



Volume 1, Issue 10: October 2026

From our President
Luis Sanchez



The Madison-Lincoln Initiative was delighted to welcome three new members to our Board at our September meeting: **Judy Pipkin, Brandon Cho, and Michelle Silva.**

Judy ran the Santa Clara Democratic Party Headquarters until her recent retirement and currently serves as a delegate on the California Democratic Party Executive Board. Her extensive experience in political advocacy and voter outreach brings a wealth of expertise and wisdom to our growing organization.

Brandon is an honors student at Newbury Park High School who founded our first civic leadership club and successfully led it over the past year. He has interned in the office of Congresswoman Judy Chu and served as a Democracy Summer Fellow for Congressman Jamie

Raskin. Brandon's remarkable résumé is already too extensive to summarize here, but he is a bright light whose future offers hope for our democracy. His presence on the Board also helps keep us focused on the young people who will become the future voters and leaders of our republic.

Michelle is a marketing professional and founder of **The Savvy CMO**, a marketing and communications consultancy based in Sacramento, California. She is also an active community volunteer and philanthropist who is already helping us better position our mission and strengthen our identity in the vast landscape of nonprofits and civic education organizations.

Please join me in welcoming Judy, Brandon, and Michelle to our Board and to our shared mission.

Teresa and I have been on the road for the past thirty days, driving up the Pacific Coast through Oregon and Washington and then venturing as far north as Banff, Canada, before making our way home to San Luis Obispo through the Dakotas, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona.

Among the highlights of our travels were visits to Theodore Roosevelt National Park, the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, Mount Rushmore, and the Crazy Horse Memorial. Perhaps the most memorable stop on our long journey, however, was our visit with one of our Madison-Lincoln Initiative board members Dr. Stephen Schoonmaker, President of Tohono O'odham Community College, and our tour of this beautiful tribal college outside Tucson.

While visiting the campus—and later over dinner at the magnificent Arizona Inn—we also had the pleasure of spending time with Dr. Rafe Trickey, a founding Board member of the Madison-Lincoln Initiative, as well as Stephen's wife, Joy, whose enthusiasm for science and books was delightful.

As I write this, we are nearing the end of our journey. I cannot wait to return to the comforts of home and the quotidian familiarity of our routines. At the same time, I am profoundly grateful for this reminder of the extraordinary beauty and diversity of our nation's lands, even as I

remain conscious of the often-dark history of how many of those lands were acquired.

That history carries an obligation. It is now our responsibility to protect these lands with due regard for the peoples who possessed and cared for them before us, and with a keen sense of stewardship for the generations who will follow us.



AI Has Entered the Civic Square

What does artificial intelligence mean for civic education?

Artificial intelligence is no longer simply a classroom technology or workplace tool. It has entered the civic square.

Citizens can now ask AI to explain a ballot measure, summarize a government report, analyze competing arguments, draft a letter to an elected official, or help organize a community campaign. A 2026 study of grassroots civic organizations found generative AI already being used to simplify



complicated public documents, improve outreach, and assist with petitions and public submissions. ¹

That creates opportunities—but it also changes what it means to prepare young people for citizenship.

The OECD and European Commission's new AI Literacy Framework argues that students need to understand how AI works, critically evaluate what it produces, and use it responsibly.² A recent national survey found that 70% of U.S. teens already use AI for schoolwork, while many acknowledge using it in ways that can offload some of their own critical thinking. ³

For civic educators, then, the question may no longer be simply, **“Should students use AI?”**

A more important question is: **How do we teach students to remain thoughtful, independent citizens when an artificial intelligence can instantly explain an issue, construct an argument—and sometimes get the facts wrong?**

That means traditional civic literacy may increasingly need to



include **AI literacy**: checking sources, recognizing fabricated or manipulated information, distinguishing evidence from assertion, detecting bias, questioning an AI's reasoning, and knowing when *not* to delegate judgment to a machine.

AI has entered the civic square. Civic education now has to prepare students to meet it there.

¹ [Springer \[https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00146-026-03108-4...\]](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00146-026-03108-4...)

² [OECD \[https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/empowering-learners-for...\]](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/empowering-learners-for...)

