2 level tasks in-cluding five DOK 1 vocabulary tasks, and two DOK 2 tasks that involve explanation or descrip-tion. The majority of student tasks in grade eight involve application of content knowledge in simulations and games that require students to make decisions based on their individual opinions or beliefs in the context of their understandings of civics and government which reach complex reasoning associated with DOK 3, and extended reasoning associated with DOK 4. In the state and federal module, two of the three simulations were from iCivics—one on the Branches of Government and another on the Federal Budget —while a third simulation on a scenario regard-ing the Judicial Committee of Georgia's legislative branch was created during the pandemic by GCCE.

The iCivics simulations were professionally produced prior to the pandemic. They allow students to select the role they will play in the game, provide a variety of source materials for

content support, and allow them to see the direct result of their choices. Because these simulations require students to apply content knowledge and make connections between multiple actions and outcomes, these simulations can reach DOK 3. GCCE's simulation for this module is similar to the one created for local government. It was created in video format using actors, where student decisions at critical points would result in alternate outcomes. The local government module simulations described in later sections, were developed by GCCE and involve students to design all aspects of their own city, and a video simulation of a city council meeting with alternate outcomes based on student decisions at critical points. As there are far more resources available to teachers that address government content at the national level, developing simulations that address standards specific to state and local government was necessary to ensure that element of the curriculum was included in GCCE's virtual programming. Developing the virtual field trip of the Georgia State Capitol was another example of a resource that GCCE felt was an essential element of their civic education programming. Field trips are a mixture of sources and student tasks that allow students to make meaning through experiences.

In a recent study, the National Education Association (NEA) found that field trips make content more memorable by allowing students to engage with content in different ways and that the majority of students said field trips "made them more engaged, intellectually curious, and interested in and out of school." Field trips have the potential to reach the higher levels of DOK by allowing students extended time to learn first-hand from primary sources, make connections to classroom learning, build cultural understanding, and build independent thought (NEA Member Benefits, 2023). "Field trips offer an opportunity to motivate and connect students to appreciate and understand classroom concepts, which increase a student's knowledge foundation, promoting further learning and higher level thinking strategies. With understanding comes confidence

and intrinsic motivation" (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014). Though the virtual field trip of the Georgia State Capitol does not imbed student tasks, it had the potential to allow teachers to provide students with this type of experiential learning.

Overall, the primary focus of the modules in grades six through eight is on civic knowledge with some emphasis in grade eight on students situating themselves in state and local government content. There is little to no focus on the student action component of civic education. In the initial interview of GCCE staff, Dr. Angela Hargis described the goal of the digital platform as a way for students in a distance learning setting to access the basic information they were required to learn from the standards and to provide teachers with a tool they can use to support student learning within their own lessons.

> What are these teachers needs that we can do? And it just made sense that one of the things they needed was a platform A place fit that if the kids did have the ability to go online. They could go to one place and kind of get resources. And so that's, that's really how that part of the work started this way. We just found a platform that we can put stuff out there for the teachers to use. (Trammell & Hargis, 2022, p. 15:11)

When asked in the follow up interview about the primary focus on civic knowledge in the majority of the digital modules, Dr. Trammell explained:

> …as an organization, we have tended to be more hands-on in our youth development when it comes to civic identity and certainly action that comes later on. So, for us again, it was that triage response. Get the knowledge and hopefully building in some sort of activity or series of activities that can help push them down the civic continuum, that civic youth development continuum. But otherwise, just get them on the continuum with the baseline knowledge. (Trammell & Hargis, 2023, p. 03:01)

Though the digital modules were intended for use by students in a distance learning setting, GCCE indicated in their access data that it was primarily used by teachers as a planning tool for instruction. Based on teacher feedback, GCCE reported that the majority of teachers used the platform to extract text, video, and visual source material to embed as sources in their own lessons. A much smaller percentage of teachers assigned the digital modules directly to students to complete (Trammell & Hargis, 2023, p. 06:08).

**Question 3: How did virtual curriculum impact the program goals and program leaderships' expectations?**

Data aligned to this question comes primarily from the pre and post interview data of GCCE staff. Codes used for analysis include: distance learning, obstacles, purpose for decisions to move forward, digital citizenship, successes, and teacher support. After initial coding of the interviews, reports were pulled in NVivo associated with identified codes for analysis. I reviewed each set of data to find categories and identify themes. Initially I created categories for a basic description of the data which included: obstacles to synchronous and asynchronous civic instruction, program successes, and program expectations. Deeper analysis led to the identification of two larger themes of impact to goals and expectations: student engagement and participation and adapting to technological challenges.

