



All Together Now: Collaboration and Innovation for Youth Engagement

The Report of the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge

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ALL TOGETHER NOW: COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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As a teacher we surveyed for this report said, civic education “is essential if we are to continue as a free democratic society. Not to educate the next generation will ensure the destruction of our American way of life as we know it.”





A Call to Action

Each new generation must become active, informed, responsible, and effective citizens. As a teacher we surveyed for this report said, civic education “is essential if we are to continue as a free democratic society. Not to educate the next generation will ensure the destruction of our American way of life as we know it.”

Data show that many young Americans are reasonably well informed and active. For instance, 45% of citizens between the ages of 18 and 29 voted in the 2012 election. In a national survey conducted for this Commission, 76% of people under the age of 25 who voted could correctly answer at least one (out of two) factual questions about where the presidential candidates stood on a campaign issue and state their own opinion on that issue.

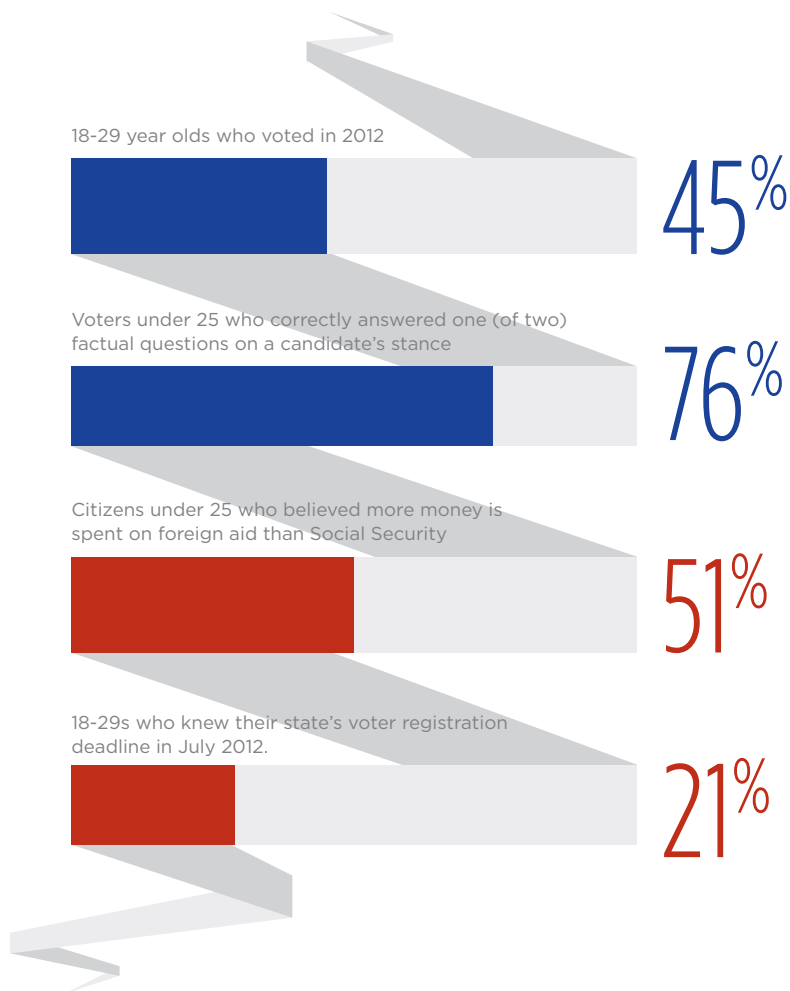
On the other hand, more than half of young people did *not* vote. And on some topics, most young people were misinformed. A majority (51.2%) of under 25-year-olds believed that the federal government spends more on foreign aid than on Social Security, when in fact Social Security costs about 20 times more. (Older adults have also been found to be misinformed on similar topics.) Our research, like many other studies, finds that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to be informed and to vote.

These shortcomings cannot be attributed to the schools alone, since families, friends, political campaigns, election officials, the mass media, social media, and community-based organizations are among the other important influences on young people. In fact, our research shows that while

schools matter, civic education must be a shared responsibility. The outcomes are acceptable only when all the relevant institutions invite, support, and educate young people to engage in politics and civic life. Improving the quality and quantity of youth participation will require new collaborations; for example, state election officials and schools should work together to make voting

Breaking the pattern of the past forty years will require new ideas and the active support of all sectors of society.

This report is intended to engage Americans in a new discussion, leading to experiments, partnerships, and reforms.



procedures understandable and to educate students about voting rules.

Some of the existing strategies for civic education are strongly supported by research and deserve to be maintained and expanded. For instance, teaching young people explicitly about politics and elections is related to higher levels of political knowledge; thus schools should be encouraged and supported to cover politics in classes that reach all students. Young adults are also more civically engaged if they discussed

underlying social and political problems in conjunction with service projects in high school.

The effects of policies are more difficult to estimate than the effects of educational strategies and practices. There are only 50 states, and they differ in many ways. We find that some policies probably have detrimental consequences. For example, young people without college experience who lived in the states with photo ID requirements were less likely to vote in 2012 than those who lived in other states, even when

we accounted for other factors that are related to voting. States with many restrictive measures in place on Election Day also saw lower turnout by non-college youth.

Research conducted for this report does not by any means rule out the benefits of some existing policies, such as mandatory courses and tests or convenient means of voter registration. However, the data collected for the Commission and previous studies suggest that none of the existing state policies has an impressive

positive effect. Certainly, the current policies in states and major school districts do not come close to achieving the goals of civic education, which are to provide *all* young people with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to be active and responsible citizens. Either the policies are misconceived, the quality of implementation is inadequate, or both.

For example, we find that testing civics has no positive impact, but that could be because the tests are not well designed, teachers are not well prepared and supported to teach the material, or the curriculum is misaligned with the tests. The quality of implementation requires more attention, and there is an urgent need to experiment with wholly new strategies and policies, some of which are suggested in this report.

Despite enormous shifts in the nature of campaigns and political issues, news and electronic media, the demographics of the youth population, and education policy and voting law, changes in youth turnout and civic knowledge have been limited since 1972. The average youth turnout (for ages 18-24) in presidential years from 1972-2012 was 43.7%. The rate in 2012 was just a bit below the mean at 41.2%. Since 1972, the 50% threshold has never been breached. Meanwhile, the best national data on civic knowledge—from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment—show very small changes since the 1970s.¹

Although levels of turnout and knowledge have not changed dramatically over time, the Commission believes that the present moment is a particularly challenging one for civic educators, whether they work in schools or other settings. Civic education is a low priority for most policymakers and private funders, and the very idea of trying to engage young people in politics has become controversial. Breaking the pattern of the past forty years will require new ideas and the active support of all sectors of society—including youth themselves. Just as we should teach young people to work together to address public problems—each contributing his or her assets and ideas—so people of all ages must collaborate to improve youth civic engagement. This report is intended to engage Americans in a new discussion about educating the next generation of voters, leading to experiments, partnerships, and reforms.

Main Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from the Commissioners' deliberations, which were informed by an in-depth analysis of prior research and extensive original research conducted during and after the 2012 election (see the next section for a summary of the new research). No single reform listed here is a panacea, but combining several of them would help build a supportive

YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP AS CITIZENS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF:

- Their own parents and family members;
- Schools and colleges;
- Peer groups, both in-person and online;
- Community groups and religious congregations;
- Neighborhood and community norms;
- National news and entertainment media;
- Social media; and
- The formal political system.

Civic education is best understood as a shared responsibility, requiring collaboration.

environment for youth civic learning and engagement. The main body of the report explains whether each of these recommendations is based on extensive experience and evaluation data or is a new idea that the Commissioners advocate on a pilot basis.

Selected recommendations for national, state, and local policymakers

- Make voting more accessible through reforms such as Same Day Registration; automatic registration of eligible high school students or pre-registration of 17-year-old students; and online registration with easy mobile updating.
- Implement state standards for civics that focus on developing advanced civic skills, such as deliberation and collaboration, rather than memorizing facts. Standards should be more challenging, more coherent, and more concerned with politics than the typical state standards in place today. Because these standards will be challenging, they will require both deep attention to civics within the social studies curriculum and support from other disciplines, such as English/language arts and the sciences.
- Experiment with assessments of civic skills that use portfolios of students' work instead of standardized tests. (This reform is currently being implemented in Tennessee, and the experience there will provide valuable lessons.)
- Enact state and district policies that support teachers' obligation to include discussions

of current, controversial political issues in the curriculum.

- Lower the voting age to 17 in municipal or state elections so that students can be encouraged to vote while they are taking a required civics class.
- Increase the scale and quality of national and community service programs that involve elements of deliberation, collaboration, and work on social issues, and make sure they are open to youth who do not attend college.

Selected recommendations for school districts and educators

- Implement high school course requirements with valid assessments that measure higher-order skills and the application of knowledge. Courses should teach the registration and voting process explicitly and engage students in following the news and deliberating about issues.
- Adopt explicit policies that protect teachers' careers if they teach about controversial issues, as long as they encourage discussion of diverse perspectives on those issues.
- Provide professional development that goes well beyond one-day events and that is available to all teachers, including those serving disadvantaged students.²
- Use assessment systems that reward students' discussion and investigation of current events and issues.

- Assign students to read and discuss news in class and with their parents or other adults.
- Teach in detail the current voting laws that apply in the state, as many young people do not know the specifics of the laws that govern voting in their own jurisdictions.
- Emphasize youth conducting community research and producing local journalism, with the twin goals of enhancing students' communications skills and making a contribution to the community in light of the severe gap in professional reporting.
- Provide standards, curricular materials, and professional development that ensure students discuss the root causes of social problems when they participate in service-learning and ensure that student groups address social issues.
- Strengthen standards and curricula for digital media literacy and coordinate digital media literacy and civic education.
- Implement multi-player role-playing video games as tools for civic education.

Recommendations for families and communities

Families and caring adults contribute to the younger generation's civic development in many ways. Families cannot be required to teach civic education, and even advice should be offered cautiously out of respect for families' autonomy and diversity. But in general, families should:

- Discuss current events (including upcoming elections) and political issues.
- Obtain and discuss high-quality news, to the extent possible.
- Encourage children to form and express their own views on current controversial issues.
- Support the discussion of controversial issues in schools.
- If eligible, vote, and talk to children about why they vote.
- Involve their children in out-of-school groups and organizations that address political and social concerns.
- Align states' high school civics curricula with voting reforms that encourage pre-registration in schools.
- Support the study of civics and government among college students who are headed for teaching careers.
- Hold contests and award certificates of civic achievement. Students enrolled in k-12 schools would be eligible, but community groups would participate in judging and awarding the prizes. Parents and other adults could also be eligible for awards.

Recommendations for collaboration

- Develop and support statewide coalitions that advocate for favorable policies and work to ensure that policies are well implemented. (For instance, as well as advocating a civics test, the coalition will help design a good test, align it with materials and curricula, and help provide professional development for teachers.)
- Award badges for excellence in civics. These portable, online certificates would demonstrate advanced civic skills, knowledge, and actual contributions. Badges could be designed and awarded by various institutions (e.g., schools and religious congregations), but the sectors should share ideas and set voluntary standards.
- Encourage parents to participate in civic activities within schools, e.g., by judging students' portfolios or by joining discussions of current events.

Research for this Report

To investigate the full range of influences on informed youth voting, CIRCLE organized and staffed a scholarly, nonpartisan commission. Research for the Commission was funded by the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, W.T. Grant Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Spencer Foundation and the Youth Engagement Fund. To inform the Commission's deliberations, CIRCLE conducted the following ambitious and original research projects in 2012-2013:

- **The Youth Engagement Fund polls:** CIRCLE conducted a nationally representative online survey of 1,695 youth (ages 18-29) in June/July 2012 and surveyed 1,109 of the same youth in October 2012 to track change during the campaign season.
- **The National Youth Survey:** Immediately after the election,

CIRCLE surveyed 4,483 representative individuals (ages 18-24) by cell phone and land-line phones. At least 75 participants came from each of the 50 states and Washington, DC (75-131 per state) to allow us to estimate the effects of state policies using a statistical model. Participants of Black and Hispanic backgrounds were slightly oversampled.

- **The Teacher Survey:** In May and June 2013, CIRCLE surveyed a national sample of high school government and social studies teachers. We collected 720 complete teacher responses.
- **Stakeholder interviews:** CIRCLE interviewed 15 stakeholders (nonprofit leaders and advocates, including young adults) and coded and summarized their ideas.
- **Analysis of national data:** CIRCLE analyzed National Exit Poll and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement (CPS Voting Supplement) data to calculate youth turnout and to examine relationships between turnout and laws at the state level.
- **Policy scans:** CIRCLE conducted a full scan of all the states' civic education policies and a separate scan of their teacher certification requirements. We categorized these laws to incorporate them in statistical models of the effects of policies on youth outcomes.
- **A literature review:** CIRCLE completed a comprehensive literature review, highlights of which are briefly summarized as Appendix A.

