

Summary of Amicus Brief prepared by Advancement Project and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

*Unequal access to civics education, which perpetuates a long history of disenfranchisement, is a racial justice issue.*

The right to an education is inextricably bound up with the fundamental right to vote. Lack of access to a quality education broadly affects a person's ability to fulfill their civic duty to participate in the democratic process. At the same time, our government has become more complex, and engaging with the government has become that much more challenging. If democratic government is to work and thrive, people must have the knowledge and skills to make their voices heard by government. This is especially critical for communities of color.

Our public education system exists in large part to prepare children to become effective citizens. Historically, education — in particular public education — has been the gateway to social and economic mobility and civic engagement for generations of immigrants as well as native-born Americans. But in many places, such as Rhode Island, it has failed, and continues to fail, to provide Black and Latinx children with adequate preparation for civic participation, perpetuating a history of disenfranchisement that continues to embarrass the United States to this day.

Black and Latinx students in Rhode Island are being denied the opportunity to develop the critical knowledge and cognitive skills necessary to sort through inaccurate and unreliable information sources and effectively engage with government to secure the rights and privileges of citizenship guaranteed by the Constitution for themselves and their communities. Black and Latinx students are particularly vulnerable to a media environment dominated by misinformation and disproportionately lack skills needed to effectively deal with it. Unequal access to a quality civics education, including development of civic online reasoning, and the resulting unequal access to meaningful participation in public policy is a racial justice issue. Remedying that inequality is an essential step toward securing our participatory democracy for all of the people for generations to come.

The Supreme Court recognized in *Brown v. Board of Education* that adequate educational opportunities are essential to racial equity, a proposition it has since reaffirmed and never abandoned. The failure of Rhode Island to provide adequate civics education to its Black and Latinx students is a violation of their constitutional rights.

This brief provides a veritable tsunami of history and evidence to support each of these points.