*Engagement and Participation*

GCCE indicated they experienced a decrease of student engagement in their synchronous events. They found it difficult to recreate the authenticity of a face-to-face environment in a digital, distance learning platform. Students often lacked a private physical location at home that was suitable for educational learning, were often unmotivated, and unprepared to participate with peers in a digital space (lacked digital citizenship skills).
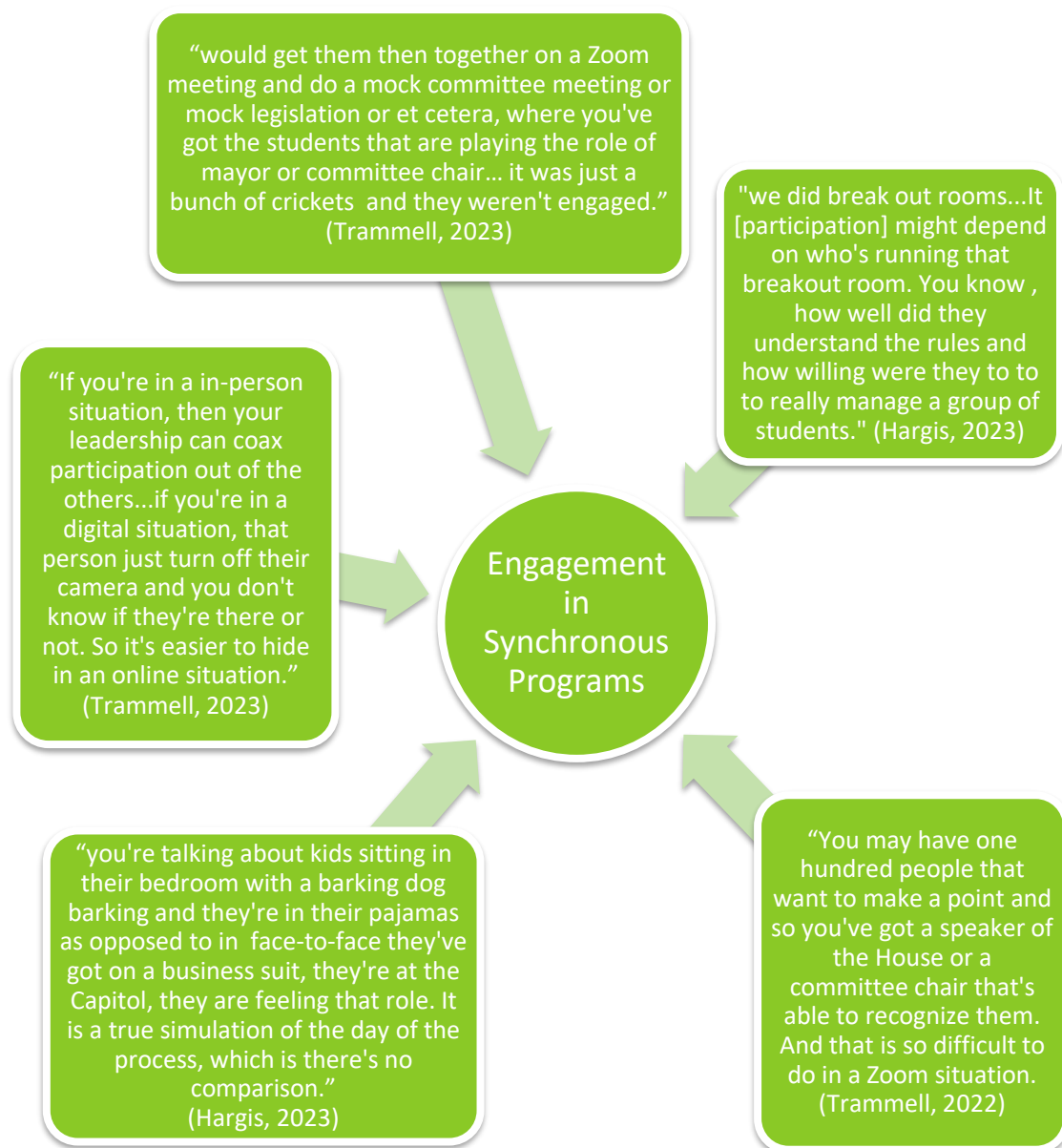
**Figure 15 Engagement in Synchronous Programs**
(Trammell & Hargis, 2022; Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

GCCE created a digital learning platform for asynchronous content and activities organized in

self-driven modules for student use. The expectation was for students to access standards-aligned

content from various sources, including text, images, and videos, and engage in meaningful ac-

tivities that teachers could utilize to assess their knowledge and growth. However, teachers

ended up utilizing the platform primarily as a resource to find content for their digital lessons.

> We create these little activities where they're hopefully interacting with whatever they
> read and going beyond the standard a little. That was how we visualized it. I think how it
> was actually used was more of teachers accessing the platform and using it themselves as
> a tool to teach. Especially, they really liked the fact that the videos were already found for
> them. They didn't have to take the time to find a video that might match it [the standard].
> (Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

Teacher focused instructional practices were prevalent in both synchronous and asynchronous

learning. When GCCE began synchronous programs, they used teachers as moderators during

group work and observed little student engagement. They modified the group meeting by using

other students as mentors and found success using high school students as moderators in engage-

ment, in terms of the program goals. Dr. Trammell describes their obstacles and changes below.

> You had some teachers that inserted themselves completely and sort of ran the committee
> meeting, which was not our goal…What we found that worked the best was inserting
> high school students to lead the middle school program that where you have some sort of
> mentorship there. (Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

*Technological Challenges and Adaptation*

With the onset of the pandemic and the shift to remote learning, educators reported to

GCCE that they felt ill-equipped to teach in distance learning environments due to inadequate

resources and insufficient pedagogical preparation. GCCE staff recognized that both educators

and students were required to navigate new technologies with little or no training. Educators had

limited knowledge of proper behavior and etiquette in synchronous virtual platforms, while stu-

dents lacked sufficient preparation to effectively interact in virtual environments. Moreover,

challenges related to the reliability and availability of suitable software, hardware, and internet

connectivity further complicated the delivery of both synchronous and asynchronous programs. Dr Hargis describes initial challenges with using conferencing platforms below.