In all, we surveyed or interviewed 6,913 people (some more than once, to detect changes over time) and scanned the relevant laws of all 50 states plus the District of Columbia for the purpose of producing this report. Additional details are available in Appendix B.

About the Commission

The members of the Commission are among the most distinguished scholarly experts on youth political engagement, representing diverse disciplines and institutions. They studied and discussed the findings from the new research and then jointly wrote this report.

- David Campbell, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Rooney Center for the Study of American Democracy, the University of Notre Dame
- Constance Flanagan, Professor, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Lisa García Bedolla, Professor, Graduate School of Education, University of California, Berkeley
- Trey Grayson, Director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard University and former Secretary of State of Kentucky
- Eitan Hersh, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale University
- Diana Hess, Senior Vice President, the Spencer

Foundation and Professor of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison

- Joseph Kahne, Professor of Education at Mills College and Chair of the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics
- Alex Keyssar, Matthew W. Stirling Jr., Professor of History and Social Policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University
- Michael McDevitt, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Colorado, Boulder
- Richard G. Niemi, Don Alonzo Watson Professor of Political Science, University of Rochester
- Eric Plutzer, Professor of Political Science, Penn State University
- Debra Satz, Marta Sutton Weeks Professor of Ethics in Society and Professor of Philosophy, Stanford University
- Ismail K. White, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Ohio State University

Staff: CIRCLE provided research and other forms of support for the Commission. CIRCLE Director Peter Levine was the Principal Investigator on all the research efforts and coordinated the Commission. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, CIRCLE's Deputy Director, had primary responsibility for the research. Other key staff were: Surbhi Godsay, Researcher; Abby Kiesa, Youth Coordinator & Researcher; Kathy O'Connor,

Program Assistant; Felicia Sullivan, Senior Researcher; and Nancy Thomas, Director of CIRCLE's Initiative for the Study of Higher Education and Public Life.

New Data on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge

Many of the statistics and specific findings presented in this report have previously been released publicly under the aegis of the Commission. But this report is the first-ever presentation of several findings, such as the following:

- ★ For young people without college experience, the existence of a photo ID law in their state predicted lower turnout in 2012, even after we included many other potential explanations in our statistical models. (Future elections may differ from 2012, when the photo ID laws were highly controversial and actively opposed.)
- ★ Allowing people to register to vote on the same day that they vote had a positive effect on youth turnout in 2012, and that finding is consistent with previous research.
- ★ About one in four high school civics or American government teachers believe that the parents of their students or other adults in their community would object if they brought discussion of politics into the classroom.
- ★ Ninety percent of teachers believe that their principal would support their decision to teach about an election (and 46% would expect strong support from principals). But only 38% of teachers think they would get strong support from their district, and only 28% think parents would strongly support them. If teachers perceive strong support, they are significantly more likely to provide an open climate for discussion in class and tend to prefer more deliberative forms of discussion. Teachers with more experience are more likely to perceive support.
- ★ Attending racially diverse high schools predicted lower electoral engagement and lower levels of informed voting, probably because it is more difficult to discuss controversial issues in diverse contexts, and individuals feel less encouragement to participate politically when others around them disagree.³ On the other hand, discussion of controversial current issues in school and parental support for controversial discussions diminished the negative relationship between diversity and electoral engagement.
- ★ Only eight states (California, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia) include social studies in their assessments of schools' performance, usually as a very small proportion of the schools' scores.
- ★ Only ten states (Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, and Wisconsin) require teachers of government or civics to be certified in civics or government.



Young people do not automatically acquire the skills, knowledge, motivations, and values necessary to contribute to the republic; they must be educated and encouraged.

Challenges and Opportunities

Every generation needs civic education. Young people do not automatically acquire the skills, knowledge, motivations, and values necessary to contribute to the republic; they must be educated and encouraged. This principle has long been recognized.

The great champion of free public education, Horace Mann, wrote in 1846, “since the achievement of American independence, the universal and ever-repeated argument in favor of public schools has been that the general intelligence which they are capable of diffusing is indispensable to the continuance of republican government.”⁴

But each generation faces unique circumstances.

Today’s young people enter civic and political life at a time characterized by four interrelated trends, each of which poses special challenges and opportunities:

1. Deep polarization and ideological conflict

We are living in a period of bitter partisan and ideological conflict, especially in official political settings like the U.S. Congress. Americans disagree about political issues, but professional politicians are more polarized than the public and more polarized than political leaders used to be. In February 2013, 76% of registered voters said that American politics had become more divisive lately, 74% believed that this was a bad trend, and 55% agreed that the

parties were more divided than the public was.⁵

Polarization contributes to failures of governance, such as repeated fiscal crises in Washington, DC. The constant controversy and struggle for advantage also lead many Americans to disdain politics, to mistrust their

THE CHALLENGE:

Civic education is especially difficult when young people have good reasons to view politics as polarized and dysfunctional.

THE OPPORTUNITY:

Teaching a new generation to be civil, responsible, and constructive citizens may be part of the solution to our polarized and dysfunctional politics.

fellow citizens, and sometimes to view other Americans' political participation with hostility. Although low trust for Congress is widely known, it may be just as significant that "a dwindling majority (57%) [of Americans] say they have a good deal of confidence in the wisdom of the American people when it comes to making political decisions."⁶

Young people are special targets of suspicion. Commissioners are struck by the controversy about whether youth voting is desirable, and whether promoting it can be a nonpartisan goal. In one of our stakeholder interviews (see Appendix B5), Rob "Biko" Baker, the Executive Director

of the League of Young Voters, said, "The worst thing is that civic engagement, generally, has become a partisan issue." ("The best thing," he added, "is that young people are connected, smart, and are able to lift up above the partisan nature of our political system.") Cynicism about the capacity of youth to be responsible citizens leaves educators and policymakers little room to propose reforms that entail some risk but potentially high returns. Beyond making specific suggestions for reforms, the Commission hopes to encourage the spirit of tolerance and goodwill conducive to innovation.

Disagreements among national elites involve not only values and goals for society, but also basic factual issues regarding science and economics. In designing the National Youth Survey, we found it difficult to write politically neutral, purely factual questions, because so many premises about the issues—and even about where the major parties' candidates stood on the issues—were hotly contested. For a young person, political discourse as a whole can be confusing and may promote blanket skepticism or cynicism, and we should acknowledge that this is both a rational response and one intended by those who would poison the well of civil deliberation.

In that survey, just 22% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 could choose the issue of greatest importance to themselves and answer two (out of two) factual questions about the candidates' positions on that issue. Although the

Commission is concerned about civic education, one explanation for these low scores may be that the presidential campaign was confusing and was reported in confusing ways.

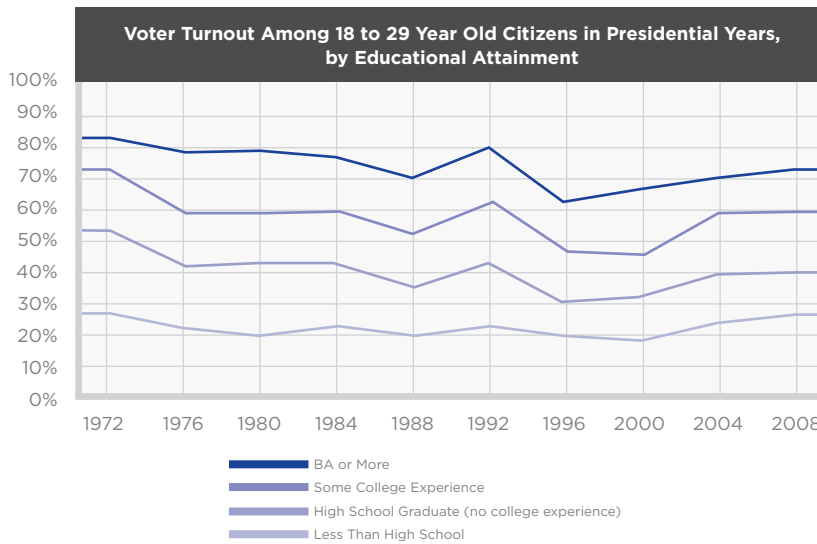
In a separate study that CIRCLE conducted during the 2012 election campaign for the Democracy Fund, more than 80 percent of a random sample of adults said that campaign advertising frequently depends on selective evidence or information taken out of context. In open-ended responses, an outright majority of this sample took the opportunity to denounce political advertising in very general and often furious ways. One comment—"It is rampant and I despise it"—succinctly captures the spirit of those responses. Some respondents shifted the blame to fellow citizens, whom they described in scathing terms, e.g., "It's a sad state of affairs that the political advertising used today is effective because of a largely ignorant electorate."⁷

Members of the Commission disagree about how to evaluate aspects of the current American political system. For instance, the Commissioners hold mixed feelings about negative ads, which may alienate people from politics but also tend to be substantive.⁸ Some Commissioners regard the hundreds of millions of dollars in political advertising as a sign of corruption; others view this as evidence that Americans are actively participating in politics by making campaign contributions.

RELEVANT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enact state and district policies that support teachers' obligation to include discussions of current, controversial political issues in the curriculum.
- Assign students to read and discuss news in class and with their parents or other adults.
- Implement state standards for civics that focus on developing advanced civic skills, such as deliberation and collaboration, rather than memorizing facts. Standards should be more challenging, more coherent, and more concerned with politics than the typical state standards in place today.

Table 1: Voter Turnout Among 18 to 29 Year Old Citizens



But the American people clearly regard the political process as dysfunctional, and the Commission understands the public's critical stance. Civic education cannot be just a matter of teaching and persuading young people to participate in the existing system; it must acknowledge deep-seated and understandable critiques of politics. Young people are still at a formative stage in their development, and our political process may be confusing them and teaching them to distrust institutions, their fellow citizens, and most sources of news and information.

At the same time, civic education that emphasizes deliberative values, critical thinking, and collaboration looks increasingly important and attractive. One teacher we surveyed said, "Especially given the political divide in America today, teaching civil discourse is vital." Virtually all of the teachers we surveyed said that their students were free to disagree openly with them about political and social issues. All of them said that students should make up their

own minds about issues. Sixty-five percent said that it was "definitely" an important duty of citizens "to discuss political issues civilly with people who hold very different views."

In the best civics classes and out-of-school civic programs, diverse young people discuss important issues with civility, creativity, reliable information, and a shared desire to address public problems. These opportunities are antidotes to the worst features of our official politics. What works well in civic learning—e.g., encouraging youth to exchange opinions in open and respectful climates—is also what the larger political system needs. By contrast, trying to shield students from rancorous politics is unnecessarily defensive, if not harmful. Some scholars believe that the discomfort many adults feel about political discussion could be due to their lack of participation in political dialogue when they were children and teenagers.⁹ Perhaps the surest way to ensure incivility in American culture is to take politics out of political education.

2. Growing inequality of civic opportunities

The national college attendance gap exemplifies the deep inequality of our educational institutions. Even though a college degree has become the main gateway to the middle class, about half of young people do not obtain any college credits, and most in that group come from lower-income communities. American children in the top quarter of the income distribution have an 80% chance of attending college while they are young adults, whereas young Americans whose families are in the bottom quarter of the income distribution have just a 17% chance of entering college.¹⁰

THE CHALLENGE:

Almost all of the most inspiring and intellectually challenging forms of civic education—both in school and out of school—are available disproportionately to advantaged young people.

THE OPPORTUNITY:

K-12 education can reach everyone and has the potential to promote civic and political equality as well as skills useful for school and work.

Economic stratification has worsened since the 1980s. A Century Foundation task force finds that the proportion of students who come from the bottom quarter of the socioeconomic distribution grew in the community college population while it decreased significantly in the four-year college population. Today, the socioeconomically least advantaged students represent 28% of community college enrollment but less than 10% at “very,” “highly,” and “most” competitive colleges.¹¹

Levels of civic engagement are also unequal. Young adults who had attended college voted at almost twice the rate of their non-college-educated peers in 2012.¹² The gap in

engagement by education has been consistent since the voting age was lowered to 18 in 1972.

Meanwhile, rates of participation in churches, voluntary associations, grassroots political parties, and unions, as well as readership of daily news, have fallen for working-class young people, who report a deep lack of opportunity to learn and practice citizenship.¹³ Civic engagement looks especially daunting for young adults who lack strong connections to organizations and who struggle with long hours, economic insecurity, needs in their families and households, and debt. Chrissy Faessen, Vice President for Marketing and Communications for Rock the Vote, reflected on this civic opportunity gap, saying, “when we enter classrooms in under-served communities, or when we bring in an artist ambassador to help deliver our message, and we ask students, ‘What issues do you care about?’ it’s typically the first time they’ve ever been asked that.”

