

## Memo

To: Members, Wisconsin State Assembly

From: Bob Baxter, Executive Director

cc: Peggy Wirtz-Olsen, President

re: AB 563 related to civics instruction

Date: September 25, 2021

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The Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) opposes AB 563 related to additional state mandated requirements for civics instruction in elementary and high schools. Currently meaningful civics instruction begins in kindergarten and moves through the grades, culminating with statutory credit and testing requirements for high school graduation. Wisconsin's public-school educators are preparing young people to be productive, contributing members of our republic each day.

As public-school educators we write and speak with authority that stems from our extensive professional training and collective years of experience. As written AB 563 is narrow and highly proscriptive. By its nature civics education is interdisciplinary and should be strategically integrated throughout the curriculum. Civics instruction should be student-centered and inquiry-based stemming from students' personal experiences starting from what students know about their communities. These key instructional elements and consideration of child development are lacking in this bill.

Also absent from this bill is attention to place-based pedagogy, critical thinking, or contextual learning. Civics education by its nature is action orientated, this bill proposes a passive

approach to civics instruction that does nothing to inspire or empower students. AB 563 looks at the past ignoring the present and potential democratic futures our young people may wish to formulate for themselves. WEAC President Peggy Wirtz-Olsen said, “this bill underestimates the ability of Wisconsin students to be critically engaged and active citizens in a vibrant democracy—one that the next generation of students can shape. Instead of additional civics curriculum mandates, let’s trust our students and our teachers to do what they do best—to think critically and to find meaningful ways to engage in our participatory democracy.”