> Everything that we did was us trying to sift through it with the teachers. How did how do you use Zoom to do a class? I mean, all of those were still struggles that we were just figuring out as we went along…How much time did we spend actually [before the pandemic] teaching you how to behave on a game? ...I think that that was really a new concept to us. (Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

Dr. Trammell describes challenges with student use of technology related to digital citizenship. In the passage below, he describes students' lack of knowledge on how and when to use virtual conferencing tools when interacting with others and their lack of awareness regarding the appropriateness of their virtual environment.

> If you're not talking, mute it or, you know, when you are talking, unmute it. So, we didn't get through any of that, you know, or the appropriateness of your situation. And, you know, realize that I mean, we saw some stuff that you ought not see. (Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

*Program Goals*

GCCE indicated that at their core they are "a nonpartisan, non-profit organization, and our mission is to educate and equip students to become informed and active citizens" focused on the civic mission of schools and utilizing the six best practices of civic learning which are the same whether the programming is virtual or face-to-face (Trammell & Hargis, 2022). During the pandemic their goals were to be flexible, responsive, and innovative in addressing teacher's needs, expanding the relevance of their programming, and support student civic growth and leadership.

To be flexible, responsive, and innovative in addressing teacher's needs, GCCE not only reformatted their traditional simulations to fit a digital setting but refined the program to be a viable virtual option to support schools and districts across Georgia. "I love the fact that we're very responsive and very nimble, and our mission is flexible enough to allow for that… we just dug right into the curriculum and met teachers where they are" (Trammell & Hargis, 2022). GCCE also spent time listening to teachers about their immediate instructional needs to determine what support the organization could provide. They created several new resources that were not part of their traditional support including the virtual field trip of the Georgia State Capitol, digital learning modules, and video-based simulations. During the pandemic, GCCE created asynchronous student modules that addressed most of the social studies standards in grades six through eight which includes content in history, economic, and geography that is outside of the government/civic content the organization usually supports. Regarding the inclusion of additional content in grades six and seven, Dr. Hargis said.

> We really just looked at those government standards in sixth and seventh grade because it's world studies and…they need to look at all those parts [history, geography, and economics] to be able to really think about that country. So that's why in sixth and seventh grade, we went over pretty much every standard because it was all kind of relevant to the study of that country [government]. (Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

Dr. Trammell emphasized that the development of digital modules was a crisis response, they became a curriculum partner to address the needs of students and teachers struggling to find source material aligned to required civic knowledge.

> Our goal was not, is not and never has been to become a curriculum company. We, as an organization never want to enter into that land of being a vendor because that changes the

educational relationship. We want to be the co-curricular partners that can come in and

supplement and enjoy the friendship and that sort of reception then having to...It just

changes the whole dynamic. (Trammell & Hargis, 2022)

The field trip was created so that teachers could take students on a field trip even if they were all

sitting on their couch. It was a way to engage students in experiential learning virtual, which pro-

vide source material that aligned to best practices in social studies instruction and civic learning

described earlier in this chapter. Dr. Hargis describes the flexibility of the adapted eighth grade

legislative simulation as an interactive virtual field trip that GCCE has made part of their regular

programming.

Our one day event can be can be catered to your whole eighth grade class. Now, all of a

sudden, they have a place to go like a field trip that's not far from home, and they're

learning that before they come, they have ideas for writing a piece of legislation. So,

there's a little bit of prep work for them to do before they get there and they submit their

bill. But when they get there, the bill book is designed, and they learn how to do a com-

mittee…it's standards based and we know that teachers are not going to want to waste

their time with anything that's not standards based. So the one day event has really

worked out to be something that's been beneficial, and we'll continue that just because it's

a, it's a great connection. (Trammell & Hargis, 2022)

The simulations that address local and state standards have been a staple of GCCE civic educa-

tion programming since the beginning because they provide students with the opportunity to gain

civic knowledge, practice communication skills, analytic thinking, and equip them with the pro-

cesses they need to growth their civic identity, which makes them more likely to participate in

activities that benefit their community—civic action (Trammell & Hargis, 2022). There are

games and simulations for national topics created by iCivics and other national organizations but simulations that address local and state standards did not exist digitally. Some of GCCE's more complex simulations did not work in a distance learning format so the decision was made to create video based simulations using the same scripts that were used face-to-face. Actors played the roles usually given to students and they played out several outcomes—called branching scenarios—based on a limited number of choices students could make. GCCE accepted that there was some loss of effectiveness using the video simulations, but students were able to listen to and interact with the discussions and debate, and retained their ability to choose their response and their ability to think about how choices interact with outcomes (Trammell & Hargis, 2022).

Prior to the pandemic, GCCE programming reached an average 90 of 181 school districts and 4,750 students districts (Georgia Department of Education, 2023b; Trammell, 2023c). When asked about the usage of their digital resources, Dr. Trammell shared that in 2021-2022 they were used by 17,733 students, 418 teachers, 173 schools, and 62 school systems (Trammell, 2023b). Though their statewide reach dropped from roughly 50% to 34% of Georgia districts, the number of students served grew 273%. Unfortunately, the only data available are whole site asynchronous usage data from 2021 to present as the original site crashed. Additionally, the new site only reports overall usage so data for individual asynchronous digital modules is not available. The growth of these resources reinforces GCCE's goal of expanding the relevance of their programming.