Civics continues to be well taught in some advantaged communities, but much less so in schools that serve low-income and minority youth.¹⁴ Both class and race are related to a lower likelihood of scoring in the “proficient” range on the NAEP Civics Assessment, but the gap is even larger when we compare White, wealthy students to Black or Hispanic students who come from less affluent backgrounds. White, wealthy students are four to six times as likely as Hispanic or Black students who come

from low-income households to exceed the “proficient” cut-off. Not only are White and wealthy students more likely to receive recommended civic education experiences in school, but the content and topics they discuss and the way these are presented are often tailored to White and middle-class students rather than students of color and poor students.¹⁵

The educational reform movements of the last 20 years have generally overlooked civics, thereby allowing disparities to persist and grow. As the United States Department of Education acknowledged in 2012, “unfortunately, civic learning and democratic engagement are add-ons rather than essential parts of the core academic mission in too many schools and on too many college campuses today.”¹⁶

Indeed, just nine states require students to pass a social studies test in order to graduate from high school, and just eight states have standardized tests that cover civics/American government.¹⁷ Only eight states include social studies in their overall assessments of school performance, usually as a very small proportion of the schools’ scores. In 2013, the NAEP Civics Assessment was canceled because of budget cuts while other NAEP assessments went ahead. States such as California that require high school civics only in the 12th grade overlook the many young people who have dropped out before then.

RELEVANT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make voting more accessible through reforms such as Same Day Registration; automatic registration of eligible high school students or pre-registration of 17-year-old students; and online registration with easy mobile updating.
- Increase the scale and quality of national and community service programs that involve elements of deliberation, collaboration, and work on social issues, and make sure they are open to youth who do not attend college.
- Provide professional development that goes well beyond one-day events and that is available to all teachers, including those serving disadvantaged students.

Unequal opportunities are especially unfortunate because high-quality civic education is sometimes found to provide the greatest benefits to least advantaged students.¹⁸ In analyzing the 2012 National Youth Survey, we found that discussion of controversial issues in schools was most beneficial for students who lacked experience with political discussion at home, and those individuals came disproportionately from low-income families. Other research shows that an open climate for classroom expression engenders increased attention to news and political media and discussion between parents and children in Latino families, on topics such as immigration and access to higher education.¹⁹ On the other hand, CIRCLE's analysis of the NAEP Civics data found that discussion, debate, and role-playing simulations in school boosted civic knowledge more for advantaged students than for disadvantaged students, which points to the need for materials, activities, and professional development that address the special needs of disadvantaged youth.²⁰

When young people experience high-quality civic education, they can gain skills, networks, confidence, and interests that are also useful in college and the workforce. For example, young adolescents who begin high school with similar backgrounds and achievement levels are much more likely to graduate and attend college if they participate in community service through high school courses or serve on student

government.²¹ Randomized experiments have also found educational and health benefits from programs that involve community service and activism.²² These positive outcomes provide additional reasons not to tolerate deep inequalities in the availability of civic education.

“
Women's sense of their own leadership potential falls during the college years, while men's rises.
”

Inequality takes other forms as well. For example, conservative and Republican youth have been much less likely to participate in the last two national elections compared to their peers with centrist or liberal views.²³ Recent research adds that conservatives are less likely to participate in dissemination of news content

in social media,²⁴ although we will have more to say below on the vast opportunities afforded by social media once harnessed in civic education.

Research also indicates that civic education is not affording young women an equal desire to become politically engaged and to represent their communities. College women are less likely than men to aspire to political careers at a local and national level,²⁵ to discuss politics on a regular basis, and to believe they have the leadership qualities, competitiveness, and social competency that would qualify them for office.²⁶ Women's sense of their own leadership potential falls during the college years, while men's rises.²⁷ These factors may partly explain why women represent just 18.3% of Congress and 17.5% of city mayors.²⁸

On the other hand, young African Americans, who are on average less engaged in most forms of civic engagement than Whites, voted at the highest rate of any young racial/ethnic group in 2008 and 2012, and they came close to young Whites in several previous elections before Barack Obama was a national candidate. Given the longstanding history of systematic discrimination against African Americans and persistent inequality in education and employment, this is an important reminder that things can change for the better.

THE CHALLENGE:

Civic education (in and out of school) must reflect the backgrounds and circumstances of diverse young people, and schools must encourage discussions of difficult issues when their students have highly diverse backgrounds.

THE OPPORTUNITY:

Diverse young people enrich discussions and collaborations in their schools, communities, and the nation. Civic education can meet a national need to prepare young people to deliberate and collaborate with diverse fellow citizens.

3. An increasingly diverse youth population

Effective civic education must meet young people where they are and address their needs and values, while also drawing them into a common public life.

Today's young people are diverse to an unprecedented degree. More than one quarter of young Americans (ages 18-29) have at least one parent who was born in a country other than the United States. Thirty-eight percent of the 18-29s are people of color.

In a racially and culturally diverse America, students and their families have different experiences with politics and government and hold varying

political philosophies that fall well within the appropriate range of debate. One size does not fit all: civic education must be attentive to diverse perspectives and must honor students' experiences and the cultural context of the communities in which they live.²⁹ At the same time, an important goal is to bring diverse young Americans into a common conversation about the public good.

Although diverse, today's young people experience pervasively segregated schools and communities. For example, the national youth population is multiracial, but only 15.2% of White public school students attend multiracial schools, those with at least a tenth of their students coming from three or more groups.³⁰

Previous research has revealed that discussions of current issues are least common in racially diverse schools.³¹ Our analysis of the 2012 National Youth Survey adds that students who attend multiracial schools are least likely to discuss current events with families and friends. Also, when other factors are held constant, we find that young adults are less likely to vote if they attended racially diverse schools. It may appear harder to broach difficult topics and to encourage participation if the student body is diverse. At the same time, our analysis shows that when young people attend diverse schools and experience discussions of current events or belong to extracurricular groups that address social problems, they are more engaged and knowledgeable.

A diverse but internally segregated high school can be seen as a microcosm of 21st Century young America. Discussions of current events and collaborative action are more difficult—but also more necessary and potentially more fruitful—because of the diversity.

4. A powerful role for social media

Young people are the most avid and creative users of new media, which penetrate almost all aspects of their lives. In 2012, 92% of youth (18-29) in the United States used at least one social media site, up from just 8% in 2005.³² Forty-four percent of young adults who used a social media site promoted political material by posting or “liking” it.³³

Increasingly, core acts of civic and political engagement such as raising money, mobilization

RELEVANT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Experiment with assessments of civic skills that use portfolios of students' work instead of standardized tests.
- Provide standards, curricular materials, and professional development that ensure students discuss the root causes of social problems when they participate in service-learning and that student groups address social issues.
- Award badges for excellence in civics.

THE CHALLENGE:

Obtaining information online requires special literacy skills, and social media may contribute to political polarization when people share material from like-minded sources.

THE OPPORTUNITY:

Social media offer new venues for engagement and dialogue and new ways to interact constructively. There are new opportunities to tap social practices to foster more widespread and equitable civic and political participation.

for action, discussion of issues, and circulation of both information and perspectives rely on digital media. As recent campaigns against Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) illustrate, large numbers of young people can quickly mobilize online. With their low cost and broad reach, social media are able to draw people with common interests together, even over vast distances. The immediacy of social media also means that online discussions of political issues can be held in “real time.”

Of particular relevance, social media appear to enable forms of participatory politics that expand opportunities for youth to engage civically and politically in ways that promote their voice and sometimes their influence.³⁴

These participatory politics are interactive, draw on young people’s social networks, and are not guided by institutions (political parties, newspaper editors, or large non-profit and for-profit organizations). Actions might include writing or commenting on a blog about a social issue or circulating information or perspectives via social media. Drawing as they do on practices that are part of the lives of most youth, it is perhaps not surprising that they are increasingly common.³⁵ In addition, many youth now get their news through participatory channels. Forty-five percent of youth reported getting news on political issues at least once a week from family and friends via Facebook and Twitter. By way of comparison, 49% reported getting such news from a newspaper or magazine (online or offline combined).³⁶

In addition to the sheer frequency of use, several factors make digital media particularly significant for youth.

First, social media create more space for youth leadership and active engagement than do major political institutions, which rarely give youth significant roles. Drawing on social media, youth can be actively engaged in consuming, circulating, discussing, curating, and producing civic and political content.

Second, youth engagement in participatory politics is more equitably distributed by race and income than are youth voting or adult participation

in civic and political life.³⁷ Kahne and Middaugh report that Internet access “varies only a fraction among the four racial groups we studied—all above 94%.”³⁸ Recent research shows that participation in social media empowers Latino youth as information leaders in immigrant communities.³⁹

Third, social media have the potential to allow diverse young people to interact even when their schools and neighborhoods are segregated.

We see great value in connecting social media with the civics curriculum so that the attributes of digital interaction—spontaneity, access, and assertion of political voice—are guided by the deliberative principles of formal instruction. Many programs and platforms have and are being developed for youth both in and out of school. These programs and platforms connect social media to youth interests and youth networks as a means

RELEVANT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Emphasize in the curriculum youth conducting community research and producing local journalism.
- Strengthen standards and curricula for digital media literacy and coordinate digital media literacy and civic education.
- Implement multiplayer role-playing video games as tools for civic education.

of energizing and deepening learning and engagement in civic and political life (see examples in Appendix C).

However, online groups can often create “echo chambers,” as shared interests reinforce shared political views.⁴⁰ Rather than exposing citizens to the healthy give-and-take of democratic debate, social media may reinforce their political predispositions, potentially spreading the partisan rancor so common among our elected officials. Young people can also fail to develop a “public voice” capable of affecting public opinion if they mostly interact with peer groups online.⁴¹

Social media enable youth and adults to circumvent gatekeepers who historically helped vet information. Youth will need digital media literacy skills to critically engage with all the information (and misinformation) they can now find online, to seek out a range of perspectives, and to be thoughtful about the content they circulate and create.⁴² Linda Nguyen, Director of Civic Engagement for the Alliance for Children and Families, told us in a stakeholder interview, “I don’t know if there’s a lack of [sources for political information]. It’s more about who can you trust? Who are the trusted sources and how are we supporting those trusted sources?” In our Teacher Survey, all the respondents agreed that students must learn to identify credible information, and all but a handful of teachers also thought that students must learn to produce credible

information. But often schools and after-school contexts lack the infrastructure to enable youth to engage online, and policies often prevent digital activity in educational settings.

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Youth will need digital media literacy skills to critically engage with all the information (and misinformation) they can now find online, to seek out a range of perspectives, and to be thoughtful about the content they circulate and create.

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Just as young people must be free to adopt and express their own views, they must also be taught and expected to interact with peers and older citizens in ways that involve genuinely understanding alternative views, learning from these discussions, and collaborating on common goals.

Fundamental Goals

Civic education (defined broadly) addresses a wide range of social concerns. For example, it is important for young people to belong to supportive groups and to develop positive relationships with peers and adults. Helping children, adolescents, and young adults build such networks is one role for civic education. In the late 1990s, concerns about increasingly disconnected young people came to the fore and contributed to the movement for service-learning in k-12 schools.⁴³

Disconnection remains a concern, and enlisting young people in voluntary groups is

still a valid objective. However, in the Commission's view, different objectives have emerged as urgent priorities today. These are compelling needs because of the difficult context sketched above.

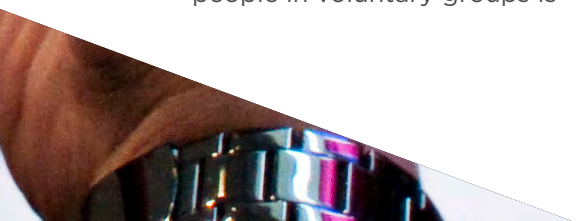
1. Free expression and civil deliberation

Young people need the space and encouragement to form and refine their own positions on political issues, even if their views happen to be controversial. Adults, schools, political officials, and youth themselves must adopt a generally tolerant and

welcoming attitude toward this process of developing and expressing a political identity.

In the National Youth Survey, discussions of current issues predicted greater electoral engagement. We also find that when parents encouraged their adolescent children to express opinions and disagreements, these young people had higher electoral engagement, political knowledge, and informed voting in 2012. Teachers in our Teacher Survey put a high priority on civic discussion.

Just as young people must be free to adopt and express their own views, they must also be taught and expected to



interact with peers and older citizens in ways that involve genuinely understanding alternative views, learning from these discussions, and collaborating on common goals.

2. Equality and quality of political engagement

The electorate should represent the American people as a whole. As noted above, low-income young people, people of color, and young people from immigrant backgrounds receive less effective civic education, both inside schools and in families and communities. Low-income and Latino youth participate at much lower rates. Meanwhile, Republican youth have been disproportionately disengaged in the past decade. Young women are less encouraged, and are less confident in their abilities, to seek leadership roles in public life.

Civic education is relevant to these gaps because, when done well, it can motivate and excite students to participate. Besides, political influence requires knowledge. Voting confers no power unless the voter understands issues, candidates, and political institutions at the local as well as state, national, and global levels. Thus the quality of engagement (in this case, defined in terms of knowledge) is closely related to equality; both are essential.