³ [Common Sense Media https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/teens-in-the-ai-er...](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/teens-in-the-ai-er...)





What Do Youth Think?

Civic engagement is often discussed by educators, policymakers, and civic organizations. But perhaps we should spend more time asking young people themselves what citizenship means to them.

Our own **Brandon Cho**, founder of MLI's first high school club at **Newbury Park High School** and recently elected to the Madison-Lincoln Initiative Board of Directors, responded to a deceptively simple question:

"What does being an engaged citizen mean to you?"

What do other young Americans think?

Brandon is only one voice. Young people across the country have been thinking and writing about what citizenship, civic responsibility, community involvement, and participation in democracy mean to them.

Being an engaged citizen means actively participating in civic life. Civic engagement is essential to preserving our democratic way of life, and all Americans should strive to contribute to it. I believe

civic engagement can be practiced through advocacy, voter participation, and community service.

Advocacy is a vital component of civic engagement. By expressing our ideas, concerns, and perspectives to elected officials, we can help address challenges facing our communities, government, and nation.

Voting is a fundamental right and responsibility of citizenship. It gives individuals a voice in government by allowing them to elect public officials and influence the laws and policies that shape society.

Community service provides opportunities to strengthen our communities and improve the well-being of others. Through service, citizens can make a positive and lasting impact on the lives of those around them.

Ultimately, civic engagement helps advance the ideals of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" set forth in the Declaration of Independence, ensuring that our democracy remains strong and responsive to the needs of its people.

This Month in American Democracy

October 19, 1781 —

Independence Becomes Possible

On October 19, 1781, British troops under Lord Cornwallis marched onto a field at Yorktown, Virginia, and laid down their arms before the combined American and French forces commanded by George Washington and the Comte de Rochambeau. Roughly one-third of Britain's forces in North America were surrendered. ¹

The American Revolution did not officially end that day. The Treaty of Paris recognizing American independence would not be signed until 1783. But Yorktown effectively ended major fighting and dealt a devastating blow to Britain's effort to retain its American colonies. ²

Its importance to American democracy lies in what the victory made possible. The ideals proclaimed in 1776 still had to survive a war. Yorktown helped secure the independence that allowed Americans to undertake the difficult



The Pennsylvania Journal & The Weekly Advertiser

Date: October 27, 1781

This Philadelphia newspaper printed George Washington's official report to Congress beginning:

"Sir, I have the honor to inform Congress, that a reduction of the British army, under the command of Lord Cornwallis, is most happily effected."

experiment that followed:
governing themselves, writing
state constitutions, creating—
and then replacing—the Articles
of Confederation, and eventually
framing the Constitution.

¹ [National Park](#)

[Service](#) [<https://www.nps.gov/yourk/learn/historyculture/siegetime>
[line....](#)]

² [National Park](#)

[Service](#) [<https://www.nps.gov/yourk/learn/historyculture/siegetime>
[line....](#)]



What's Coming Up

October offers a strong lineup of professional development opportunities for educators interested in civic learning, constitutional literacy, civil discourse, media literacy, and student engagement. Here are several worth putting on your calendar.

National Opportunities

October 12 — We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution

Rutgers University, New Jersey

A professional development workshop exploring constitutional questions, deliberation, consensus-building, and simulated legislative hearings.

October 13 — Fostering Belonging & Civil Discourse During a Polarized Election Season

Facing History & Ourselves / Virtual

Designed for school and district leaders, this session offers practical approaches to fostering civil discourse, civic learning, and constructive conversations about difficult political issues during the 2026 election season.

October 13 — Teaching Research and Writing with BRI Primary Sources

Bill of Rights Institute / Online, 7–8 p.m. ET

A practical session focused on using primary sources to strengthen students' research, analysis, and writing skills.

October 21 — Native Nations and the Constitution

National Constitution Center / Virtual / Free

A 90-minute professional learning session examining tribal sovereignty, citizenship, treaties, and the constitutional powers of the federal government.

October 21 — Building the Civics Bee Unit

Bill of Rights Institute / Online, 7–8 p.m. ET

Explore classroom resources and strategies for developing civic knowledge and encouraging student participation through the National Civics Bee.