GCCE was able to expand the relevance of their programming by partnering with other organizations to develop instructional resources, and by using technology to increase their reach. Dr. Hargis explained that the creation of the digital resources required them to reach out to other organizations like GaDOE for permission to use the teacher notes, and Georgia Humanities and

GPB to develop the virtual field trip of the state capitol. "A lot of times I felt like we were somewhat of a bridge between the classroom, the teachers and outside organizations that maybe want to help or interested in being involved and just don't really know how" (Georgia Center for Civic Engagement & Georgia Humanities, 2021; Trammell & Hargis, 2022). The success of the redesign for some of their curriculum programs to fit a distance learning setting had the added benefit of expanding their reach to eighth grade classrooms in areas of Georgia previously outside their ability to support. Dr. Hargis shared that making these changes to the eight grade programming made them realize this was something that they could do for eighth graders across the state.

> Our one day event can be can be catered to your whole eighth grade class…. So the one day event has really worked out to be something that's been beneficial, and we'll continue that just because…it's a great connection. (Trammell & Hargis, 2022)

Increasing the reach of their programming and positive feedback from teachers about their resources are on two aspects of GCCE's measure of success. As their mission is to equip informed and active citizens, student civic growth and leadership is an important outcome.

Before the pandemic, GCCE measured civic knowledge and dispositions for all of their student participants to assess student growth. Dr. Trammell explains that this measure continued for their synchronous programming during the pandemic.

> We had the students complete a pre-test, pre-participation assessment to get a benchmark level of their civic knowledge, as well as their levels of civic identity and dispositions. And then after they completed the participation in the experience, we did a post assessment which allowed us to compare their growth or lack thereof in civic knowledge and dispositions. And actually, we saw growth in both knowledge and dispositions.
> (Trammell & Hargis, 2022)

An unintended success of these simulations involved problem solving the facilitation of committee meetings in breakout rooms. Initially teachers were assigned the role of committee chair, but often times this led to decreased student engagement. "You had some teachers that inserted themselves completely and sort of ran the committee meeting, which was not our goal" (Trammell & Hargis, 2023). Finding new processes for choosing the committee facilitator created an opportunity to engage students in leadership roles. "What we found that worked the best was inserting high school students to lead the middle school program that where you have some sort of mentorship there." (Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

**Conclusions**

This chapter contains the data analysis of this case study in the context of the research questions. The two employees involved in programs offered by the Center for Civic Engagement during the pandemic were interviewed prior to review of curriculum materials and after the initial curriculum review. Curriculum materials were analyzed and coded from the hybrid leadership program, synchronous simulations, and from the asynchronous digital modules for grades six through eight.

The pandemic presented challenges and obstacles to civic education that were in some ways very similar to what the nation experienced during the influenza of 1918, though technological innovations made modern K-12 education better positioned to address. GCCE's decisions to continue programming and adapt instructional support and programs are in line with their mission to "educate and equip students to become informed and active citizens" (Georgia Center for Civic Engagement, 2020a) and their desire to stay relevant and support Georgia educators. Their intent was to offer hybrid programs that address student growth on the civic continuum and shift

additional support to asynchronous digital modules focused on increasing civic content

knowledge and understanding of state standards intended for student consumption.

The obstacles GCCE faced were a direct result of the severity and immediacy of the public health crisis that became a crisis in public education. At a basic level, the technological infrastructure (reliable internet connection, access to electronic devices, and resources to facilitate digital learning) was not consistently available for students and teachers to engage in distance learning, which required GCCE to be reactive in their programs and support. Where and when the technology was available, GCCE staff reported that teachers lacked knowledge regarding best practices in distance and digital learning and therefore had not prepared students to participate and engage in learning on digital platforms. Addressing these challenges highlighted the need for more permanent changes to the structure of GCCE's resources and support. Many of the resources and supports offered as a triage for the crisis of distance learning during the pandemic will continue in GCCE's future programs that will serve as enhancements to the curriculum and to expand and increase outreach to school districts outside their region that were previously unsupported by GCCE. Below Dr. Trammell described a new program planned prior to the pandemic that will be modified to reach more students.

> We created a couple of new programs that we had already planned to create in person.
> One is Georgia Municipal Leaders Summit, which takes students through city, the governance [of] city, city leadership sort of program and the others. Similar program just focused on counties called emerging county leaders. And so, we will definitely keep those programs, but we will move them into a hybrid environment where you have some of that connectivity, where students can gather, but also where they can, you know, communicate regionally and even statewide and using those opportunities. Because one of the

challenges that we have with anything we do in Georgia is distance and time and getting

students together. (Trammell & Hargis, 2022)

Access to guest speakers has also been a struggle for Dr. Trammell's face-to-face programs but

he explains that in a virtual program, distance and travel costs are reduced or eliminated if a

speaker can join from wherever they are. This makes finding guest speakers willing to participate

in student programs much easier.

It's easier for me to get somebody to talk to us from Washington, D.C. or I mean, any-

where in the world really through that technological platform that I couldn't necessarily

do face-to-face. So it allowed us to broaden our horizons. (Trammell & Hargis, 2022)

Though the pandemic presented a variety of challenges that few organizations and educators

were prepared to overcome, GCCE provided resources and programming teachers needed for in-

struction in distance learning environments, maintained the organizations relevance, and stayed

true to their organizations mission of preparing students to be active citizens.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

**Journal Entry: Where we are May 4, 2023**
Despite yet another set of strokes in November, contracting COVID in December and COVID pneumonia in January, my mother is on the long road to recovery. In a few short weeks, my son graduates from high school, and on May 11 the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency expires. The CDC is no longer publishing national COVID data regularly as the pandemic is falling out of the news but the World Health Organization reported that since the beginning of the pandemic the United States had 103,436,829 confirmed cases, 1,127,152 deaths, and have administered 668,168,096 vaccines doses (World Health Organization, 2023).

