

Iowa Seal of Civic Excellence Guide

Introduction

In 2026, Governor Kim Reynolds signed [House File \(HF\) 2231](#) into law. HF 2231 requires the Iowa Department of Education (Department) to develop and administer the Seal of Civic Excellence to any participating school district or accredited nonpublic school.

The Iowa Seal of Civic Excellence is intended to recognize and honor high school students who have attained and demonstrated a high level of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in civics. The seal also helps recognize a student's readiness for college, career and civic life.



Importance of Civic Readiness

According to former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, "The practice of democracy is not passed down through the gene pool. It must be taught and learned anew by each generation."

- **Civic knowledge** is the foundational understanding of how the government works at the local, state, and national levels.
- **Civic skills and dispositions** refer to the attitudes, values, and character traits that enable students to participate in their communities and work to solve public problems and participate in civic life.

High-quality civic education fosters civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Schools offering the Iowa Seal of Civic Excellence benefit because it enhances these qualities, builds future-ready skills, and improves school climate and community involvement.

Students who earn the Seal of Civic Excellence demonstrate they have learned, and can put into practice, the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to meaningfully participate in a Constitutional Democracy.

Pathways to Earn the Seal of Civic Excellence

Students must earn 10 total points from the table below to earn the Seal of Civic Excellence. Students must complete at least **two** activities in each category (Civic Knowledge and Civics Skills and Dispositions) in order to qualify.

Activity	Points
Civic Knowledge	
4 units (years) of social studies with at least a B in each course	2 points
90% on the Iowa Civics Test	1.5 points
AP Government test score of at least 3	1.5 points
Student-designed project on a specific civics topic (Can't be repeated)	2 points
Participation in We the People contest (Center for Civic Education)	1 point
Civic Skills and Disposition	
Service learning project focused on civics (minimum of 25 hours) with authentic presentation and reflection essay	4 points
Serve as a page in the Iowa Legislature	4 points

Activity	Points
Active participation in civic leadership programs such as: • Student council • Key Club • State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council • National Youth Leadership Council • Rho Kappa National Honor Society	1 point each
Participation in programs such as: • Mock Trial • Model United Nations (UN) • United States Senate Youth Program • Speech and Debate • YMCA Youth and Government Program • Girl Scouts/Boy Scouts	1 point each
Participation in Girls State/Boys State	2 points
Participation in JROTC	3 points
Serve as a representative on the district school board or State Board of Education	2 points
Total Points	Should equal at least 10 points and include at least two activities from each category.

Student-Designed Civics Project

In this project, students select a civics/government topic and create a project demonstrating their extensive content knowledge on the topic. This could be an essay, presentation, website, documentary, etc.

If students choose this option, the district Seal of Civic Excellence coordinator should ensure the submitted project is of high-quality and demonstrates student content knowledge.

Service-Learning Project

Service learning is an experiential learning approach in which students engage in meaningful service to the community and students engage in meaningful opportunities to apply what they learn to issues that matter to them. Steps often include:

1. **Investigation:** Students conduct research on a community-based issue or need.
2. **Engagement:** Students engage in at least 25 hours of civics-focused community-service related to their identified issue or need.
 - a. **Direct Service:** Community service involves hands-on, face-to-face interactions.
 - b. **Indirect Service:** Service is not seen by the people who may directly benefit from the service; however, the service meets a real need.
3. **Preparation:** Students create a plan to address the identified issue or need.
4. **Demonstration:** Students present their project to relevant stakeholders and an authentic audience related to the identified issue or need. For example, if students identify an issue with trash in their community, they might need to present to members of the city council or city government.
5. **Reflection:** Students complete a reflection about what they learned and how their plan addressed the identified issue or need.

If students choose this option, the district Seal of Civic Excellence coordinator should create a system to track community-service hours, validating the student completed the required 25 hours of service and that the service hours took place at a consistent organization. In addition, the coordinator should ensure the submitted project is of high-quality and demonstrates student skills and dispositions.

Annual Requirements to Offer the Seal of Civic Excellence

Component	Description
Notify the Department of Your Intent to Participate	Each year during the Fall BEDS collection window, the district or accredited nonpublic school must notify the Department of its intent to participate in the Seal of Civic Excellence. In its notice, the district or accredited nonpublic school must designate a Seal of Civic Excellence program coordinator. The role of the coordinator includes, but is not limited to: • Receiving communication from the Department; • Serving as the main point of contact regarding the seal for your district or school; • Disseminating key information to stakeholders; and • Ensuring all students have equitable access to participation information
Make Local Program Implementation Decisions	The district or accredited nonpublic school must determine how it will implement the program locally. Questions to determine implementation include, but are not limited to: • How will you communicate information to all students and families about the possibility of earning the seal? • What supports will you offer to students who want to earn the seal? • How will you recognize students who earn the seal?
Inform Students and Parents/Guardians About the Program	To inform students and their parents/guardians, the district or accredited nonpublic school is encouraged to post the following program information on its website and include the information in the student handbook: • General program and participation information; • A description of what students will need to do to earn the seal. • The name and contact information for the program coordinator.
Receive the Electronic Seal by Feb. 1	The district or accredited nonpublic school will receive the electronic seal from the Department by Feb. 1 of each year. This is the official seal and the only seal that should be used. The district or accredited nonpublic school can choose additional formats (e.g., certificate, medal, physical sticker) to award the seal as long as the official seal is used on the student's transcript.
Identify and Maintain Documentation of Students Qualifying for the Seal	The district or accredited nonpublic school must identify the students that qualify for the seal. To qualify, a student must earn at least 10 points on the pathway matrix identified above. Students may meet requirements at any time during their high school enrollment.
Award the Seal Upon Graduation	The district or accredited nonpublic school must include the official seal image containing the year on the student's transcript. The district or accredited nonpublic school can only officially award the seal upon graduation.
Annual Report in Spring BEDS	The district or accredited nonpublic school must annually submit Seal information to the Department. The report requires the district or accredited nonpublic school to provide a list of students awarded the seal. The report must only include data of graduating seniors who have been awarded the seal. Districts will report student-level information about students who earned the seal in Spring BEDS for the 2026-27 school year.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. **During which grades can students start working on meeting the seal requirements?** Students can begin working towards these requirements in 9th grade. Students can complete the requirements anytime between 9th and 12th grade.
2. **What if we use/have a program already that is not on the provided list?** Please reach out to Stefanie Wager at stefanie.wager@iowa.gov.
3. **What if a student is graduating early? Can they still earn the seal?** Yes, students graduating early can earn the seal as long as they meet all the requirements when graduating.
4. **How does a district sign up to participate in the Iowa Seal of Civic Excellence?**

Each year during the fall BEDS collection window, the district or accredited nonpublic school must notify the Department of its intent to participate in the Seal of Civic Excellence. In its notice, the district or accredited nonpublic school must designate a Seal of Civic Excellence program coordinator. The role of the coordinator includes, but is not limited to:

 - Serving as the main point of contact regarding the seal for your district or school;
 - Receiving communication from the Department;
 - Disseminating key information to stakeholders; and
 - Ensuring all students have access to participation information.
5. **Can foreign exchange students be awarded the Iowa Seal of Civic Excellence?** If a foreign exchange student is going to graduate from the school, they may be awarded the seal.
6. **How will my district receive the seal?** The Department will send an electronic version of the seal to all districts who have signed up to participate.

Questions and Additional Information

If you have questions, please contact Stefanie Wager at stefanie.wager@iowa.gov. For additional information, visit the Department's [Seal of Civic Excellence webpage](#).