In analyzing the 2012

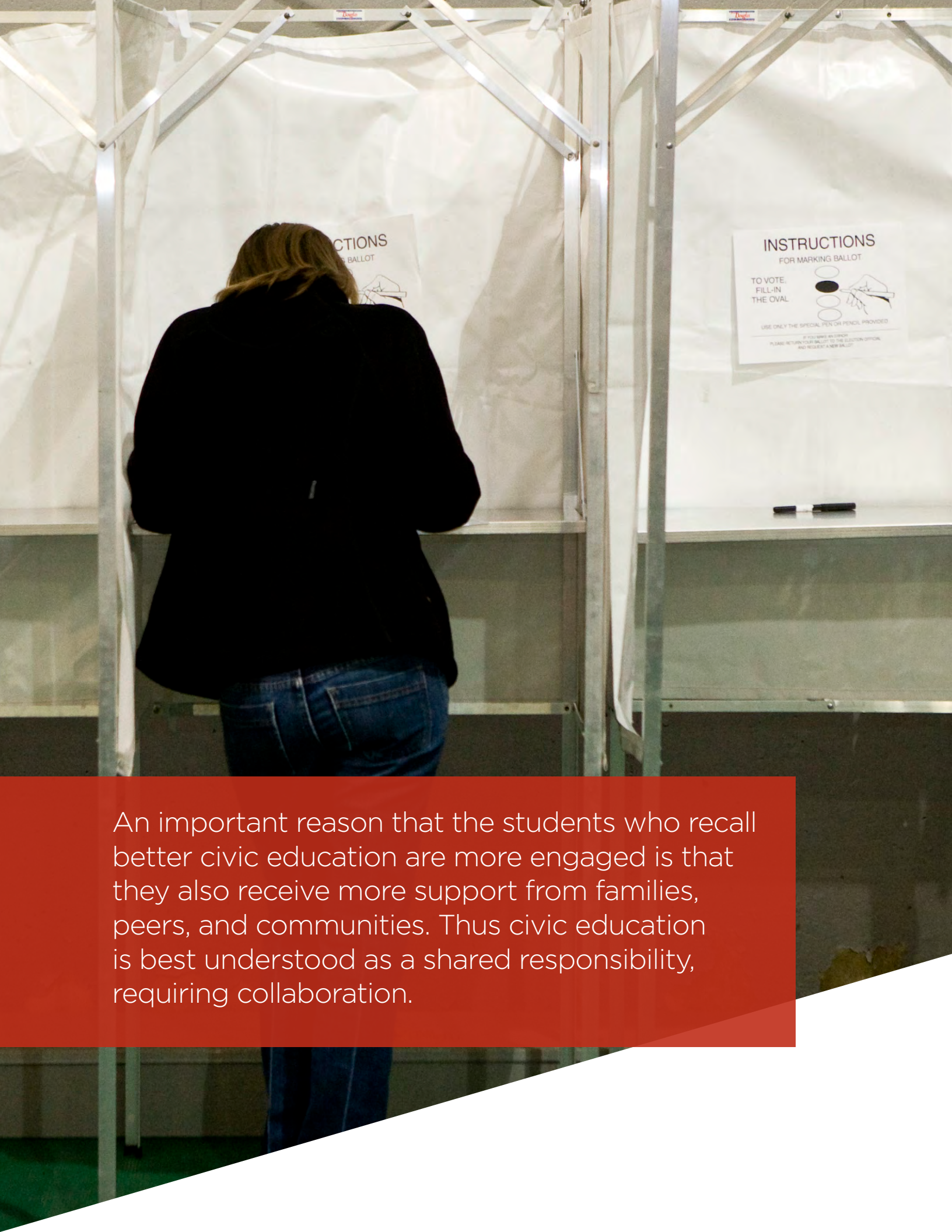
National Youth Survey, CIRCLE defined “informed voting” as registering, voting, answering at least one (out of two) campaign knowledge questions correctly, answering four or more general political knowledge questions correctly, voting consistently with one’s personal opinion on a campaign issue of one’s choice, and following the news fairly or very closely during the election season. Overall, just 10.3% met all of these criteria for informed voting. The proportion rose to 28% if individuals who met five out of the six criteria were included. People with more educational attainment and people who had experienced high quality civics in high school all scored above average.

The rates of knowledge and engagement should be higher and more equal. At a time when media organizations are either partisan or not investing in serious journalism (or both), it is especially important to promote civic knowledge among young people.

“Quality” can be defined to encompass more than knowledge and voting consistently with one’s own values. It can also include ethics and sense of purpose, meaning “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something both meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self.”⁴⁴ Excellent programs for civic engagement always aim at some kind of quality, but they have understandably diverse conceptions of the good

citizen, and we need both a wide array of such programs and a vibrant discussion of what constitutes excellence in citizenship.⁴⁵





An important reason that the students who recall better civic education are more engaged is that they also receive more support from families, peers, and communities. Thus civic education is best understood as a shared responsibility, requiring collaboration.



Recommendations

1. Stitch together a quilt of helpful policies

Concerned Americans often respond to data about low civics test scores or poor voter turnout with a simple suggestion directed at a single institution. For example, they may call for civics to be taught and tested in k-12 schools. Youth as well as older adults typically support this idea in surveys, and some of the stakeholders we interviewed called for it. But, according to the 2012 National Youth Survey and federal data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, nearly 90% of high school students already take at least one civics class. Most states have course requirements in civics, and almost all civics teachers test their students.

The 2012 National Youth Survey reveals a very strong relationship between recalling interactive and engaging civics experiences in high

school and being politically engaged as a young adult. But that relationship diminishes once we take into account the individual's educational success and family background (see Appendix B1 for details). Relying on previous research, the Commission still argues that civics courses matter, but their impact is relatively modest and depends heavily on the quality of instruction and whether young people see the topics in their social studies classes as relevant to current issues and their own lives. An important reason that the students who recall better civic education are more engaged is that they also receive more support from families, peers, and communities. Thus civic education is best understood as a shared responsibility, requiring collaboration.

Another common suggestion is to make voting easier. Of all the proposed voting reforms, the one that has the best empirical support is allowing citizens to register on the same day that they vote. In

previous research, Same-Day Registration (SDR) has been found to boost youth turnout, although the impacts are modest.⁴⁶

We looked closely at the election of 2012 (see Appendices B2 and B3 for details). That year may not set a reliable precedent for subsequent elections, because restrictive laws were new, in rapid flux, and subject to much explicit discussion and pushback. Nevertheless, we found:

- SDR was a significant predictor of higher youth turnout in the 2012 election, even when we also considered individual demographic background indicators such as education, race, gender, marital status, and unemployment status, and statewide characteristics such as the poverty rate, the adult turnout rate in 2010, and whether the state was politically contested in 2012.
- Young people without college education were both more

affected by the restrictive measures and more responsive to measures that facilitated voting. They were less likely to vote if their states had introduced photo ID laws (whether those laws were in effect or not) or put any limit on when and where people could register to vote. The total number of restrictive measures also predicted lower turnout for non-college youth, after accounting for factors such as gender, race, age, educational attainment (i.e., number of years of education completed), employment status,

the competitiveness of the race, and the state's poverty rate. At the same time, non-college youth were more likely to vote, according to our model, when their state had passed or implemented SDR. The positive effect of SDR was particularly important when their states also had a number of restrictive measures. Thus it appears that SDR can counteract the effects of voter restrictions on the populations most affected by those restrictions.

Research has not ruled out other effects of state policies. Some effects could have been missed because of limitations in the data and analytical methods. For instance, it is possible that some restrictive voting laws enacted in 2012 had negative effects that were canceled out by grassroots campaigns that made “voter suppression” into a rallying cry. Biko Baker of the League of Young Voters told us that Voter ID laws “became the reasons why people were mobilizing.”

Table 2: Summary of State Policy Effects

POLICY	OUTCOME		
	Voter turnout (as measured by the CPS Voting Supplement)	Political engagement (as measured by the National Youth Survey)	Political or civic knowledge (as measured by the National Youth Survey and the Knight Foundation's Future of the First Amendment Survey)
State civics course requirements or test requirements	No effects detected	No effects detected	No effects detected
Photo ID requirements	Negative impact for non-college youth only	No effects detected	No effects detected
Same Day Registration (SDR)	Positive impact in previous studies and in our 2012 model	No effects detected	No effects detected
Restrictions on registration (e.g., a shortened registration period or limits on who may register voters)	Negative impact for non-college youth	No effects detected	No effects detected
Sum of all restrictive voting laws	Negative for non-college youth and for White youth in 2012	No effects detected	No effects detected

This table is based on CIRCLE's analysis of 2012 data and Lopez et al.⁴⁷

Indeed, states that restricted early voting before the 2012 election saw marginally higher youth turnout than other states, according to CIRCLE's statistical model, which may suggest that campaigning against the restrictions worked. But if that is true, then restrictive laws may have a negative impact in subsequent years, when the grassroots campaigns are weaker.

In any case, research has repeatedly confirmed the following pattern: Young people's civic engagement is strongly related to their individual and family experiences—for example, whether they receive engaging civic education in school, discuss politics at home, or are contacted by a political campaign. The outcomes—voting and knowledge—vary from state to state. State policies regarding civic education and voting laws also vary. But once we consider all the relevant factors together in one statistical model, the impact of the state laws themselves either vanishes or becomes very small. That is particularly true of policies whose stated purpose is to increase engagement.

Further support for that conclusion comes from the fact that state laws regarding voter registration, voting, civic education, and education (more generally) have changed dramatically since 1972, yet both youth turnout and political knowledge show modest changes over that time.

If we hold—and wish to convey—a positive attitude

toward youth engagement, we should enact practical reforms that make a positive difference, even if the effect of each reform is relatively small. Some examples include:

- **Same Day Registration and other voting reforms that are found to be equally or more effective than SDR at increasing youth turnout:** At this time, SDR has the best research support, but it is not a panacea, and it is best viewed as an example of a policy that makes registration less of a barrier to voting. The most popular suggestion in our stakeholder interviews was automatic registration of all high school students who are citizens. Another option, online registration with easy mobile updating, has been found to save Washington and Arizona considerable money while also serving voters well.⁴⁸ A third promising approach is establishing voter preregistration at age 16 in order to facilitate voter registration programs at the DMV and in high schools, ideally twinned with voter education and automatic activation of preregistrants upon reaching voting age. FairVote has sparked successful advocacy for this proposal in eight states, including Colorado, Florida, Maryland, and North Carolina. In general, these proposals have not been tested in statistical models. We did test online registration and found it unrelated to turnout in 2012. But it could be improved with, for example, automated reminders to vote.
- **Course requirements in high schools, with valid assessments that measure higher-order skills and the application**

of knowledge to current

events: Some Commissioners specifically advocate a course on Electoral Participation that covers the registration and voting process explicitly (in a session or two) and devotes the rest of the semester to following the news and studying and deliberating about issues. CIRCLE's analysis of the National Youth Survey finds that young adults who recalled being told to vote by a high school teacher and who remembered being taught specifically about voting in high school were more knowledgeable and more likely to vote in 2012 (holding constant the other factors measured in the survey).

- **State standards for civics that focus on developing advanced civic skills, such as deliberation and collaboration, rather than memorizing facts:** Standards should be more challenging, more coherent, and more concerned with politics than the typical state standards in place today. Because these standards will be challenging, they will require both deep attention to civics within the social studies curriculum and support from other disciplines such as English/language arts and the sciences.
- **Policies that encourage discussion of current, controversial issues and that protect teachers' careers when they encourage such discussion:** Again, the National Youth Survey and other research finds that young adults who experienced such discussions in adolescence are more knowledgeable and more engaged. But many teachers told us that they would expect opposition from parents if they

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What happens at home, and what happens on the playground, and what happens in sports, and clubs, and all these other activities that kids are involved with, are part of a kid's citizenship education.

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discussed an election, and only 38% of teachers thought the district would strongly support them in such cases.

- **Community service programs open to youth who do not attend college and that involve elements of deliberation, collaboration, and work on social issues:** YouthBuild transforms some deeply marginalized young people into dedicated civic leaders.⁴⁹ AmeriCorps programs have positive effects on young people's political engagement, with the biggest effects on less-advantaged participants. Specific elements of these programs that boost civic engagement include the diversity of the Corps teams (which is helpful for all participants), opportunities to contribute to and be a part of the community (which especially benefit less advantaged Corps members), and opportunities for leadership.⁵⁰

We must resist policies that convey a skeptical attitude toward young people's participation and that create new costs and barriers. For example, restrictions on who may register voters can be perceived as exclusionary. Photo ID laws also seem likely to convey a negative attitude, unless citizens can get help obtaining IDs and the photo ID laws come as part of a package that also includes SDR or other provisions to make voting more convenient. CIRCLE's analysis of the Census Bureau's 2012 voting data found that the existence of a photo ID law did not predict turnout levels for youth as a whole. But photo ID laws were a negative factor for young adults who

had no college background. Further, CIRCLE's Youth Engagement Fund polls (see Appendix B1) found that most young people did not know the rules in place in their own state, and many erroneously believed that photo IDs were required. The patchwork of constantly changing and often burdensome voting laws creates an inhospitable climate, when we should be trying to encourage informed participation.