## Summary of Study

The purpose of this case study is to explore the impact of the pandemic on the goals and curriculum decisions made to shift face-to-face civic education programs to a distance learning format. Qualitative research of the programs and support offered to teachers and students by Georgia Center for Civic Engagement during 2020 revealed a crisis response. Their stated goal of providing teachers with civics and government content for their distance learning classrooms while staying true to the mission of GCCE by continuing to offer student civic programming tied to best practices in civic learning.

Several important observations were identified from this research. First is that the decisions made by GCCE were done as a crisis response which became a turning point for the organization. The crisis involved the intertwined decisions of whether to cancel or modify student programming and how to satisfy donors whose funding made GCCE programming possible. Prior to the pandemic, GCCE was well known for their success in facilitating intricate student simulations on different aspects of government that helped students find their own agency and prepare them for civic action. Admittedly, they had no experience with distance learning prior to the pandemic, but they made the decision to support teachers by providing their programs in a distance

learning environment and by creating government and civic resources accessible for students and teachers.

Pressure from donors to continue programming during the pandemic was a consideration in GCCE's decision to continue programming by creating digital modules and adapting their simulation programming into multiple distance learning formats. During correspondence with GCCE staff, I noticed that they seemed cautious and limited with responses about the relationship between donors and programming. GCCE is a non-governmental organization that supports public schools in Georgia but exists through the generosity of private individuals and organizations. As GCCE and its staff had already agreed to be publicly named in this research, I chose not to push further into that line of questioning since there could be potentially negative repercussions on the organization's funding.

However, there is no evidence from the data to suggest that GCCE deviated from their mission of educating and equipping students to become active engaged citizens as all of the curriculum data aligns to cultivating civic knowledge, identity, and action. GCCE is a small organization with only a few full-time and part-time employees in north Georgia. Prior to the pandemic their reach was limited to school districts within the same region. They were able to capitalize on the pandemic crisis and expand their reach to districts and students through distance learning programming.

Another interesting finding involves GCCE's work to create and adapt curriculum. Previous to the pandemic, GCCE hosted the Model United Nations simulation for Georgia, but the majority of their programming and resources focused on federal, state, and local government. During the pandemic, they expanded their offerings of civic education to include a global focus by providing curriculum resources for the modern world studies courses in grades six and seven.

In talking with Dr. Trammell and Dr. Hargis moments after I stopped recording on the follow up interview, they indicated disappointment in these world studies modules and the virtual field trip despite the data regarding student and teacher usage of these resources, which could indicate the resources are popular and successfully used by teachers. I also have a good deal of experience writing lessons for virtual field trips, and my evaluation shows that GCCE created a quality virtual field trip of the state capitol, so their statements seemed disconnected and overly critical. In combing the data from the interviews and the programs for any indication of why they would be unsatisfied with resources they created and kept beyond the pandemic, I came across a statement from Dr. Trammell that could indicate a cause.

> As an organization, we have tended to be more hands-on in our youth development when it comes to civic identity and certainly action that comes later on. So for us…it was that triage response…just get them on the continuum with the baseline knowledge. (Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

The focus on GCCE being "hands on" with student programs is reinforced in a 2021 article where Dr. Trammell stated that GCCE's goal was focused on teaching "strictly the process" of government through active simulations (Downey, 2021). The asynchronous digital modules and the virtual field trip are static resources where student interaction with content is not facilitated by GCCE. In face-to-face programs, GCCE staff can guide students in the simulation, provide additional assistance, and generate questions to help students move to higher levels of thinking. Their asynchronous resources rely heavily on teacher usage in individual lessons where feedback and support from GCCE are less controlled. Data for the digital resources that shows significant usage indicates they met teachers' needs. In my position, I am aware of a lack of resources for

modern world studies courses aligned to the standards and appropriate for middle grades. This could be another reason the digital modules saw high utilization.

The adaptability of the processes and programming GCCE developed in the early months of the pandemic to continue civic learning with students is a key factor in their success. GCCE found that students lacked the knowledge and protocols to engage effectively and civilly in synchronous programming. In order to address this obstacle in the leadership program, they adapted the format to include student facilitators and implemented kid friendly guides and videos in order to improve student outcomes. As students and teachers became increasingly familiar with learning in a virtual environment, GCCE adapted more of their eighth grade programs to fit into a single class/day. This allowed them to increase their reach by meeting the time constraints of teachers who have limited time for simulations as they prepare students for the statewide assessment. These adapted programs include a short synchronous program or an asynchronous digital module for classrooms who could not organize a face-to-face or synchronous program.

Another interesting observation is how GCCE's civic education programing, which was designed to equip students to be active and engaged citizens in a normal setting, translated to preparing students to be active and engaged citizens when many people isolated themselves from public places during the early stages of the pandemic. Before the pandemic, much of the social interaction and community involvement were face-to-face. During the pandemic, civic participation changed, and civic education had to pivot to a distance learning setting. Interaction between students in the classroom, lunchroom, and hallways changed to discussions in chat rooms and breakout rooms in video conferencing software. Group activities held by churches and commu-

nity centers were often limited to outdoor activities as weather permitted, speeches and discussions using video conferencing software, and the absence of community members who were most at risk.

