

Will a test on U.S. citizenship help make people better citizens?

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff
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In this Jan. 5, 2015, file photo, Republican Arizona Governor Doug Ducey addresses the crowd after being sworn in during inauguration ceremonies at the Arizona Capitol in Phoenix. The Arizona Legislature is putting a bill creating a new high school civics test on the fast track. Photo: AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin, File

PHOENIX — To finish high school, students in Arizona now have to pass a U.S. citizenship test.

It is the same test immigrants, who come from other countries, take. They have to pass it to become U.S. citizens.

The test asks 100 questions. Students have to get 60 right. It tests knowledge about the Founding Fathers, the Bill of Rights and U.S. presidents.

Civics: How Government Works

Arizona is the first state to make students take the citizenship test. The law was passed on Thursday. A few other states may pass a law like it this year, too.

The law is meant to teach Americans who have a poor knowledge of civics. It is the study of how the government works.

"This has been building for a long time," said Ted McConnell. McConnell works with Sandra Day O'Connor. She used to be a U.S. Supreme Court justice. They work together to increase teaching about government in schools. McConnell said he and others are still worried. They say the citizenship test is not enough.

Civics isn't being taught very well, some say.

More People Should Vote

In 2010, a test looked at educational progress. Only 1 out of every 7 high school seniors got a passing score in American history.

Poor knowledge of being a citizen means people vote less. The 2012 elections for Congress had the lowest number of voters in years.

The Joe Foss Institute wants to change that. It wants all 50 states to use the U.S. citizenship test for high school students. It wants this to happen by 2017.

The institute says 15 states are going to consider the law this year. Four states are already looking to pass laws like Arizona's.

McConnell said the laws go after the right problem. But he said it's the wrong solution.

More Tests, Or Stronger Classes?

A few states do make high school students take a civics test about American government.

They ask questions about how we make sure the law treats everyone equally. They ask about the purpose of a democracy. And they quiz students on how to be a good citizen. Some experts say stronger civics classes would be better than just a test.

The new rule also comes as part of a larger argument over testing.

Some people fear testing means less time for teaching topics like civics. One study found this to be true. More than a quarter of the school districts said they spent less time on social studies.