In addition to enacting positive reforms and resisting policies that convey negative views of youth voting, we must try entirely new strategies. Those are explored in the following pages.

2. Involve Families

Young people develop as citizens under the influence of:

- their own parents and family members;
- schools and colleges;
- peers, both in-person and online;
- community groups and religious congregations;
- neighborhood and community norms;
- national news and entertainment media;
- social media; and
- the formal political system.

As Marcie Taylor-Thoma of the Maryland State Department of Education told us, “what happens at home, and what

happens on the playground, and what happens in sports, and clubs, and all these other activities that kids are involved with, are part of a kid's citizenship education."

Previous research and CIRCLE's 2012 National Youth Survey underscore the importance of each of these factors, with perhaps the strongest effects attributable to parents and peer groups. The influence of parents and other adults may be increasing. As more young people live with their parents well into their 20s and take longer to make the transition to adulthood, parents seem to have stronger relationships with their adolescent and young-adult children than in past generations.⁵¹

Our analysis of the National Youth Survey (see Appendix B2 for details) finds that parents' encouraging their adolescent children to express opinions and disagreements predicted their electoral engagement, political knowledge, and informed voting in 2012.

Parents cannot be required to educate their children for citizenship in particular ways. Even advice must be offered cautiously, since families are diverse and complex, and no single style of civic education is appropriate in all homes. Schools and educators should be sensitive to various parenting styles and to differences in the ways that families relate to the US political system, depending on their historical and current experiences with politics and government.

However, in general, families should:

- Discuss current events (including upcoming elections) and political issues,
- Obtain and discuss high-quality news, to the extent possible,
- Encourage children to form and express their own views on current controversial issues,
- If eligible, vote—and talk to children about why they vote,
- Support the discussion of controversial issues in schools, and
- When possible, involve their children in out-of-school groups and organizations that address political and social concerns.

Schools should also find ways to engage parents in their children's civic education.

3. Support Teachers

The burden for increasing civic learning and engagement, clearly, cannot rest on the shoulders of teachers alone, but they represent an essential asset for increasing civic engagement and learning. Our survey of high school civics and government instructors (The Teacher Survey described in Appendix B4) may have drawn a sample somewhat biased toward active and concerned educators; nonetheless, they reported a very high degree of commitment to their schools' civic mission. Ninety-eight percent said that it was very important or essential to teach students to embrace the

responsibilities of citizenship, such as voting and jury duty.

When asked for their "general thoughts about the value of teaching about voting and political engagement," one teacher replied, "Why is this an issue? Of course we teach politics. How would the country run otherwise?" Another said, "It's why I get up at 5:30 a.m. every morning... My passion for voting and engagement make every class seem vital."

When a controversy arises in the news, these teachers tend to use it as an opportunity for civil debates (94.2%) rather than avoid it at the risk of offending parents or distracting the class (5.8%).

Our analysis of the National Youth Survey also indicates some important benefits of good teaching:

- The quality of high school civics classes (defined by the number of research-based pedagogical practices that the respondents recalled) marginally predicted young adults' electoral engagement and predicted their informed voting in 2012.
- Experiencing service-learning in high school predicted civic engagement in 2012 if the service-learning involved discussion of root causes of the problem underlying the service experience. When service was required without a discussion of root causes, it appeared to have a negative effect on civic engagement.
- Being told to vote by a high school teacher and learning about voting predicted electoral engagement in 2012.

- Specifically being taught about voting in high school predicted political knowledge in 2012.
- More extracurricular participation in high school was associated with higher political knowledge today.⁵²

The finding about extracurricular activities is relevant to all teachers, but government and civics teachers certainly play important roles in advising student groups. In our Teacher Survey, 73% of the respondents said that they advised at least one group or team. Of those, 24% oversaw two groups and 18% advised three or more groups. They most commonly coached a sports team (30%), followed by student government (15%), a service club (15%), a debate team (7%), or an arts and culture club (5%).

Despite the important benefits that teachers provide, the Teacher Survey—and previous research—reveals the challenges that they face.

First, it is not easy to introduce and facilitate classroom discussions about controversial issues wisely and fairly and in ways that benefit all students. There is certainly a dearth of compelling examples of civil discussion in the media and public life. Yet many teachers have learned how to lead high quality discussions of even the most controversial political issues.⁵³ Teachers need opportunities to learn inclusive discussion-based teaching skills from specialists and from one another. A typical teacher in our survey reported having had just two

professional development (PD) experiences in civics, and 18% reported none. The most common training lasted up to one day. If teachers said they had experienced multi-day PD for civics, they were more likely to feel support from their principal and district and more likely to encourage political discussions among their students. Teachers were more likely to receive PD if they taught in more affluent communities, if they worked with college-bound students, if their schools had higher daily attendance rates, and if they perceived support for teaching about elections. In other words, the teachers with the most need for professional development were least likely to receive it.

Teachers can also be prepared to teach civics before they enter the profession. Shawn Healy, Civic Learning & Engagement Scholar at the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, told us, “I do think from an institutionalization perspective, we should focus a lot more on pre-service teachers and what types of training they have... that prepare them to teach for democracy once they enter the classroom full-time. I think that’s a major oversight.”

Indeed, only 10 states require instructors who teach civics or government classes to have certification in that specific field. In most states, certification in any social studies area—often, history—will count for civics. Although adding a certification requirement might have disadvantages, most states lack any policy

to ensure that their civics and government teachers are well qualified. For example, Marcie Taylor-Thoma of the Maryland State Department of Education said, “We have... secondary school certified teachers who are teaching a high stakes assessment—government and civics test—who have never had a political science course in their life, and they’re teaching civics and government...and I am concerned whether or not they are qualified to do that.”

Second, standards and testing regimes do not encourage or reward the teaching of politics and current issues. The Teacher Survey did provide some positive news on this score. Almost 84% said that spending time on the 2012 election could help them achieve their goals for their course, and 81% said it would help the course meet state standards. Just over half said that teaching the election could help them meet the English/Language Arts Common Core standards. That may be because they assign reading and writing assignments related to the election, at least when there is a presidential race underway. (Nearly half said that they spent more time on elections and politics in fall 2012 than usual.)

However, we know that state testing and accountability measures do not reward teaching civics, let alone discussing current events. Our scan of state policies finds that just eight states have statewide, standardized tests specifically in civics/American government.⁵⁴ And social studies assessments have

shifted from a combination of multiple-choice and performance tasks to almost exclusively multiple-choice exams since 2000. We did not detect relationships between the existing state policies for testing and standards and what students know or whether they vote. But that may be because the only accountability regimes in place today are multiple-choice exams that are very unlikely to address current events and contemporary politics.

In the Teacher Survey, several open-ended responses testified to the poor fit between teaching about politics and the testing and accountability regimes in their states. For instance:

- “Students do not ‘debate’—they argue and have no support

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Should that be a priority? Well, of course, but I don't have time to teach it.

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for their opinions. Should that be a priority? Well, of course, but I don't have time to teach it. I am bound by a set of state guidelines as to what I am to teach even though there is no high stake testing for government classes.”

- “Whenever possible I present non-partisan information or present all points of view on controversial current issues. However, we have a full curriculum to cover with a state assessment necessary for graduation, so the topics must fit into our curriculum rather than obstruct completion.”
- “The foundations of democracy are being lost due to all the emphasis on the math, science and technology education/testing that is taking over our schools.”

This concern also arose in several stakeholder interviews. For example, Chrissy Faessen of Rock the Vote advocates teaching about elections in high schools. She reports that there are plenty of “good curricula out there,” but the limitation is time, and that is caused by testing and standards. “The one thing we always hear from educators is ..., ‘That’s great, I’d love to do all of this, but really I’ve got to get all of this curriculum in’ for testing.” Shawn Healy from the McCormick Foundation said, “what we hear from teachers is: ‘Hey this stuff is great..., I’d love to have a debate in my class about immigration or abortion or whatever the topic of the day is..., but I don’t feel supported, and I can’t take that risk.’”

Examples of supports for teachers would be:

- Explicit policies protecting teachers’ careers if they teach about controversial issues, as long as they encourage discussion of diverse perspectives on those issues.
- Professional development that goes well beyond one-day events and that is available to all teachers, including those serving disadvantaged students.
- Changes in teacher education to support the study of civics and government among college students interested in teaching careers.
- Assessment systems that reward students’ discussion and investigation of current events and issues.

4. Encourage Collaboration

None of the reforms presented so far will, in isolation, solve the problem of unequal and insufficient political knowledge and engagement. We must stitch together a supportive fabric out of many such policies. Certainly, no particular high school course—and no tweak in the voting process—is sufficient. Instead, we recommend an integrated approach that fosters a norm of civic engagement—not unlike the way that the anti-obesity movement is beginning to use many tactics, some more successful than others, but all promoting the norm of fighting obesity. The anti-smoking movement provides another example. No single reform has led to the drop

in smoking rates; instead, public health advocates used a multi-pronged approach. Similarly, Eric Braxton, Executive Director of the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, supports "raising the profile and building the connections between the groups that are already" working on youth civic engagement.

There is evidence that when the various influences on youth coordinate to promote civic participation, the gains are much larger than those from any single program. For example, when students discuss the same current events at home and school, they learn more and are more likely to vote.⁵⁵ We also see much promise in policies that would combine high school civics education with school-based voter registration.

There are opportunities to tie civic education to media literacy education. When teachers require students to seek diverse perspectives online, or when they require students to create and share information online, youth become more likely to engage in similar activities at home and otherwise during their discretionary time.⁵⁶ Another promising link is between civics and 21st Century skills, because civic skills heavily overlap with workforce skills, such as organizing and leading diverse teams of people to accomplish a common purpose.

These are all examples of coordination and synergy. But sometimes the opposite occurs. For example, it is

rare for election officials and schools to coordinate their efforts to educate and register high school students. And some parents object to discussion of issues in schools. In our Teacher Survey, a quarter of the respondents thought that parents would object if political issues came into their classrooms. Sixteen percent thought that parents would object if they taught about voting. Although those numbers are far below 50%, they still represent schools that serve millions of students. Open-ended responses explored this issue further:

- "My personal feeling [is] that students should be informed about what is going on with politics in this country. However, after the election in 2008, I had many parents upset with me for discussing and showing the election results and the inauguration in class. So, since then I have not talked about most issues and especially the differences between the Democrats and Republicans."
- "[I]t is vital that we as educators discuss voting and other means of political engagement in class. However, there is concern amongst the public that in doing so there might be an attempt to push a political agenda. Due to this fear of a backlash I think some teachers avoid the topic altogether."
- "I did have a couple parents show disapproval of having students watch presidential debates. Parents were the issue with what I was teaching. The students loved getting to discuss and debate their views of politics."

For their part, educators sometimes try to keep parents and other community members at a distance from schools. Some negative views of parents emerged in the open-ended portion of our Teacher Survey:

- "[Students] need the tools to watch both left and right and middle media and come to their own decisions based on what is right, not what is shoved down their throats by uninformed family or friends."
- "So many of my students have said they would vote this way simply because that is the way their parents vote. I want my students to learn about both sides of each issue and make a decision based on their feelings."

It is essential to reduce conflicts over civic education and to promote coordination. Hampton, VA, supports a youth civic engagement "system" that includes service-learning in courses; youth advisory boards in each school, police precinct, and city agency (drawn from the service-learning students); and paid opportunities for youth city planners—all overseen by a citywide Youth Commission. Hampton achieved strikingly high levels of youth turnout in 2000 and 2004.⁵⁷

Engaging young people requires efforts by many sectors. All parties must attend to the quality of implementation as well as the mere existence of policies. For instance, a test for students or a teacher certification requirement can be valuable if it is well

designed, aligned with the curriculum, and if the people who face the assessment have opportunities to learn what they need to know. Otherwise, such assessments can be counterproductive. Since progress requires

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Foundations are able to fund new ideas, and the problem we have right now...is taking those great new ideas to scale.

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many people’s contributions and constant attention to quality, no new policy can permanently improve youth engagement on its own. That is why it is especially valuable to build durable, multi-sector collaborative coalitions for civic education at the state level. Examples are described in Appendix C. In all cases,

these are ongoing efforts, not short-term campaigns for particular policy reforms.

Examples of strategies for coordination include:

- Directing some government and private funds to interdisciplinary, multi-partisan, and otherwise diverse task forces or coalitions for civics at the state level.
- Aligning a state’s high school civics curriculum with voting reforms that encourage pre-registration in schools.
- Offering civics teachers professional development opportunities in museums, colleges and universities, presidential libraries, national historic sites, and news media organizations, among other places.
- Assigning students to read and discuss news in class and encouraging them also to discuss with their parents and other adults who are important in their lives.
- Including civic outcomes in efforts to build 21st Century Skills.
- Holding contests and awarding certificates of civic achievement. Students enrolled in k-12 schools would be eligible, but community groups would participate in judging and awarding the prizes. Parents and other adults could also be eligible for awards.

5. Innovate and Evaluate

A final implication of the research on youth

engagement is that states, local governments, schools, and nonprofits must innovate and experiment more. The U.S. Department of Education’s “road map” to Advancing Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy promises to help “identify promising practices in civic learning and democratic engagement—and encourage further research to learn what works.”⁵⁸ Specifically, the Obama Administration has proposed a competitive fund called “Effective Teaching and Learning for a Well-Rounded Education” that would support innovation in civics along with other subjects that were overlooked in No Child Left Behind. But at this time, there is no significant federal support for innovation in civics.

“Often, innovation is supported by organizations like my own. Foundations are able to fund new ideas, and the problem we have right now...is taking those great new ideas to scale and a foundation like my own doesn’t have the capacity to bring these things to scale and that’s where government... becomes a funder and needs to come back in the equation,” Shawn Healy of the McCormick Foundation, told us. “I think in the civic learning space it wouldn’t even take that large of a footprint. ... From a federal perspective, we’re talking a rounding error here.”

Eric Braxton of the Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing, noted that funds often do not flow to the organizations best able to innovate for civics. Small youth organizing groups, he said, “aren’t being supported at the level of some other larger

organizations that aren't as in tune to what's happening on the ground."

Policies as well as programs offer opportunities for experimentation. As noted above, the effect of existing state laws on most forms of civic engagement is unimpressive. But the variation in state laws is actually rather limited. Some states require one course on American government; others do not. Some states mandate a multiple-choice test of civic knowledge; most do not. Some states allow early voting or Same Day Registration. But no state has policies that make civic education a priority throughout k-12 education and also assesses higher-order outcomes such as deliberation or policy analysis. And no state automatically registers its own young citizens when they turn 18 and then reaches out to them to vote.

Statistical evidence from the past and present cannot prove that more ambitious innovations would work in the future, but the states should try new strategies. States are not the only laboratories of democracy, because school districts, municipalities, universities and community colleges, and community-based nonprofits can also experiment with new policies and strategies.

Examples of promising innovations (each of which should be rigorously evaluated) include:

- New state standards for civics that are shorter, more challenging, more coherent, and

more focused on politics than the typical state standards in place today.⁵⁹

- A statewide assessment of civic skills that uses portfolios of students' work instead of standardized tests, like the system now being implemented in Tennessee. Online portfolios are becoming increasingly common throughout education and could be used to revolutionize assessment in civics.
- Badges for excellence in civics. These would be portable, online certificates to demonstrate advanced civic skills, knowledge, and actual contributions. They would be attractive to college admissions offices and employers. They could be issued by schools but also by community-based groups, thus encouraging collaboration across sectors.⁶⁰
- Explicitly teaching the current voting laws that apply in the state, since our survey data and previous studies⁶¹ have found that many young people do not know the laws that govern voting in their own states, particularly laws involving pre-registration, regaining the right to vote after a felony conviction, and photo ID requirements.
- Lowering the voting age to 17 in municipal (or state) elections so that students can be encouraged to vote while they are taking a required civics class. Takoma Park, MD enacted this reform in May 2013, and Lowell, MA is seeking the state's support to do the same.

- Encouraging parents to participate in civic activities

within schools, e.g., by judging students' portfolios or by joining discussions of current events.

- Curricula that emphasize youth conducting community research and producing local journalism to address the severe gap in professional reporting. The crisis of traditional journalism represents an opportunity for youth to address local issues and problems that would otherwise go unnoticed by local news media. Participation in high school journalism "contributes to socialization into citizenship and, most crucially, to the development of a collective sensibility."⁶²
- Setting standards and providing curricular materials and professional development to ensure that students involved in service-learning discuss the root causes of social problems and that student groups address social issues.
- Multi-player role-playing video games as tools for civic education.

In decades to come, we may look back on the present era as the time when youth engagement began to rise substantially. This will not be because one of the policies or practices that has already been implemented in certain states and communities was imitated nationally. Instead we will have stitched together a whole quilt of supportive policies, including some bold ones that had not even been tried in 2013.

Planning a Discussion

We tell youth that they should all contribute ideas and energy to address public problems, that they must collaborate, and that they should be persistent—not expecting complex issues to have quick answers. The same advice applies to anyone who cares about youth civic engagement.

Unlike some other reports about matters of public concern, *All Together Now* does not end with a short list of policy proposals. Trends in voting and civic knowledge have proven resistant to change despite substantial shifts in laws and policies over the past forty years. Also, needs and opportunities differ greatly from one community to another. Barriers to youth civic engagement are complex; and complex problems are more likely to be resolved when a broad range of people—not just public officials and specialists—come together to identify, talk about, and work together to find solutions.

Making a significant impact in any community will require a process that is inclusive, carefully planned, well-facilitated, and directly connected to action. CIRCLE and its partners plan to organize public dialogues in various communities about what specifically can be done in those places to further youth voting and civic knowledge. High school teachers are joining this discussion as part of the California Democracy School Civic Learning Initiative, and some of those instructors will also involve their students.

If you are interested in organizing a process in which dialogue leads to change, look for more resources at www.civicyouth.org this fall.





Appendices

Appendix A: Selected Previous Research on Youth Political Engagement

This section is a highly abbreviated version of the literature review that CIRCLE published and made available to the Commission to inform its deliberations.⁶³

Overall, the level of informed political participation is not acceptable. Civic knowledge, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment, is generally considered poor, with only one quarter of high school seniors reaching the “proficient” level. The voter turnout of young adults (18-29) varies by election, from 1% in the 2012 Nevada caucuses to 51% in the 2008 national election, but is generally low compared to

other nations and the voting rates of older adults. Despite this variability, the national trend since 1972 (when the voting age was lowered to 18) has been largely flat, with youth turnout usually being about 20 percentage points that of behind older voters.

Both voting rates and civics test scores show very large gaps by class and race. Individuals with more educational attainment vote at higher rates. In fact, according to Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry, this is “the best documented finding in American political behavior research.”⁶⁴ To some extent, educational attainment may be a proxy for social status or personal motivation and ability, but some careful studies find that obtaining more education actually boosts voting.⁶⁵

All states have civics standards, and many have course or testing requirements.

Most high school students take American government in the 12th grade. Prominent studies in political science in the 1970s and 1980s concluded that adolescent students were mostly unresponsive to conventional civics instruction, but research since the 1990s has increasingly documented positive outcomes from high-quality programs. Civic education courses and programs in high school (including extracurricular programs, such as mock trial, and modules like Kids Voting USA that are embedded in courses) have significant, positive effects on voting after graduation.⁶⁶ These courses may boost voting by enhancing students’ knowledge, interest in politics and issues, habits of discussing politics, and sense of membership and obligation. Extracurricular participation in high school, with the exception of sports, is also positively related to voting.⁶⁷ But civic

learning opportunities vary widely across school districts and schools, and different student populations receive different levels and kinds of instruction. Prior educational success, family socioeconomic status (SES), and school SES have each been shown to affect the quality of civics education a student is likely to receive.⁶⁸

State laws regarding civic education vary, with some states requiring courses and high-stakes tests, and others mandating nothing. West found that state-level history and science course requirements were strongly correlated with the amount of classroom time that students spent on history.⁶⁹ Yet the one study prior to the Commission's report that examined whether state laws affected student civic knowledge found no impact.⁷⁰ In general, the impact of policy on civic learning has been little studied. In a time of rapid change in educational policies—marked by No Child Left Behind, the Common Core State Standards, charter schools, and vouchers—the literature on the effects of policy for civic education is thin.

The United States is unusual in allowing states to set widely different policies governing elections, from Oregon's exclusive use of mailed ballots, to states that require individuals to appear during limited hours on Election Day (having registered more than 30 days earlier) and present photo ID. Variations in election law are relevant to civic education because: (1) being

mobilized to vote and voting are themselves educative acts; (2) schools and colleges can mitigate deficiencies in the electoral system by, for example, teaching students how to manage difficult voter registration rules; and (3) voting laws can directly affect educators—for example, those who distribute registration forms in school.

Some recent reforms in election laws are likely to improve voter turnout. Two studies have found that Same-Day Registration (SDR) is an effective mechanism for bringing young people to the polls because it allows people to participate even if they only become interested in an election during the most intense final phase of the campaign.⁷¹ Several other reforms modestly improve turnout. For example:

- When schools encourage students to register, or allow 16- and 17-year-olds to “preregister,” available evidence suggests an increase in turnout.⁷²
- States that mail information about polling locations and sample ballots to households seem to raise turnout significantly among less advantaged young people.⁷³

Before 2012, the findings of research on measures that placed restrictions on voting were mixed. Stringent residency requirements were sometimes found to dampen the participation of college students, but voter ID requirements did not appear to have sizable effects on overall turnout, even though many college students and

urban youth lacked acceptable identification.⁷⁴ However, the available research did not look closely at youth. Also, voter identification requirements might not appear to affect turnout because the populations who lacked IDs had low turnout anyway. In that case, implementing new requirements would place a ceiling on their participation. Many of the most controversial requirements were new in 2012. That was true, for example, of the particularly stringent photo ID laws adopted since 2010 in several states.

As of 2004, 5.3 million Americans, of whom about 2 million are African Americans, were ineligible to vote because of state laws disenfranchising felons and ex-felons. Felon-disenfranchisement laws not only block the turnout of those directly affected, but they seem to depress the turnout of non-felons from the same communities.⁷⁵

Appendix B: Data Collected for the Commission

To inform the Commission, CIRCLE collected and analyzed data during and after the 2012 election. Commissioners advised on design and interpretation, but CIRCLE is solely responsible for the analysis (and for any errors). Additional, detailed results have been published on the CIRCLE website or will be published in peer-reviewed academic papers.

1. The Youth Engagement Fund Surveys

Methods and sample

With funding from the Youth Education Fund, CIRCLE polled 1,695 nationally representative youth (ages 18-29) in June/July and 1,109 of the same youth between October 12 and 23, 2012. Knowledge Networks administered the online survey for CIRCLE, using a nationally representative sample built originally on a random sample of households. Recruited households were given Internet access if needed. African Americans, Latinos, and individuals who had never attended college were oversampled. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish. Surveying the same people twice offered evidence of change over time.

Most pertinent findings

These surveys asked young people about the candidates, issues, and their own involvement in the campaign. Most relevant to the Commission's work were questions about state voting laws and policies, which were in rapid change during the election season as many states implemented new restrictions and courts struck some of them down. Our survey showed much confusion and misinformation about the actual laws, although young people knew more in October than in July.

Many young people (43.3% in the summer, and 41.7% in

October) said they didn't know what the photo ID requirements were in their state. More than half (51.6%) did not know about early voting options when asked in the summer; 44.2% still didn't know in October. Just 21% knew the registration deadline in July. In the summer, 61.0% of respondents were unsure whether they needed to register 30 days or more before the election. In October, only 40.4% didn't know. But in many states, the deadline had passed by then.

Across the board, likely voters were more than twice as likely as unlikely voters to choose an answer to each of the voting law questions. They were also more likely to be correct.

When young people chose an incorrect response in October, it was often because they assumed that the law was stricter than it really was. African Americans were most likely to assume that their state had various requirements, and were also likely to be incorrect on the ID requirement largely because of the assumption that strict laws were in place. Excluding those who were unsure, African Americans (61.2%) and Hispanic Americans (59.3%) were more likely to be incorrect about a strict photo ID law than Whites (39.8%).

Young people with college experience were better informed than their non-college peers. Youth with some college were almost seven percentage points more likely to correctly identify photo ID requirements in their state (56.9% college and 48.7% non-college).

Only a small percentage (1.4%) indicated that they had no photo ID of any sort. However, non-college-experienced youth were five times more likely than college-experienced youth to lack valid photo ID. Hispanics were over four times more likely than Whites and over six times more likely than African Americans to be without a photo ID. So while the percentage of individuals without photo ID was small, they were disproportionately members of some groups.

The most common form of photo ID listed was a current state-issued driver's license (80.7%). A distant second was a current U.S. passport (39.9%), followed by a current photo ID issued by a college or university in the state where the student would vote (28.8%). Of those who said they had photo ID, 91.3% indicated that it had an expiration date on it, 3.5% indicated no expiration date, and 5.2% were unsure. (Some states required photo IDs with expiration dates.)

2. The National Youth Survey

Methods and sample

CIRCLE commissioned Universal Survey, Inc. to recruit 4,483 individuals to participate in a 17-minute random-digit-dialing phone interview. The sample was designed so that two-thirds of the respondents come from cell-phone numbers and the rest from land-line numbers. The interviews began the day after the 2012 Presidential election and went on for six weeks,

until all the participant data were collected. At least 75 participants came from each of the 50 states and Washington, DC (75-131 per state). Participants of Black and Hispanic backgrounds were slightly oversampled to obtain a large sample of each group (i.e., over 800 individuals in each group, coming from states with moderate to high portion of Black and Hispanic residents).

To keep the interview length under 20 minutes total, the survey questions were asked using three parallel forms, each of which contained approximately 75 questions. All respondents answered the core set of 45 questions. The other 45 questions were split among three parallel forms, such that each form contained two out of three “blocks” of questions, resulting in about 30 additional questions. As a result, we have a large sample (about 2,900 individuals) for every question, while being able to ask a wide range of questions.

After the survey data collection was completed with a total sample of 4,483 respondents aged 18-24 (all U.S. citizens), CIRCLE computed a non-response and post-stratification weight so that the weighted frequencies matched the Census Current Population Survey March 2012 Supplement population data for citizens by gender and race/ethnicity. Because of the oversamples of African American and Hispanic respondents, they were weighted slightly lower than respondents who identified as White (54.4% of the unweighted sample) or

as belonging to other racial groups. Participants were quite balanced ideologically, with 28.1% identifying as “conservatives,” 27.4% as “liberals” and 33.2% as “moderates” (and 11.3% chose “none of those”). However, consistent with other survey research on youth, they were more likely to identify as Democrats (38.2%) than Republicans (21.3%). Twenty-eight percent considered themselves independents, 9.8% said they had no political views, and 2.6% said they identified with another party. Forty-one percent of respondents were in college at the time of the survey, 36.7% employed full time, 19.7% had at least one parent born overseas, and 21.1% were themselves parents.

Chief findings

CIRCLE built statistical models to predict voter turnout, electoral engagement (registering and voting while also following the news), political knowledge (correctly answering items on a short quiz of general knowledge), and informed voting, which we defined as registering, voting, answering at least one (out of two) campaign knowledge question correctly, answering four or more general political knowledge questions correctly, voting consistently with one’s personal opinion on a campaign issue of one’s choice, and following the news fairly or very closely during the election season.

As possible predictors of these outcomes, we considered a wide range of factors, including the individuals’

demographics and background experiences, their experiences with various forms of civic education in schools, families, and community settings, their current involvement with civic groups, the political climate of their states, and the education and voting laws in force in their states. Detailed results will be published in scholarly articles.

In short, youth knowledge and engagement varied dramatically by state, but those differences could, in general, be explained in terms of individual-level factors such as demographics. State-level civics course requirements, tests, civic standards, and the content of state tests had no detectable impact on the outcomes of interest. The competitiveness of the presidential race in 2012 did boost a state’s youth’s propensity to vote, as did the availability of Same Day Registration (SDR). However, the effect of the competitiveness of the election and SDR was limited to voting, and was not observed for other outcomes of interest such as civic knowledge and informed voting.

We tested other indicators of voter laws and measures to facilitate registration and voting, such as online registration availability, no-excuse absentee voting, early voting, vote by mail, online registration, and extended voting hours but found no relationship between each of these measures and any of the outcomes of interest once we controlled for individual-level covariates (e.g., educational progress).

We also tested measures such as photo ID rules, proof of citizenship requirements, restrictions on early voting, restrictions on registration, the sum of all restrictive measures, and the Election Performance Index (a composite measure of 17 measurable indicators of election administration in the state, such as polling location wait times, online availability of information, number of rejected registration forms, overseas ballots and accuracy of voting technology), and found that none of these affected youth turnout or other indicators of civic engagement and political knowledge. We did, however, detect some effects when we used the much larger CPS Voting Supplement to estimate individual propensity to vote: see Appendix B3, below.

Although state policies did not seem to matter, the following individual experiences did:

- The quality of high school civics classes (defined by the number of research-based pedagogical practices that the respondents recalled) marginally predicted electoral engagement and predicted informed voting in 2012.
- Having experienced service-learning in high school predicted civic engagement in 2012 if the service-learning involved discussion of root causes.
- Being told to vote by a high school teacher predicted electoral engagement in 2012.
- Specifically being taught about voting in high school predicted political knowledge in 2012.

- More extracurricular participation in high school was associated with higher political knowledge today.⁷⁶
- Discussions of current issues in young adulthood were related to greater electoral engagement today.
- Parents' encouraging their adolescent children to express opinions and disagreements predicted electoral engagement, political knowledge, and informed voting in 2012.
- Attending racially diverse high schools was related to lower electoral engagement and lower levels of informed voting, probably because it is more difficult to discuss controversial issues and to motivate people to participate in diverse contexts.⁷⁷ On the other hand, school and family practices and extracurricular activities can compensate. Discussion of controversial current issues in school and parental support for controversial discussions both diminished the negative relationship between diversity and electoral engagement.

3. Analysis of Official Turnout Statistics

In November of every even-numbered year, the U.S. Census Bureau surveys a representative sample of US households and asks whether respondents were registered and whether they voted. The sample size for the November 2012 voting supplement was 151,598 people. Of those, 17,811 were 18-29 year-old citizens. CIRCLE analyzed this survey to

determine the youth turnout rate in 2012 and to examine whether turnout varied at the state level depending on the voting laws and civic education policies that were in place at the time of the election.

For this analysis, we created a multilevel model that related youth voting to state laws. The model also incorporated the individual respondents' age, gender, race, educational attainment, marital status, and employment status, and the states' battleground status (competitiveness in 2012), poverty rate, number of nonprofit organizations per capita, and turnout of over-30s in 2010 (the last two indicators were entered as proxy measures of general civic and political engagement level). We used multilevel modeling because each youth was nested within a state, each of which was uniquely defined by a set of voting laws, civic education policies, and state-wide demographic characteristics affecting all residents in the state.

We modeled the effects of photo ID requirements, all voter ID requirements, proof of citizenship requirements, limitations on early voting, registration restrictions, state civic education policies, the sum of all the restrictive voting laws, and the number of efforts taken to push back against these restrictions (e.g., lawsuits, legislative repeals).

We also tested other laws that were not new in the 2012 election cycle but were designed to facilitate voting, such as Same Day Registration, extended voting hours, online

registration and in-person early voting. We tested the effects of the quality of election-related administration and the availability of election-related information using the Election Performance Index (a composite measure created by Pew Research, composed of 17 measurable indicators of election administration in each state, such as polling location wait times, online availability of information, number of rejected registration forms, overseas ballots and accuracy of voting technology, based on 2010 data), and the Election Communication Index.⁷⁸

The analysis indicated that, after controlling for individual and state-level predictors, youth turned out at a higher rate if SDR was available. On the other hand, non-college youth were less likely to vote in states where photo ID rules were in place (even if the provisions were passed but not yet implemented), and in states with a large number of voting restrictions. For non-college youth only, it appears that SDR was a particularly important buffer against non-participation when many restrictive rules were in place.

4. A National Civics Teacher Survey

Working with an educational marketing firm called MDR, we reached out to a potential pool of 8,000 people who were identified as “civics and government teachers” in U.S. high schools, which is thought to be about half of all the high school civics and government

teachers in the US.⁷⁹ Of these 8,000, we contacted 4,000 first by sending them a U.S. mail letter enclosing a \$2 bill that invited them to participate in the survey (which was available online or on paper, upon request). About one week later, MDR sent an invitation email, written by CIRCLE, to 4,837 teachers (from the same pool) whose email addresses were available. MDR sent a follow-up email if a teacher opened an email but did not click-through to the survey. The survey was open from May 10, 2013 to June 1, 2013. In that time period, we received a total of 720 responses (4 were in paper format).

We cannot know how many teachers received one or both solicitation, so the response rate may range from 9.0% to 14.9%, which is higher than the 1–2% rate for email surveys. Previous studies suggest that the U.S. mail outreach has a positive impact on response rates. Of those who started the survey, 86% finished the last questions in the survey.

Participant characteristics

- 91.3% taught at public schools, 1.7% came from private parochial schools, 1% from private secular religious schools, 1.1% from public charters, and 0.8% from private charter schools.
- About half of the teachers had between 6 and 15 years of experience, while almost a quarter had 21 or more years of teaching experience.
- Most (73%) of the teachers advised at least one student group, most commonly

coaching a sports team (30.5%), followed by student government (15.2%), a service club (14.8%), a debate team (7.2%), or an arts and culture club (4.7%).

Major findings

- High school civics and American government teachers expressed strong support for the civic mission of their schools, with 98% saying that teaching students to embrace the responsibilities of citizenship, such as voting and jury duty, is very important or absolutely essential (63.1% said it was essential). This belief was shared by teachers from all regions and from schools that face different types and levels of challenges.
- Teachers said that their principals would support their decision to teach about the election (90%). The district (86.6%) and parents (85.6%) would be similarly supportive. However, teachers were somewhat unsure of the community’s reaction to “bringing politics” into classrooms. A quarter (24.8%) of the teachers thought that the parents or other adults in the community would object to it, and 16.4% thought that parents and other adults in the community might object to teaching about election and voting.
- Teachers said they try to create what researchers call an “open climate classroom,” where students feel free to form and express opinions about issues. Virtually all of the teachers said that students should feel free to disagree openly with them about political and social

issues (46.3% strongly agreed, 53.5% agreed not strongly) and respect students' opinions and encourage them to express them during class (64.3% strongly agree, 35.5% agree). All of them (67.9% strongly) said that students should make up their own minds about issues. However, just over one third (36.3%) of teachers felt that students had a say in how the high school was run (about the same as young people's report on the same question).

5. Stakeholder Interviews

Between February and April, CIRCLE staff interviewed the following individuals for advice on the project and this report. All interviews were conducted “on the record” with explicit consent. The conversations were audio-recorded and analyzed by more than one CIRCLE staff person. Their ideas are woven into the main text of this report.

- Lee Arbetman, Executive Director, Street Law, Inc.
- Rob “Biko” Baker, Executive Director, League of Young Voters
- Brian Brady, Executive Director, Mikva Challenge
- Robert M. Brandon, President, Fair Elections Legal Network
- Eric Braxton, Executive Director, Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing
- Toby Crittenden, Executive Director, Washington Bus Project

- Chrissy Faessen, Vice President for Marketing and Communications, Rock the Vote
- Shawn Healy, Civic Learning and Engagement Scholar, Robert R. McCormick Foundation
- Marcia Johnson-Blanco, Co-Director, Voting Rights Project, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law
- Geraldine Mannion, Program Director, U.S. Democracy and Special Opportunities Fund, Carnegie Corporation of New York
- Linda Nguyen, Director of Civic Engagement, Alliance for Children and Families
- Tobin Van Ostern, Advisor for Strategic Partnerships, Young Invincibles (at the time of the interview, Van Ostern was Deputy Director of Campus Progress)
- Rob Richie, Executive Director, FairVote
- Jonathan Romm, Senior Consultant, Campus Election Engagement Project
- Marcie Taylor-Thoma, Social Studies Coordinator, Division of Curriculum, Assessment, and Accountability, Maryland State Department of Education

Appendix C: Examples of good practice

1. Coalitions

Since improving youth engagement and knowledge requires action on many

fronts, contributions from all sectors of society, and constant attention to the *quality* of implementation (not just mandates and rules), a promising strategy is to build durable coalitions that advocate for better civic education in their communities or states. These coalitions should draw on educators, youth, and other stakeholders. They should take advantage of opportunities that arise in various sectors (state education policies, state university systems, school districts, and voting laws, to name a few) and should be concerned about implementation as well as the original passage of new policies.

An illustrative and incomplete list of existing coalitions follows:

- In California, educators, legislators, policymakers, labor leaders, the business community, religious groups, and the general public are increasingly aware that the educational mission must also focus on preparing students to become responsible, actively engaged citizens in our democratic society. To achieve this goal, Chief Justice of California Tani Cantil-Sakauye convened a high-profile and diverse group for a summit on civic education in February 2013. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was the keynote speaker. Since the meeting, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson and Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye have established a Task Force on k-12 Civic Learning that has been charged with making recommendations for elevating

the status of civic learning and engagement in California's curriculum, instructional practices, professional development for teachers, student testing, accountability systems, existing infrastructure, and partnerships with the community and business.

- The Florida Joint Center for Citizenship is a partnership between the Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government at the University of Central Florida and the Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida. The Joint Center grew from a 2006 bipartisan effort, launched by Congressman Lou Frey and Senator Bob Graham, to improve civic education in Florida. Since then, with the help of many other organizations and people, the state's social studies standards and benchmarks have been revised and strengthened and the Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Civics Education Act has added civics to Florida's list of tested subjects.
- The Illinois Civic Mission Coalition is a broad, non-partisan consortium including educators, administrators, students, universities, funders, elected officials, policymakers, and representatives from the private and non-profit sectors. They advocate for implementing the Civic Blueprint for Illinois High Schools, a report jointly written by 80 civic leaders, policy makers and teachers at a conference in 2009. The report emphasizes six key ideas that can be adopted in every high school in the state.

2004 to expand and improve civic learning in our schools and colleges and universities. Its co-chairs are Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (United States Supreme Court, retired) and Lee Hamilton, former Member of the United States House of Representatives. The Campaign works with more than 60 partners to advocate changes in state, local, and national policy that promote civic learning and implement the recommendations in the "Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools," a report published by the Campaign in 2011 as an updated and expanded version of the "Civic Mission of Schools" report, published in 2003 by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE.

At the national level, the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools was founded in



I Voted

I Voted

I Voted

2. Programs

The following examples of youth-oriented programming incorporate content oriented towards civic and political action. The examples are illustrative and by no means exhaustive and were not chosen by means of a formal comparison of their impact. They all appear to be promising. Some have been studied rigorously, but some have not. Thus we do not endorse any one program per se, but welcome their spirit of innovation and encourage careful evaluation.

Diverse and accessible opportunities for civically disadvantaged and non-college youth

AmeriCorps

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps>

AmeriCorps programs focus on workforce skills in the context of community-based service. In addition to learning work skills, AmeriCorps members learn to develop an appreciation for citizenship and build their capacity to lead in community settings.

Civic Justice Corps

<http://www.corpsnetwork.org/impact/workforce-development/civic-justice>

Civic Justice Corps works with previously incarcerated and court-involved youth. Part of the Corps Network, it connects young adults with their community and engages them in community-based service. The organization encourages its members to assess and listen to their communities' needs, take action, vote, speak their minds with confidence, and lead others to solve problems.

YouthBuild

<https://youthbuild.org/>

YouthBuild engages young people ages 16 to 24 in programs that focus on learning job skills by building affordable housing and become actively engaged in their communities. Program participants also elect their own members to a policy committee which is part of the organization's governing structure. Leadership development and civic engagement skills are learned through hands-on experience.

Engagement in controversy and disagreement that promotes youth voice/expression, information seeking and deliberation

The Black Youth Project

<http://www.blackyouthproject.com>

The Black Youth Project seeks to combine knowledge, voice and action. Its leaders are committed to producing research about the ideas, attitudes, decision-making, and lived experiences of black youth, with special attention to their political and civic engagement. They work to amplify the perspectives of young black people without censorship or control and have built a space on the Internet where black youth can speak for themselves about the issues that concern them. Informed with culturally-specific knowledge, they work to mobilize Black youth and their allies to make positive change and build the world within which they want to live.

Facing History and Ourselves

<http://www.facing.org/>

Facing History and Ourselves works with classroom educators to improve both the academic performance and civic learning of their students. The program provides curricula that promote rigorous investigations of the Holocaust and other situations of genocide and mass violence.

KidsVoting USA

<http://kidsvotingusa.org/>

KidsVoting USA is a national network that works with community-based groups to increase civic learning for youth in k-12 schools. It combines classroom instruction, family dialogue and experience with voting in a “real-life” simulation.

Mikva Challenge

<http://www.mikvachallenge.org/programs/>

The Mikva Challenges works with underserved teenagers in Chicago to develop their civic leadership. Their programs place youth in experiential learning environments where they work on community activism projects, participate in electoral campaigns and research and lobby for issues of importance to them at the school and city level.

Puget SoundOff

<http://pugetsoundoff.org/>

Puget SoundOff was created by youth for youth as a safe place for anyone between 13 and 21 to connect, collaborate and take action. The organizers specifically seek to create a space where youth can 1) express their opinions; 2) discover new perspectives; 3) build groups around common interests; and 4) take action on issues.

YOUmedia

<http://youmediachicago.org/>

YOUmedia is located at five Chicago Public Library locations and was created to connect young adults, books, media, mentors, and institutions throughout the city of Chicago in one dynamic space designed to inspire collaboration and creativity. High school and middle school age students who engage with YOUmedia have access to thousands of books, laptops and desktop computers and a variety of media creation tools and software, all of which allow them to stretch their imaginations and their digital media skills. By working both in teams and individually, students have an opportunity to engage in projects that promote critical thinking, creativity, and skill-building.

Lower barriers to youth political participation and increase transparency of the political system**Arizona EZ Voter**

<https://servicearizona.com/webapp/evoter/selectLanguage>

Arizona provides a simple-to-use online voter registration process in both English and Spanish. Online registration in Arizona was implemented in 2002, and between 2002 and 2004, the state experienced a 9.5% increase in voter registration. Registration must be completed at least 29 days before the election. Eighteen other states have implemented or passed legislation that would allow similar ease of registration (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013).

Community PlanIt

<http://engagementgamelab.org/blog/2012/08/02/community-planit/>

Community PlanIt is a game-based environment used to inform community and institutional planning efforts. The game has been piloted in Detroit, Boston Public Schools, Salem, MA and other locales. The youth and adults contribute to community planning processes through engaged dialogue and interactions online. Both populations have reported the value of hearing or being part of a process that was multi-generational.

League of Women Voters - California—Easy Voter Guide

<http://www.easyvoterguide.org/>

The League of Women Voters of California Education Fund and the California State Library collaborate to provide free, independent, nonpartisan voter guides in several languages and formats. This is one of many examples of such services offered at the state or local level, informed by market research, and intended to address low voter turnout by providing relevant information.

League of Young Voters

<http://youngvoter.org/>

The League of Young Voters uses cultural organizing and social media outreach as part of their grassroots organizing campaigns. The League focuses on relevant local issues to keep young voters mobilized and engaged in off-election years. Their impact includes improved knowledge of voting and registration mechanics as well as candidates and issues.

Rock the Vote Democracy Class

<http://www.rockthevote.com/about/democracy-class.html>

Democracy Class is a one-class-period program targeting high school students across the U.S. The program uses video, a classroom discussion and a mock election to teach young people the skills to navigate the elections process and encourages them to get involved.

High-quality civic learning experiences and assessments that develop higher-order knowledge and skills in the context of real-life issues

Center for Civic Education

<http://new.civiced.org>

The Center for Civic Education's programs help elementary and secondary students to develop (1) an increased understanding of the institutions of constitutional democracy and the fundamental principles and values upon which they are founded, (2) the skills necessary to participate as competent and responsible citizens, and (3) the willingness to use democratic procedures for making decisions and managing conflict.

Constitutional Rights Foundation

<http://www.crf-usa.org/>

Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) provides youth with a deeper understanding of citizenship through values expressed in the U.S. Constitution and its Bill of Rights, and educates young people to become active and responsible participants in our society. CRF develops, produces, and distributes programs and materials to teachers, students, and public-minded citizens all across the United States.

Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago

<http://www.crfc.org/>

The Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC) strengthens American democracy by providing elementary and secondary students with hands-on learning about the Constitution to prepare them for informed civic engagement. CRFC designs and conducts local, national, and international programs that emphasize current and historical controversies involving rights, law, and policy.

DoSomething.org

<http://www.dosomething.org/>

DoSomething.org is a nationwide not-for-profit for young people and social change. Their more than 1.6 million members work on causes such as bullying, animal cruelty, homelessness, and cancer. DoSomething.org spearheads national campaigns so 13- to 25-year-olds can make an impact—without ever needing money, an adult, or a car. More than 2.4 million people took action through DoSomething.org in 2012.

Educational Video Center

<http://www.evc.org/>

The Educational Video Center is dedicated to teaching documentary video skills as a means to develop the artistic, critical literacy, and career skills of young people, while nurturing their idealism and commitment to social change. EVC's teaching methodology brings together the powerful traditions of student-centered progressive education and independent community documentary filmmaking.

Generation Citizen

<http://www.generationcitizen.org>

Generation Citizen is an “action civics” program delivered in classrooms. Over the course of the twice-weekly semester-long program, students choose an issue they care about, develop a focused, strategic plan to address the issue, take real action, and then reflect on their successes and challenges. Each semester culminates in a Civics Day, in which student representatives from classes in each city present their work to other students, community members, and public officials, celebrating their work and gaining feedback to further their efforts.

Girls, Inc - Building Better Citizens

http://archive.affiliatecentral.girlsinc.org/program/other_programs/documents/Building_Better_Citizens.pdf

Building Better Citizens is an “action civics,” out-of-school program that promotes civic education, engagement, and activism for girls ages 12-14. The program encourages girls to participate in the political process and express their needs, hopes, and concerns through community activism, volunteerism, and political leadership. Family involvement throughout the program's duration is an integral component of the program's success in promoting and encouraging girls to understand and participate in their community and government.

Global Classrooms - Model UN

<http://www.unausa.org/global-classrooms-model-un/about-global-classrooms-model-un>

Global Classrooms is an educational program that engages middle school and high school students in an exploration of current world issues through interactive simulations and curricular materials. Global Classrooms cultivates literacy, life skills and the attitudes necessary for active citizenship. At the core of Global Classrooms is Model United Nations, wherein students step into the shoes of UN Ambassadors and debate a range of issues on the UN agenda. Model Congress simulations are also a version of this type of classroom activity.

iCivics

<http://www.icivics.org/>

iCivics prepares young Americans to become knowledgeable, engaged 21st century citizens through free, web-based interactive games. iCivics has produced 17 educational video games as well as teaching materials that have been used in classrooms in all 50 states.

Street Law, Inc.

<http://www.streetlaw.org/>

Street Law creates classroom and community programs that teach people about law, democracy, and human rights worldwide. Street Law participants benefit from “real-life” lessons and insights, which they can use to effect positive change for the rest of their lives. The organization offers accessible, engaging, and interactive programs designed to empower students and communities to become active, legally-savvy contributors to society.

TakingIT Global

<http://www.tigweb.org/>

TakingITGlobal’s mission is to empower youth to understand and act on the world’s greatest challenges. TIG uses the power of online community to facilitate global education, social entrepreneurship, and civic engagement for millions of youth worldwide. Founded in 1999, the TIG website website creates a social network for global citizenship, bringing together over 400,000 members with more than 22,000 non-profit organizations across 13 languages.

Systems or networks of opportunities and supports**Boys & Girls Clubs—Torch Clubs and Keystone Program**

<http://www.bgca.org/whatwedo/characterleadership/Pages/CharacterLeadership.aspx>

The Boys & Girls Clubs of America provide several programs that build character and leadership. They aim to help youth become responsible, caring citizens and focus on the acquisition of skills for participating in the democratic process. The programs provide opportunities for planning, decision-making, contributing to the Club and community and celebrating national heritage.

City of Hampton’s Youth Leads

<http://hampton.gov/documentcenter/view/89>

Since 1990, the City of Hampton (Virginia) has placed a high priority on engaging young people in community decision-making and the overall life of the community. This focus on youth began with the creation of the Coalition for Youth, a group of city leaders convened by City Council to develop a plan of action to ensure that Hampton’s youth would become productive members of the community and workforce. Two young people were hired in the Planning Department as the first Youth Planners. The Youth Planners designed the new Youth Commission to be an effective voice for the youth of Hampton and to serve as a board of youth who would be responsible for the Youth Component of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan (1989) developed by the Youth Planners.

Democracy Schools Initiative

<http://mccormickfoundation.org/democracyschools>

Democracy Schools are an initiative of the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition (ICMC). Part of the National Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, the ICMC seeks to restore education to its core purpose—preparing America’s youngest citizens to be informed and active participants in our democracy. Illinois high school students deserve enhanced opportunities to learn and practice civic engagement behaviors, and the ICMC has created a process by which high schools affirm their commitment to civic learning by seeking recognition as a Democracy School. Democracy Schools are supported in improving civic learning practices in schools while improving organizational culture, including connections to community stakeholders.

Teens Leading the Way

<http://www.utec-lowell.org/programs/teensleadingtheway>

Teens Leading The Way (TLTW) is a statewide, youth-led coalition that seeks to empower young people to create lasting change through policy-making. TLTW youth (ages 15-20) create and maintain campaigns to bring about social change on the state level. Their current campaign is pushing for a new civics course that would focus on: understanding of the three branches and legislative process, youth rights, the history of youth and social movements, and a very strong applied learning component that emphasizes how to create change in one’s community through an understanding of the legislative or other governmental processes.

The Family Dinner Project

<http://thefamilydinnerproject.org/>

The Family Dinner Project is a grassroots effort to combine food, fun and conversation about things that matter. Families come together to share their experiences and insights to help each other realize the benefits of family dinners. Together, they identify tips for setting dinnertime goals, overcome obstacles such as conflicting schedules, and engage everyone in meaningful conversation to improve the frequency and quality of their mealtime interaction. Efforts like these can link classroom activities with family interventions that improve youth political knowledge and efficacy.⁸⁰

Youth on Board

<https://youthonboard.org>

YOB supports the power of students to transform their communities by recognizing that when young people are fully engaged they commit themselves to making their schools, their communities, and their own lives better. Through a partnership with the Boston Public School district (BPS), YOB co-administers a city-wide body of student leaders that represents most high schools in the district, known as the Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC). BSAC, which consists almost entirely of low-income students of color, identifies and organizes around pertinent student issues, thereby putting students at the center of the decisions that affect them the most.

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