Though GCCE did not change the specific content of their programs for the pandemic, they added supports for existing guidelines and protocols in the grade 8 and hybrid leadership programs focused on interacting and engaging with others—such as Robert's Rules of Order—that helped students develop communication skills in digital settings. These skills are closely associated with the social and community involvement aspects of active citizenship. Those programs also prepared them to take political action by creating a process for identify issues that impact their community, providing training on legislative processes, and connecting them to governmental agencies and positions that can affect change. Program supports and activities at the higher end of cognitive complexity that move students along the civic continuum and translate to active citizenship in a face-to-face or distance setting are not evident in the asynchronous digital modules for grades 6 and 7 which only address civic knowledge.

As the pandemic progresses, more districts adopted and integrated online learning management systems. These distance learning supports make cancelling a learning day because of snow seem like a distant memory. The decisions made by GCCE ensured that the organization survived the pandemic as a fiscally responsible partner. They remained true to their mission of educating and equipping students to become informed and active citizens while expanding their reach in Georgia by utilizing distance learning methods that overcome obstacles of connecting support over long distances.

**Findings Related to the Literature and Recent Developments**

*Distance Learning and Digital Technologies*

In chapter two, I discussed the variety of digital conferencing software, educational tools, and access to reliable internet. Though there were gaps in availability, reliability, and accessibility when the pandemic began, public education in 2020 was far more capable of addressing problems associated with distance learning than it was during the influenza of 1918. Despite these advances, teachers in the COVID-19 pandemic experienced similar struggles with the incorporation of new digital teaching tools—lack of teacher training, student preparation, and issues with technological infrastructure. Similar problems were expressed by teachers with film and radio in the 1920's, 30's and 40's, and computers to a great extent pre-pandemic as were expressed by teachers using LMSs, virtual conferencing software, and other digital resources (Cuban, 1986, 2001; Langreo, 2022; Trammell & Hargis, 2023)(Langreo, 2022).

Public education, however, has changed since the Pandemic of 1918. Public schools now have required accountability measurements for attendance, graduation, and testing requirements in place to ensure student opportunity and success. Testing in the core subjects of math, English, and science are federally mandated and several states including Georgia have additional mandated tests that go beyond the federal testing requirements ("Every Student Succeeds Act," 2015; Georgia Department of Education, 2023a). Performance on these and other federal and state accountability measures is reported as part of a schools "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) a part of federal the monitoring and reporting on student success (Kober, 2005). Schools are required to ensure educational progress for all students, and schools that do not perform appropriately face increasingly severe consequences (FindLaw Legal Writing Team, 2016).

The performance requirements are not the only difference in the educational environment. Prior to the pandemic, many school systems were researching and working on adopting an LMS. The length of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated extended periods of distance learning for many students which made the decision to adopt LMS platforms more critical. The desperate need combined with the financial support of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (2020) initiated by Congress to address learning loss, sped up adoption and implementation (Department of Education, 2020). The speed with which LMSs were adopted during the first stages of the pandemic meant that districts did not have time to plan effective roll out of the application, leading to struggles that teachers historically experienced with new technology. In 2022, Education Weekly interviewed 1,000 educators about their thoughts on LMSs. They shared that initially, lack of proper training and time to learn how to use the tool made instruction harder. Years later, at the time of the interviews, just over half of teachers feel that LMSs make instruction easier, 11% still think LMSs make instruction more difficult (Langreo, 2022).

The continued utilization of these new technologies will likely depend on their ease of use and ability to quickly adapt to teacher's needs. "The tools that teachers have added to their repertoire over time (e.g., chalkboard and textbooks) have been simple, durable, flexible, and responsive to teacher-defined problems in meeting the demands of daily instruction" (Cuban, 1986, p. 58).

*Civic Engagement*

National concern about learning loss during the pandemic and increased visibility of political turmoil has led to an increased focus on the importance of civic education. In April of 2022, the Georgia Legislature passed the "Georgia Civics Renewal Act" which created the Georgia Commission on Civics Education. The Commission is tasked to:

Promote and enhance the education of students on the importance of civic involvement in a constitutional republic, the study of state and local government among the state's citizenry, the importance of civic engagement and public service, and communication and collaboration among organizations in the state that conduct civics education. (Payne et al., 2022)

The first meeting of the Georgia Civics Commission was in April 2023, chaired by Dr. Trammell and attended by educators, legislators, and stakeholders representing all of Georgia. In my role as the Social Studies Program Manager for GaDOE, I was required to present the first annual report on Civic Education in Georgia to the committee. Below is a brief summary of the meeting from the chair.

