



Testimony for the Record
Submitted to the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees for
the 2026 Joint Legislative Hearing on Elementary and Secondary Education
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BUILDING CIVIC READINESS AND MEDIA/AI LITERACY FOR EVERY NEW YORK
STUDENT: *Preparing for the Nation's 250th Anniversary — And the Next 250 Years*

Good afternoon Chair Pretlow, Chair Krueger, Senator Mayer, Assembly Member Benedetto, and Honorable Members of the Senate and the Assembly. Thank you for this opportunity.

My name is Nan Eileen Mead and I am the Co-Executive Director of DemocracyReady NY, a nonpartisan, multigenerational statewide coalition working to ensure high-quality civic learning reaches *all* students regardless of zip code [and empower the next generation to participate fully and responsibly in public life.](#)

With my Co-Executive Director Jessica Wolff, we convene a membership that includes statewide organizations such as NYSUT, NYSSBA, NYSCOSS, Rural Schools Association, and the state PTA, as well as a cross-sector representation of youth, educators, civic organizations, civic-education providers, and youth-serving organizations from across the state. Founded in 2018 as a project of the Center for Educational Equity at Teachers College, Columbia University, and where Jessica and I were colleagues, DemocracyReady NY became an independent organization in 2025. From 2016 to 2022 I represented the 1st Judicial District on the State Board of Regents.

Every student in New York has the right to an education that prepares them to participate fully in our democracy. As we approach the 250th anniversary of the United

States in 2026, New York has a historic opportunity to strengthen civic learning from the earliest grades through graduation. Together, New York's educators, students, and civic partners are advancing a shared call to action: strengthen policy, invest in professional learning, and modernize civic learning for a rapidly changing world. With that, on behalf of the members of the DemocracyReady NY Coalition, we urge [the legislature?] to make the following critical investments this year to ensure all New York students are prepared and motivated to participate in civic life.

1. Start Early: Invest in Strengthen Elementary Civic Education — \$2.5M

- Appropriate funds for pilot programs, curriculum development, and professional learning to expand age-appropriate civic learning in the early grades.
- Expand existing evidence-based models for integrated curricula, such as the PNW BOCES ELA/SS.
- Support NYSED in developing statewide guidance on integrating civic competencies and dedicated instructional time in the elementary years.

2. Invest in the Foundations of Civic Readiness — \$5M

- Expand access to the Seal of Civic Readiness and other experiential civic learning opportunities.
— Only 26,000 of 172,000 graduates currently receive the Seal.
- Allocate funding for professional learning aligned with Portrait of a Graduate civic competencies, such as NYSUT Educator Grants that foster authentic civic learning.

3. Modernize Civic Learning: Media & AI Literacy for All — \$15M

- Ensure every school has a fully funded certified library media specialist.
- Establish a statewide Task Force on Media & AI Literacy Integration in K–12, modeled after MA and OH.
- Support pilot programs and professional learning for media, information, and AI literacy.
- Add Media and AI Literacy to NYSED's required instructional topics.

4. Lift Up Civic Education for the USA Semiquincentennial (2026)

- Host a statewide high school essay competition: "America — 250 Years in the Making."
— State winner recognized as "Governor for a Day."
— Regional winners highlighted at historic sites across New York.
- Coordinate statewide and regional events during Civics Learning Week (March 9–13, 2026).

The semiquincentennial is not only a moment of commemoration—it is a call to action. By investing in civic learning from early childhood through graduation, New York can strengthen democracy, elevate student voice, and prepare the leaders of the next 250 years.