October 24 — Exploring Tribal Sovereignty through Constitutional History

National Constitution Center / Oklahoma City / In person

A full-day workshop using constitutional history and primary sources to explore tribal sovereignty and the relationship between Native nations and the federal government.

October 27 — Executive Power & National Reconciliation: Teaching Article II Through Civil Dialogue Protocols

National Constitution Center / Atlanta / In person / Free

A professional learning program combining the study of presidential power under Article II with classroom strategies for facilitating thoughtful civil dialogue.

Closer to Home: California Opportunities

October 1, 15 & 29 — Media Literacy in the TK–12 Classroom

California History-Social Science Project / UC Humanities Research Institute / Virtual / Free

A timely three-part series addressing **Critical AI & Media Literacy, Elections and Emojis as Civic Duty,** and **Algorithms, Recommendations & Bias.** The series offers practical tools for helping students navigate an increasingly complex information environment.

October 5–November 1 — Supporting Immigrant Integration Through Civics Education

CALPRO / Online / Free for eligible California adult educators

A four-week, 15-hour course examining how civics education can support immigrant participation in community and civic life. A continuing education option is available.

October 7 — Civic Learning Institute

Sacramento County Office of Education / Mather/Sacramento / Free

K–12 educators will explore strategies for strengthening civic engagement and preparing students to earn California's **State Seal of Civic Engagement.** A follow-up session is scheduled for March 3.

October 9 — Supporting Immigrant Integration Through Civics Education

College of Marin / In person / Free

A Community of Practice focused on strengthening immigrant integration through civic education, community participation, and engagement.

October 24 — A Republic If We Can Teach It: Exploring the Past and Engaging the Present

Teach Democracy & National Constitution Center / Los Angeles / Free

A day of professional learning connecting American history and constitutional principles with civil dialogue and active civic engagement. Participants receive a **\$100 stipend**, with an additional **\$250 potentially available** for implementing the Civic Action Project.

October 28 — Teaching for Civic Engagement Network

Los Angeles County Office of Education / Los Angeles area

A professional learning network emphasizing civic inquiry, **media literacy, civil discourse, student voice, and action-oriented civic learning**.

Keep Learning. Keep Engaging.

Professional development strengthens more than classroom practice. It helps educators give young people the knowledge, critical-thinking skills, and habits of civil engagement they need to participate meaningfully in American democracy.

Democracy is a discipline—and good civic education helps us practice it.



Can You Spot the Manipulation?

A quick media-literacy challenge

Instructions: Read each example and ask yourself: **What should make you suspicious?**

Then check the explanation below.

Example 1: The Misleading Headline

Headline

LOCAL SCHOOL TEST SCORES PLUNGE 50%!

The Fine Print

Last year's average score: **98%**

This year's average score: **49%**

What information would you want before accepting the headline's implication that the school is failing? (1)

Example 2: The Out-of-Context Statistic

A social media post declares:

"SHOCKING: 70% of Americans say they no longer trust our elections!"

The post provides no link to the survey, no date, and no explanation of who was questioned.

What should make you suspicious?

The statistic sounds precise—**70%**—which can make it seem authoritative. But a number by itself tells you very little.

Example 3: The Suspicious Image

Imagine a social media post showing:

A politician standing in floodwater while dozens of sharks swim around them.

The caption reads:

"Look what happened during today's press conference!"



Answers:

(1)

Clues

- ✓ Was the test the same difficulty both years?
- ✓ Did the grading scale change?
- ✓ How many students took the test?
- ✓ Was the previous score unusually high because it involved a different group of students?

Why This Can Be Manipulative

The headline uses a dramatic percentage without context. A large change may be real, but readers need additional information before drawing conclusions. Headlines often emphasize the most shocking number while leaving out key details that could explain it.

(2)

Clues

- ✓ Who conducted the survey?
- ✓ How many people were surveyed, and how were they selected?

- ✅ **When was the survey conducted?**
- ✅ **What was the exact question?**
- ✅ **Does “don’t trust” accurately describe what respondents were actually asked?**
- ✅ **Can you find the original survey rather than relying on the social-media post?**

The lesson

Numbers can mislead without being false. A real statistic can be stripped of context, selectively presented, or described in a way that changes its meaning.

Before sharing a dramatic statistic, **trace it back to the original source and read what the number actually measures.**

Media-literacy rule:

A precise number is not the same thing as reliable evidence.

(3)

Clues

- ✅ **The situation is extraordinary.** Dozens of sharks surrounding a politician at a press conference would be an astonishing event. If it really happened, major news organizations would almost certainly be reporting it.
- ✅ **Look closely at the sharks.** Are their sizes, shadows, reflections, and positions in the water realistic? Do any fins or bodies seem distorted, duplicated, or oddly shaped? Those can be signs of AI generation or image manipulation.
- ✅ **Look at the politician.** Check the hands, face, clothing, and the places where the body meets the water. AI-generated images can contain subtle anatomical or physical inconsistencies.
- ✅ **Question the caption.** “Today’s press conference” provides no location, politician’s name, news organization, photographer, or source.

Vague captions can make false material seem immediate and authentic.

✅ **Check independent sources.** Search reputable news organizations for the supposed event. A reverse-image search could also reveal whether the original photograph existed before the sharks were added.

Solution

The image should not be accepted as evidence that the event happened. The implausible scene, possible visual anomalies, vague caption, and absence of independent confirmation are strong reasons to investigate further. It may be AI-generated or digitally altered.



What AI Literacy Means for Civic Education

Following up on our earlier article, “AI Has Entered the Civic Square: What Does Artificial Intelligence Mean for Civic Education?”

Artificial intelligence is no longer simply a technology story. It is rapidly becoming a **civic literacy issue**.

Students are entering a public square in which AI can write political arguments, summarize legislation, create convincing images and video, imitate human voices, recommend what information people see, and produce answers that sound authoritative even when they are incomplete, misleading, or wrong.

That changes what it means to be an informed citizen.

Traditional media literacy taught students to ask familiar questions: **Who created this information? What evidence supports it? Is the source reliable? What might be missing?**

Those questions remain essential. But AI adds another layer.

Students must also learn to ask: **Was this content created or altered by AI? Where did the AI get its information? Can its claims be verified**

independently? Is an algorithm deciding what I see? Could an image, quotation, recording, or video have been artificially generated?

AI literacy, however, should mean more than teaching students to distrust what they encounter online. Artificial intelligence can also be a powerful tool for civic learning. Students can use it to explore competing arguments, clarify difficult constitutional concepts, analyze public documents, generate questions for further research, and identify gaps in their own reasoning.

The key is learning to use AI **without surrendering judgment to it.**

That may be the most important connection between AI literacy and civic education. Democracy has always depended upon citizens capable of weighing evidence, questioning assertions, listening to competing viewpoints, and ultimately reaching their own conclusions.

AI does not make those skills obsolete.

It makes them more important.

For civic educators, then, AI literacy should not be treated as one more technological subject competing for classroom time. It belongs naturally alongside **media literacy, critical reasoning, civil discourse, constitutional literacy, and democratic engagement.**

The challenge is not simply teaching students how to use artificial intelligence.

It is teaching them how to remain thoughtful, independent citizens in a world where artificial intelligence is increasingly part of the civic square.



In Their Own Words: Young Americans on Engaged Citizenship

Here are some other perspectives.

From "What Do Youth Think?"

In a Spring 2025 LSU student profile sociology student Hunter Deshotel offered his thoughts he wrote: I think we are encouraged in many ways to self-isolate and minimize the degree to which others and the space we exist in contribute to our identity. So, to be a good, engaged citizen first requires an awareness of those facts. In doing so, by getting out and meeting people, I think you take the first step in improving your community and expanding the depth of your life.

In the educational project *What Does It Mean to Be an American?*, student activist Michelle Hua is featured specifically to explain why she became civically engaged and what motivates her work.



Jake Lehman (student activist)

Quoted in a discussion of student activism:

"What we're really trying to do is build student activism and get students passionate about their community through arts and music, and other forms of outreach."

Famous Quotes on Student Activism and Well-

Being [[wellbeing.gmu.edu https://wellbeing.gmu.edu/famous-quotes-on-student-activism-...](https://wellbeing.gmu.edu/famous-quotes-on-student-activism-...)]

Cartoon Corner



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