The meeting started with a general discussion about the state of civics education in Georgia led by former Georgia Secretary of State Cathy Cox (D) and former Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice Harold Melton (R). Among the items discussed was how to teach students the value of and practice of discourse with those with whom they may disagree. Then the committee received testimony from Ms. Joy Hatcher, Social Studies Program Manager, for the Georgia Department of Education which included the status of Social Studies and Civics Education in Georgia, what content (and how much) is taught in various grade levels, as well as her thoughts as to what the strengths and opportunities were in K-12 Social Studies instruction in the state. The committee will meet again in the fall and will prepare an initial report for the legislature, Governor's office, State Board of Education, and the State School Superintendent. (Trammell, 2023a)

Growing concern for the civic knowledge of students was reinforced in May 2023 days before the pandemic officially ended. NAEP released the results of the 2022 Civic Assessment and

though there had been an increase in the average score between 2014 and 2018, the 2022 assessment indicated a drop in score and cited no statistically significant difference between student performance on the assessment in 1998 and 2022 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2023).
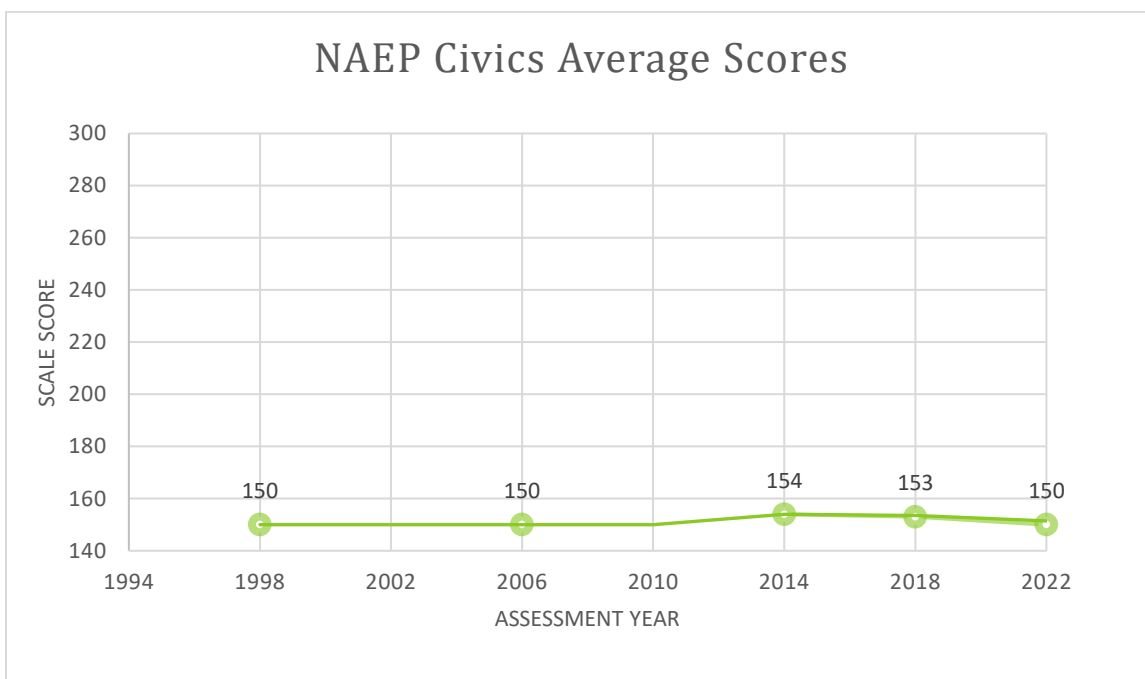


**Figure 16 Trend in Average Eighth Grade NAEP Civics Scores as of 2022**

This research also suggests that both teachers and GCCE believe that best practices in civic education are more effective in face-to-face settings.

> We are now able to intentionally look at sustainability…we have limited time, we have limited resources and so we have to determine, is that the best investment of our efforts at this moment? And quite frankly, the majority of folks are zoomed out and they're longing for that in-person touch and so we're seeing a decline in the use of resources like that overall. (Trammell & Hargis, 2023)

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this research. In general, qualitative analysis involves subjectivity of the researcher it is meant to expand on the understanding of the specific event not to imply causation. Despite attempts to triangulate data sources and types to address multiple perspectives and viewpoints as described by Stake (1995) and Yin (2018), the gap between the time included in this research—June to December 2020—and the start of the research—Spring 2022—limited the number of staff available for interview. Additionally, technological issues with the original digital platform eliminated the possibility of analysis from portions of the original digital modules that were not captured before the platform crashed. Interviews with teachers and students, recordings and student work samples were not included in the IRB research request so all data regarding student, teacher or program outcomes is reported by GCCE. Qualitative data related to the usage of digital resources is only available in aggregate.

The unique characteristics of this case study of a single non-profit organization providing support to public schools for one discipline within the social studies umbrella during a pandemic makes similar research difficult to repeat and it may not be a representative sample of similar organizations (Yin, 2018). Additionally, as there has only been one other recorded pandemic in the United States when public school was a national requirement, no similar research exists for comparison.

**Positionality Revisited**

This case study involves interpretation of qualitative data. My role as researcher is influenced and partially informed by my leadership role in social studies with the Georgia Department of Education which includes civic education, and by my involvement in providing social studies support to local districts which intersects with statewide social studies organizations. This

research only explored one statewide organization during a six-month period in the middle of a global health crisis. During this time, I engaged with districts, teachers, and other statewide organizations across the state to support Georgia social studies educators. This gives me some additional insight into decisions made by districts and teachers as they reached out for support. However, since Georgia is a local control state, there is no requirement for districts to contact me regrading social studies curriculum or instruction, and all decisions beyond the standards themselves and the statewide assessment are made at the district/school level. Regarding assessment data for civics, as of 2019 Georgia no longer includes nationally normed test items in the state mandated Social Studies Georgia Studies End of Grade Assessment which makes a comparison of national and state data impossible. Georgia still participates in the NAEP assessment for federally mandated tests, which include English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science, but does not include social studies.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

This exploratory case study was designed to gain an initial understanding of civic education during a pandemic from the perspective of a civic organization that dedicated itself to supporting teachers and students in public schools through programs that foster civics/government awareness. GCCE made the decision to continue in a time of crisis, not just a crisis of public health and education but the potential crisis resulting from the politics of non-profit funding. Conducting research on the pandemic-related decisions of other non-profit organizations that support civic or social studies education and exploring the relationship between their funding models and the ways in which they serve public schools, as well as their approaches to making curriculum decisions, would offer a useful comparison. This investigation could serve as a valuable resource for future researchers seeking insights into the relationship between external support

for social studies organizations and their responses during crisis situations. Additional studies are needed to explore how programming is influenced in organizations dependent on private donors to build on the research that focused on government funding.

Ager (2020) study, of the correlation between school closures during the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic and subsequent adult outcomes yielded no significant impact. His research aligned with early research on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students conducted in 2020. Ager's research specifically focused on affected students, assessing the consequences of school closure through indicators like "adult educational attainment, wage income, non-wage income, and hours worked in 1940" (p. 3). To deepen our understanding, a subsequent study could reexamine this same cohort from 1918-1919, shifting the focus to markers of civic health, including political engagement, social participation, and community involvement. Using similar civic metrics, a future study could also explore the adult impact of the 2020 pandemic by considering factors such as the duration of time spent in distance learning and the type of civic curriculum utilized during distance learning. Such an investigation would contribute valuable insights into the potential influence of school closures in 1918-1919 on civic engagement and allow for a comparative analysis between the impacts of the two pandemics. This possible research would enhance our comprehension of the role played by technological advancements and research-based practices in civic education and their subsequent effects on adult civic health outcomes.

Conducting further research to explore the perspectives of K-12 civics educators in both public and private school settings would enhance our understanding of civic education during a pandemic. Additionally, exploring students' experiences in distance learning classrooms and understanding how these experiences shape their perspectives on active and engaged citizenship would offer valuable information for analyzing digital citizenship and civic education during

times of public crisis. These studies have the potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of the subject, aiding future researchers in constructing a detailed description of the topic. Moreover, they can serve as a guide for educators and educational leaders, assisting them in assessing crisis readiness in relation to distance learning and proactively planning effective solutions.

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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A IRB Approval**

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mail: | P.O. Box 3999 | In Person: | 3rd Floor |
| | Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999 | | 58 Edgewood |
| Phone: | 404/413-3500 | FWA: | 00000129 |

April 27, 2022

Principal Investigator: Joseph Feinberg

Key Personnel: Feinberg, Joseph; Hatcher, Amanda J

Study Department: Middle & Secondary Education

Study Title: Not Throwing Away My Shot: Civic Education in a Pandemic

Submission Type: Exempt Protocol Category 2

IRB Number: H22532

Reference Number: 369504

Determination Date: 04/25/2022

Status Check Due By: 04/24/2025

The above-referenced study has been determined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to be exempt from federal regulations as defined in 45 CFR 46 and has evaluated for the following:

1. Determination that it falls within one or more of the eight exempt categories allowed by the institution; and
2. Determination that the research meets the organization's ethical standards

If there is a change to your study, you should notify the IRB through an Amendment Application before the change is implemented. The IRB will determine whether your research continues to qualify for exemption or if a new submission of an expedited or full board application is required.

A Status Check must be submitted three years from the determination date indicated above. When the study is complete, a Study Closure Form must be submitted to the IRB.
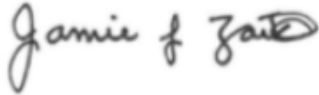
This determination applies only to research activities engaged in by the personnel listed on this document.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to ensure that the IRB's requirements as detailed

in the Institutional Review Board Policies and Procedures For Faculty, Staff, and Student Researchers (available at gsu.edu/irb) are observed, and to ensure that relevant laws and regulations of any jurisdiction where the research takes place are observed in its conduct.

Any unanticipated problems resulting from this study must be reported immediately to the University Institutional Review Board. For more information, please visit our website at www.gsu.edu/irb.

Sincerely,

Jamie Zaikov, IRB Member

**Appendix B Informed Consent**

Georgia State University
Informed Consent

Title: Not Throwing Away My Shot: Civic Education in a Pandemic
Principal Investigator: Dr. Joseph Feinberg, Associate Professor in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education
Student Principal Investigator: Amanda Joy Hatcher, Doctoral Student in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education

## Procedures

You are being asked to take part in a research study. If you decide to take part, you will participate in interviews that answer questions about your participation in developing civic education opportunities for students during the pandemic.

- We ask that you participate in two 60-minute virtual interviews.
- We ask that you participate in a possible third follow-up interview within 30 days if the data collection and analysis required clarification.
- To support the accuracy of transcription, interviews will be recorded utilizing video conferencing software.
- Participants will have the opportunity to review the transcripts and conclusions for accuracy prior to submission.

## Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not have to be in this study. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time

## Contact Information

Contact: Dr. Joseph Feinberg, Associate Professor in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at 404-413-8403 and jfeinberg@gsu.edu

## Consent

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please complete the information below.

Name:
Email Address:
Phone Number:


Signature: