

## CIRCLE RELEASES 2006 NATIONAL CIVIC AND POLITICAL HEALTH SURVEY

**C**IRCLE's new *2006 National Civic and Political Health Survey* provides the most up-to-date and detailed look at how young Americans are participating in politics and communities. The survey takes a broad look at political and civic activity and finds that many young Americans are involved. For example, 36 percent have volunteered within the last year; 30 percent have boycotted a product because of the conditions under which it was made or the values of the company that made it; and 67 percent have confronted someone who said something that they considered offensive, such as a racist or other prejudiced comment.

However, certain groups of young people are largely *disengaged*, including 17 percent who have not done any of the 19 measured forms of participation within the last 12 month.

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The survey also finds that most young Americans are strikingly uninformed or misinformed about important aspects of politics and current events. However, those who participate (vote, join groups, and volunteer) tend to be better informed. Additionally, the survey finds a loss in trust in the government among young people as compared to 2002.

The survey was released on October 3, 2006 at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. It was conducted from April 27 to June 11, 2006 by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (on behalf of CIRCLE) with funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The survey focuses on young people but contains a representative sample of older Americans for comparison. It is one of the few surveys of its kind containing over-samples of Asian-American youth. In addition, it also includes over-samples of African-American and Latino youth and was translated into Spanish. The questionnaire largely replicates one designed by Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins and fielded in 2002.<sup>1</sup>

### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: THE GOOD NEWS AND THE BAD

The survey looked at 19 measures of civic engagement. According to CIRCLE director Dr. Peter Levine, "People have numerous ways to influence the world around them, and it is important to look beyond the most frequently measured forms of engagement—voting and volunteering. Our survey found many young people are engaging in a variety of activities

<sup>1</sup> *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation*, available via [www.civicyouth.org/research/products/youth\\_index.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/youth_index.htm)

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**CIRCLE**

The Center for Information & Research  
on Civic Learning & Engagement

## A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

**College Park, MD, August 25:** Summer inside the Washington Beltway is traditionally a time for rest and reflection and for trying to escape the muggy heat. But not this summer at CIRCLE. As you'll read in the following pages of the newsletter and on our Web site ([www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)), we are busy analyzing the data from the 2006 *Civic and Political Health Survey*, helping the National Conference on Citizenship to build an index of national civic health, awarding over half a million dollars in research grants on K-12 civic education, writing a separate fact sheet on youth voting for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, crunching numbers on community college students, immigrant youth, and other topics, and developing research projects for the near future. In addition, we launched a series of focus groups on about ten college campuses.

It is worth pausing to recall what all this activity is *for*. At CIRCLE, we are neutral about some things. For example, we don't care whether young people engage as radicals, moderates, conservatives, liberals, or libertarians—that's up to them. And we don't assume that any particular form of civic education or mobilization is effective until we have seen it tested.

However, we are not neutral about youth civic engagement. America needs its young people to do important work in politics and civic life, for their own sake and for the vitality of our democracy. CIRCLE's research, like all the good work of our colleagues across the country, is valuable only insofar as it advances that goal.

Sincerely,



Peter Levine

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**CIRCLE** (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of young Americans. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects that we support have practical implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 and is funded predominantly by Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Pew Charitable Trusts. It is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy.

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including protesting, persuading others to vote, addressing community problems, boycotting, and raising money for charities. Nevertheless, there remain a sizeable number of young people who are disengaged from civic activities. Our challenge is to find out more about why so many young people disengage from civic life—and about the programs that can help turn this trend around.”

Some young people are intensely involved. Thirteen percent of American youth are what we call “dual activists,” engaging in at least two different forms of community engagement and two different forms of political participation. Almost seven percent of young Americans are hyper-involved, claiming ten or more different kinds of participation. Compared to their peers, this hyper-engaged group is more likely to be Asian-American, Democratic (or leaning toward the Democrats), liberal, suburban, college-educated, and from college-educated homes. Most are confident in their ability to make a difference.

The bad news is that substantial numbers of young people are disconnected from politics and community life. A majority of young people (58 percent) are disengaged, meaning they are unable to cite two forms of civic or two forms of political engagement that they have done. A subset of the disengaged—the 17 percent of youth who have not done any of the 19 forms of civic engagement—are much less confident in their own ability to make a difference, less likely to have college-educated parents or parents who volunteer, less likely to have any college experience, less aligned with either party, and more likely to be white.

#### POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE MATTERS FOR ENGAGEMENT

The survey found that most young Americans are uninformed or misinformed about important aspects of politics and current events. For example, 53 percent are unaware that only citizens can vote in federal elections; only 22 percent can correctly name at least one member of the President’s Cabinet; and only 34 percent know that the United States has a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

However, those who participate tend to be better informed. Of those who could answer all six of our knowledge questions correctly, 48 percent were regular voters, 32 percent were active members of at least one group, and 50 percent had volunteered. In contrast, of those who could answer no questions correctly, just 15 percent voted regularly, 11 percent belonged to any group, and 25 percent volunteered.

#### TRUST IN GOVERNMENT DOWN

One of the most striking findings was the loss of trust in government among young people. When Continued on page 12

## 19 INDICATORS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

### CIVIC INDICATORS

- 1. Community problem solving:**  
Working together informally with someone or some group to solve a community problem
- 2. Regular volunteering for a non-electoral organization:**  
Working in some way to help others for no pay
- 3. Active membership in a group or association:**  
Belonging to and actively participating in groups or associations, either locally or nationally
- 4. Participation in fundraising run/walk/ride:**  
Personally walking, running, or bicycling for a charitable cause
- 5. Other fundraising for charity:**  
Helping raise money for a charitable cause

### ELECTORAL INDICATORS

- 6. Regular voting:**  
Voting regularly in both local and national elections
- 7. Persuading others:**  
Talking to others when there is an election taking place to try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates
- 8. Displaying buttons, signs, stickers:**  
For a candidate, political party, or political organization
- 9. Campaign contributions:**  
Contributing money to a candidate, a political party, or any organization that supported candidates
- 10. Volunteering for candidates or political organizations**

### INDICATORS OF POLITICAL VOICE

- 11. Contacting officials:**  
Contacting or visiting a public official, at any level of government, to ask for assistance or to express an opinion
- 12. Contacting the print media:**  
Contacting a newspaper or magazine to express an opinion on an issue
- 13. Contacting the broadcast media:**  
Calling in to a radio or television talk show to express an opinion on a political issue, even if it is not aired
- 14. Protesting:**  
Taking part in a protest, march, or demonstration
- 15. E-mail petitions:**  
Signing an e-mail petition
- 16. Written petitions:**  
Signing a written petition about a political or social issue
- 17. Boycotting:**  
Not buying something because of conditions under which the product is made, or because of disapproval of the company that produces it
- 18. Buycotting:**  
Buying a certain product or service because of approval of the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it
- 19. Canvassing:**  
Having done some work as a canvasser going door-to-door for a political or social group or candidate.

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

The Research Roundup column highlights recent research findings commissioned or generated by CIRCLE. Also included is an update on new CIRCLE products such as Fact Sheets, Research Articles, Research Abstracts, Bibliographies, and Datasets.

### THE 2006 MIDTERM ELECTIONS: QUICK FACTS FROM CIRCLE

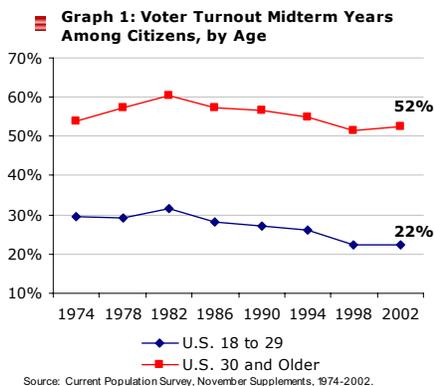
This year's midterm elections follow a presidential election that witnessed the highest level of youth voter participation in over a decade, with a national youth voter turnout rate of 49 percent (for ages 18 to 29), up nine percentage points over 2000. Whether the voter mobilization momentum of 2004 continues into 2006 remains unpredictable. Following are some "quick facts" on youth voting in the midterm elections. The same information can also be found in a new CIRCLE Fact Sheet entitled "Quick Facts about Young Voters: 2006." The Fact Sheet as well as corresponding Fact Sheets for each of the 50 states can be downloaded from [http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/fact\\_sheets.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/fact_sheets.htm).

#### TRENDS IN YOUTH VOTING IN MIDTERM ELECTIONS

It would be a mistake to compare either state-level or national youth voter turnout in 2006 to 2004 since presidential elections generally draw more voters to the polls. Instead, the two appropriate comparison years are 2002, the last time midterm elections occurred, and 1994, the last time midterm elections followed a surge in youth voting in a presidential election (1992).

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Overall, the general trend in the voter turnout rate nationally among young people during midterm elections was down between 1982 and 2002, as shown in Graph 1.<sup>1</sup> This general decline



however, masks variation in youth voter turnout rates across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In 2002, the three states with the highest level of youth voter turnout were Minnesota (45 percent), South Dakota (36 percent), and Alaska (34 percent). In contrast, the three states with the lowest voter turnout rates among young people in 2002 were Delaware (15 percent), West Virginia (15 percent) and Arizona (14 percent). It is likely that differences in electoral participation among young people across states were driven by high profile gubernatorial and Senate races and statewide initiatives in midterm years. In 2006, these factors again may help drive young people to the polls in certain states.

#### ESTIMATES OF ELIGIBLE YOUNG VOTERS, 2006

In 2006, a midterm election year, there are an estimated 41.9 million young people between the ages of 18 and 29 who are eligible to vote in U.S. elections. Table 1 shows voting statistics for 2002 and 1994, the best comparison years.<sup>2</sup> Note that the number of votes cast by young people in 1994 exceeded the number of votes cast by young people in 2002 by 1.5 million. In 1994, young people represented a greater share of the electorate than in 2002, and also had a higher voter turnout rate.

	18-29 Year Olds	Adults 30 and over
<b>2006</b>		
Number of Citizens Eligible to Vote in 2006	41.9 million	158.2 million
<b>2002</b>		
Number of Votes Cast	8.9 million	78.9 million
Voter Turnout Rate	22 percent	52 percent
Share of All Voters	10 percent	90 percent
<b>1994</b>		
Number of Votes Cast	10.4 million	75.2 million
Voter Turnout Rate	26 percent	55 percent
Share of All Voters	12 percent	88 percent

Source: CIRCLE's Tabulations, *Current Population Survey*, March Supplement 2006 and November Supplement 2004.

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

## VOTER TURNOUT RATES IN 2002 &amp; 1994 AMONG YOUNG CITIZENS

Table 2 displays voter turnout rates for various groups of young people in 2002 and 1994. In many cases, voter turnout rates were higher in 1994 than in 2002, with the largest declines in turnout occurring for Asian non-Hispanic youth, Native-American non-Hispanic youth, youth in the West, and youth with at least some college experience. For each of these groups, voter turnout rates declined by at least six percentage points between 1994 and 2002.

**TABLE 2: U.S. VOTER TURNOUT RATES AMONG YOUNG CITIZENS AGES 18-29, 2002 & 1994**

Voter Turnout Rate Among:	2002	1994
<i>Race/Ethnicity<sup>3</sup></i>		
White non-Hispanics	23 percent	28 percent
Black non-Hispanics	25 percent	23 percent
Hispanics	16 percent	20 percent
Asian non-Hispanics	16 percent	23 percent
Native American non-Hispanics	14 percent	25 percent
<i>Gender</i>		
Women	24 percent	27 percent
Men	21 percent	25 percent
<i>Educational Attainment</i>		
Less than High School	10 percent	9 percent
High School	16 percent	19 percent
Some College	25 percent	31 percent
BA or more	40 percent	46 percent
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single Men	20 percent	24 percent
Single Women	23 percent	26 percent
Married Men	26 percent	29 percent
Married Women	28 percent	30 percent
<i>Region</i>		
Northeast	21 percent	27 percent
Midwest	25 percent	26 percent
South	22 percent	22 percent
West	22 percent	32 percent
<b>REGISTERED VOTERS</b>	<b>47 percent</b>	<b>53 percent</b>
<b>ALL YOUTH</b>	<b>22 percent</b>	<b>26 percent</b>

Source: CIRCLE's tabulations from the 2002 and 1994 November Supplements of the *Current Population Survey*. Note that identification of mixed race youth was not possible in 2002.

## PARTISANSHIP AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

In a new CIRCLE survey, conducted in the early summer of 2006, young people were more likely to identify as an Independent and less likely to identify as a Republican than their adult counterparts. While young people today are more likely to identify as Democrats and Independents, there was little change in self-reported partisanship among young people between 2002 and 2006 (see Table 3). \*

**TABLE 3: PARTISANSHIP IN 2006 AND 2002**

	2006		2002	
	18-29 Year Olds	Adults 30 and Over	18-29 Year Olds	Adults 30 and Over
<b>Democrat</b>	29 percent	33 percent	26 percent	36 percent
<b>Independent who lean Democrat</b>	16 percent	13 percent	20 percent	12 percent
<b>Independent (no leaning)</b>	26 percent	18 percent	24 percent	15 percent
<b>Independent who lean Republican</b>	8 percent	9 percent	9 percent	10 percent
<b>Republican</b>	20 percent	26 percent	21 percent	28 percent

Source: CIRCLE's tabulations from the *2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey*.

1. For more information on the voter turnout rates of young people in presidential years, see "CIRCLE Working Paper 35: The Youth Voter 2004: With a Historical Look at Youth Voting Patterns 1972-2004."

2. For a full discussion of the different ways voter turnout can be calculated, please see "CIRCLE Working Paper 35: The Youth Voter 2004: With a Historical Look at Youth Voting Patterns 1972-2004." All voter turnout estimates presented in this fact sheet are calculated for U.S. citizens only, and according to the "Census Citizen Method" described in CIRCLE Working Paper 35.

3. We have defined racial/ethnic groups from the Current Population Survey November Supplements by defining anyone with Hispanic background as Latino; individuals who cite a single race or ethnicity and who are non-Hispanic are classified as white, African American, Asian American or Native American. All programs used to generate race and ethnicity variables are available from the authors upon request.

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

**KIDS VOTING EVALUATION SHOWS LASTING IMPACT OF CIVIC EDUCATION**

Kids Voting USA (KVUSA) is a curriculum that helps several million students to study and discuss politics and issues and then participate in mock elections. An ongoing evaluation by Michael McDevitt of the University of Colorado and Spiro Kioussis of the University of Florida has provided important evidence about civic learning, thanks to their rigorous, quasi-experimental research design. The evaluators compared students exposed to Kids Voting with similar students not in the program. The latest product of their research is a CIRCLE Working Paper (#49) "Experiments in Political Socialization: Kids Voting USA as a Model for Civic Education Reform."

**FILLING IN THE GAPS IN RESEARCH ON CIVIC LEARNING**

The new paper addresses three questions of broad importance to the field of civic education. First, can young people gain knowledge, skills, confidence, and interest in politics through classroom exercises? We know that students who take classes on civics and government are more knowledgeable and interested in politics, but that could be because interested students elect to take these classes. The rigorous evaluation of Kids Voting demonstrates substantial positive effects from this particular program, showing that it is possible to make a difference through interactive lessons and discussions in the classroom.

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Second, if young people's civic knowledge and attitudes improve because of a class, do these gains soon wear off? Or does learning about politics help students to begin following the news and discussing current events, so that their knowledge actually improves after the course ends? The new Working Paper is based on two years of follow-up data. While some of the positive effects of Kids Voting waned over those years, the program did spark an ongoing learning process. Two years later, students who had experienced the program were still more likely than their counterparts to discuss issues outside of class and to follow the news.

Third, does civic education widen or narrow gaps in knowledge, skills, and likelihood of participating? It is possible that a civic education program would have the greatest benefit for students who were already civically engaged (and who tend to come from more advantaged homes). In that case, it would expand gaps in civic participation. But the evaluation of Kids Voting shows that the program reduced such disparities.

**PROMISING CURRICULUM ACTIVITIES**

The KVUSA curriculum appears to teach civic habits that are "self-perpetuating" with long-lasting effects. In particular, three KVUSA curriculum components—frequent discussion of the election in class, teacher encouragement of opinion expression, and participation in get-out-the-vote drives—showed lasting effects on the civic development of the high school students studied. Table 1 shows the effects of these curriculum activities on students three years after the program ended.

According to the authors, "These activities allow adolescents to practice communication skills and to build social confidence, dispositions that are easily transferred to other domains of civic engagement. The students in our study remained receptive to

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

*The authors provide the following eight recommendations for civic educators. Please see their CIRCLE Working Paper (#45) for a complete discussion of the recommendations.*

- ★ **Incorporate parents.**
- ★ **Deploy media in civic learning.**
- ★ **Teach to take advantage of big political events.**
- ★ **Translate classroom instruction into community activism.**
- ★ **Promote discussion on topics of greatest relevance to youth.**
- ★ **Do not shy away from topical debates.**
- ★ **Do not give up on low-income students.**
- ★ **Promote citizenship beyond voting.**

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

independent learning opportunities that came along after the Kids Voting program ended, such as new political controversies or the eruption of political debate at home or with friends.”

The researchers found that even though the Kids Voting curriculum was taught during a short time period—the final weeks of the 2002 elections—the program still had powerful and lasting effects on students’ civic development. Part of the success of the program lies in its ability to bring together schools, families, the media, elections, and peer groups to create “a kind of

political immersion for students.” According to Dr. McDevitt, “The single most important lesson from Kids Voting is the benefit of integrating different influencers such as schools and families.”

The complete findings as well as detailed recommendations for civic education are contained in CIRCLE Working Paper (#49) “Experiments in Political Socialization: Kids Voting USA as a Model for Civic Education Reform” which can be downloaded at: [http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/working\\_papers.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/working_papers.htm)



**TABLE 1: CORRELATIONS OF CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND VOTER ENCOURAGEMENT IN 2002 WITH STUDENT CIVIC MEASURES IN 2004**

<i>Civic Involvement in 2004</i>	Frequent discussion of election	Free expression of opinion	Student encourages adults to vote
<b>Media Use</b>			
Attention to political news	✓		
Attention to Internet news	✓		
Encourage parent attention	✓		✓
<b>Cognition</b>			
Political knowledge			
Issue salience			
Information integration	✓	✓	✓
<b>Discussion</b>			
With parents	✓	✓	✓
With friends		✓	✓
Size of discussion network		✓	✓
<b>Deliberative habits</b>			
Listen to opponents			
Willingness to disagree			
Testing opinions for response			✓
Testing opinions to persuade			
<b>Civic Identity</b>			
Partisanship	✓		✓
Ideology			
Conventional participation	✓	✓	✓
Unconventional activism			
<b>Participation</b>			
Volunteering	✓	✓	✓
Campus Activism		✓	✓
Voted in 2004			

**Table 1 Notes:** ✓ = significant at the .05 level or higher. The partial correlations control for the following variables: ethnicity, year in school when exposed to Kids Voting in 2002, grades earned in 2002, gender, religious group membership, parent SES, and voting history of parent.

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

## EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN MATH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

New exploratory research by Roderick Watts and Omar Guessous of Georgia State University investigates the link between math and civic engagement. The research is based on an evaluation of the Young People's Project (YPP)—a national program that recruits, trains, and deploys high school and college Math Literacy Workers for mentoring middle and elementary school students. For more on the Young People's Project see <http://thealgebraproject.org/>.

The program is based on a model of education developed during the Civil Rights movement that takes a holistic view of youth development. The goal of the YPP is to prepare young people for adult life and citizenship, as well as for their work as peer math educators. According to Dr. Watts, "One of the goals of our study was to better understand how the political and historical elements of the YPP influence the young people who participate, over and above whatever their experiences with the math education and workshops contribute." The findings from the research are contained in the CIRCLE Working Paper (#50) "Civil Rights Activists in the Information Age: The Development of Math Literacy Workers in the Young People's Project."

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*According to Dr. Watts, "One of the goals of our study was to better understand how the political and historical elements of the YPP influence the young people who participate, over and above whatever their experiences with the math education and workshops contribute."*

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## RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was exploratory in nature, focusing on the Chicago branch of YPP. Dr. Watts notes, "Because of the limitations inherent in cross-sectional research and those associated with data collection and program operations, we view this study as exploratory, yet highly promising." The study attempted to examine whether "YPP contributed to the math, academic, sociopolitical, ethnoracial identity, and positive youth development of its participants." The researchers used a cross-sectional design, comparing YPP participants, peers of YPP participants, and a comparison group of students who participated in a different after-school program. Participants completed surveys at various points in time from November 2004 through August 2005.

## MATH IS POWER

The research found mixed results concerning the effects of the YPP program on the outcomes of interest (math and academic confidence, sociopolitical development, ethnoracial identity and positive youth development). Some findings were disappointing. For example, veteran students (students who had completed at least one YPP program session before the research began) reported that they were actually *less* likely to use math in the future than their novice counterparts (students who were surveyed when they first entered the YPP program).

One promising finding from the research is that it appears many young people involved in the YPP program view "math as power." Analysis showed that there was a relationship between the participants' attitudes towards math and their own sociopolitical development. For example, students who reported they were confident in their math ability were also more likely to feel they could make a difference in their communities. On the other hand, those with a lot of self-doubt about their math abilities exhibited lower levels of commitment and involvement in community and political activities. Dr. Watts notes, "The relationship between sociopolitical development and math confidence was consistently stronger among YPP participants, as compared to the control group." This suggests that YPP contributed to a link between math knowledge and the feeling of empowerment necessary for social or political action. Looking back to the Freedom Schools of the civil rights era, the authors speculated that ". . . participants arrived there with a desire for liberation and gained literacy in the process, whereas YPP youth came to their program interested in math and their community. Soon after, they connected this to a sense of agency and a commitment to civic engagement."

The authors caution that while it is exciting to find a link between academic attitudes and a sense of political and social efficacy, more research needs to be done on the subject. They note, "What warrants more investigation is whether both math and sociopolitical development variables are a function of sense of agency [the feeling that one can make a difference] or whether civic engagement and sociopolitical development play a causal role in sense of agency, and perhaps intellectual and academic development as well." ❖

*Our Grants column provides valuable information on the CIRCLE grant application process. A current list of funded proposals on youth civic engagement, their authors, and supported institutions is also included.*

## FUNDED PROPOSALS FOR RESEARCH ON K-12 CIVIC EDUCATION

CIRCLE is pleased to announce that ten research teams have been awarded grants to study K-12 Civic Education. The ten grants total over half a million dollars. The grant competition was made possible by a generous grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York. Below is a list of funded research projects:

1. **“Research Strategies to Promote Adoption and Institutionalization of Civic Education Programs”**  
**Lawrence Bailis**, Center for Youth Development, Brandeis University
2. **“Energizing Civic Education Through Youth Media”**  
**Jen Beck and Katina Paron**, Children’s Press Line
3. **“An Assessment of Civic Engagement and High School Academic Progress”**  
**Alberto Dávila and Marie T. Mora**, Department of Economics and Finance, University of Texas—Pan American
4. **“The Long-Term Impact of a High School Civics Curriculum on Political Knowledge, Democratic Attitudes, and Civic Behaviors: A Multi-Level Model of Direct and Mediated Effects Through Communication”**  
**William Eveland Jr.**, School of Communication, The Ohio State University
5. **“Measurement and Changes Over One Semester in High-School Students’ Civic Skills, Knowledge, Dispositions, and Beliefs”**  
**Constance Flanagan**, Department of Agriculture and Extension Education, Penn State University
6. **“How Deliberating Controversial Issues in High School Courses Influences Civic Learning and Participation: A Continuation Proposal”**  
**Diana E. Hess**, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Wisconsin—Madison
7. **“A Longitudinal Examination of High School Students’ Civic Learning Opportunities and Outcomes”**  
**Joseph Kahne**, School of Education, Mills College
8. **“Colors of Socialization: Pathways to Civic Identity in Red States and Blue States”**  
**Michael McDevitt**, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Colorado—Boulder
9. **“Bowling Young: Exploring the Link between the Associations of Youth and Citizenship in Adulthood”**  
**Reuben J. Thomas**, Department of Sociology, Stanford University
10. **“The Classroom-Kitchen Table Connection: The Effects of Political Discussion on Youth Knowledge and Efficacy”**  
**Tim Vercellotti and Theresa Thonhauser**, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University

## RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

*From Research to Practice, a column dedicated to recognizing successful "bridges" between researchers and practitioners, reports on research with practical implications for youth civic engagement. Additionally, it presents concrete examples of how practitioners have applied this research to encourage the participation of young people in civic and political life.*

### SCHOOLS AND RESEARCHERS WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE CIVIC EDUCATION: TWO EXAMPLES

Recent CIRCLE-sponsored research resulted in two new tools to help K-12 schools measure student civic outcomes and school citizenship climate. The projects also offer a model of how teachers, school administrators, and researchers can work collaboratively to improve civic education. The tools are available at <http://www.civicyouth.org>.

#### MEASURING CIVIC OUTCOMES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The first new tool, designed to be used at the elementary school level, offers specific indicators of civic growth for Kindergarten through fifth grade. It consists of two parts: a student survey and a set of corresponding grade level observation checklists of students' skills and behaviors. The tool was created by Bernadette Chi of the East Bay Conservation Corps, JoAnn Jastrzab of Abt Associates Inc., and Alan Melchoir of Brandeis University. They were advised by a national group of civic education leaders including Joseph Kahne, Constance Flanagan, Judith Torney-Purta and Mary McFarland.

The research project began when Bernadette Chi and her colleagues at the East Bay Conservation Corps (EBCC) Charter School in Oakland, CA recognized a need for a measurement tool to assess civic outcomes at the elementary school level.

To help meet this need, Dr. Chi and faculty at the EBCC Charter School first collaborated to identify a framework of age-appropriate civic knowledge, thinking skills, participation skills, and dispositions that was significantly informed by the teachers' classroom experiences. Teachers at EBCC worked with Dr. Chi and the national advisory team of researchers to develop the original assessments. Then, forty teachers from 18 schools in seven states piloted the survey to test its reliability.

While the assessment tools were designed specifically for the EBCC Charter School, they can be easily adapted for use by other schools or school districts. For schools wanting to use the EBCC assessments, Dr. Chi suggests beginning with a clear understanding of their desired civic outcomes. She states, "Our framework represents our definition of civic outcomes and considers what is age-appropriate at the elementary level to foster engaged citizens. Other people, other schools may have a different understanding of what civic education looks like at the elementary level, and that's completely legitimate. Our framework

and assessment tools, however, can serve as a jumping off point for them."

Dr. Chi goes on to suggest that teachers and administrators consider using the tools to measure students' growth over a school year by using the survey and observation checklists in a pre/post manner. "It gives schools some really good information about what areas students are growing in and in which areas they are not. They can look at the assessments item by item or by scale."

Carolyn Gramstorff, principal of the East Bay Conservation Corps Charter School, believes that the tools, especially the observation checklists, are "absolutely one of the most important tools we use to guide our classroom curriculum and school-wide practices in the development of powerful citizens in the elementary grades." The EBCC Charter School has used the indicators and the observation checklists to create themes for each month of the school year that will guide classroom curriculum to include civic education, character education and conflict resolution. These themes include personal responsibility, caring, community and leadership.

#### ASSESSING CITIZENSHIP CLIMATE IN MIDDLE AND UPPER GRADES

The second new tool is for middle and upper grade levels and was developed for the Education Commission of the States (ECS) by Gary Homana, Carolyn Barber, and Judith Torney-Purta of the University of Maryland. The School Citizenship Education Climate Assessment instrument includes suggestions for how to use the assessment. According to Gary Homana, lead author of the work, "Among other things, we wanted to create an assessment to help members of the school community focus on the relevant characteristics of a positive school and classroom climate in order to better promote quality citizenship education across the school. At the same time, we wanted a tool to help the school community to identify and develop workable strategies to increase and sustain policies and practices that enhance students' knowledge, skills and dispositions for competent citizenship."

This assessment tool offers another example of how researchers and practitioners can work together to refine the measurement of civic education in schools. Homana and Barber noted that although the tool was developed by researchers familiar with the construction of assessment scales and items necessary for this type of work, a critical component of the tool's development was

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the collaboration provided by school administrators, practitioners, and others. According to the authors, "The tool went through an extensive development process that has taken a couple of years. Perhaps the most important aspect of the process has been the feedback we received in the beginning from practitioners and then later on."

The authors stress that "this assessment can help support the social studies by creating opportunities for embracement of citizenship at a broader level of partnership across the school." Barber explained that the research team was very careful not to limit the assessment to things that would only work in a social studies classroom: "You develop trust and respect... everywhere. In other words, the process is something that grows in conjunction and through other aspects of the school environment." The authors specifically pointed to extra-curricular activities and service-learning (when tied to political or civic engagement) as additional places for citizenship education.

The researchers suggest a number of ways school administrators and teachers can use this assessment. A few examples are:

- An intervention to identify the characteristics that may already exist in the school and build on them,
- A conversation starter that can help schools to deepen their understanding for the potential of civic opportunity for all students,
- To relate schools' performance on this assessment to students' performances on tests of academic achievement, and
- Support of teacher collaboration and ongoing professional development to help faculty develop skills that they need.

Dr. William Hughes is the Superintendent of the Greendale School District (WI) where all of the teachers in the Greendale Middle School completed the School Citizenship Education Climate Assessment during the pilot process. Dr. Hughes advises, "Somebody has to be able to put the assessment in a context before people take it." His experience suggests that "teachers need to see the reason why they are taking these kinds of surveys. They need to see the value of it." Dr. Hughes reported that taking the survey led to discussion among the teachers about the content of the assessment and their school. This is exactly what the authors wanted. "What we very much hope comes out of this assessment is face-to-face discussion or town hall

meetings of all the folks who took the assessment," Barber says.

Gary Homana suggests that there is not a pre-set prescription for who should take the assessment when a school or district administers it. "The biggest thing we've said is make it diverse." While this assessment was created for teachers and school administrators, the authors anticipate that the next step will be a climate assessment for students to take. ■

## YOUTH VOTER MOBILIZATION TACTICS

Young Voter Strategies and CIRCLE have collaborated to create a booklet on how to turn out young voters. The booklet compiles research on get out the vote efforts, with information about the cost of each effort in producing an additional young voter. Canvassing, phone calls, direct mail are the methods outlined in the booklet. A table of examples (drawn from randomized experiments) follows below.

METHOD	CONTEXT	COST PER ADDITIONAL VOTE CAST
<b>Canvassing</b>		
Partisan canvassing	Democratic primary	\$10.40
Leaflets with partisan message at the door	Michigan assembly races, 2002	\$14
<b>Phone Calls</b>		
Professional phone bank calling to registered Democrats off a phone list	Democratic primary	\$10.50
Bilingual volunteer phone banks	Nonpartisan GOTV in the 2002 general election	\$22
<b>Direct Mail</b>		
Direct mail with tear-off piece to request absentee ballot	Sent to list of supporters of conservation in Colorado in a statewide election	\$15.65 (as little as \$8 per voter under the age of 30)
Direct mail	Registered Indian Americans in Queens, NY with Hindu or Sikh surnames	\$40

To download the complete booklet, "Youth Voter Mobilization Tactics," visit [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).

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this survey was last conducted in 2002, young Americans appeared to be highly favorable toward government. About two thirds of people between the ages of 15 and 25 felt that government should do more to solve problems, that governmental regulation of business was necessary not harmful, and that government deserved more credit than it usually got. Young people were substantially more favorable toward the government than their elders were.

In 2006, about the same proportion of young people—63 percent—still believe that the government should do more to solve problems. Just 31 percent believe that “Government does too many things better left to businesses and individuals.” However, young people are significantly less likely in 2006 to favor government regulation of business. More of them say that government is “almost always wasteful and inefficient” than say that it “often does a better job than people give it credit for” (47

percent versus 45 percent).

According to Dr. Levine, “While we don’t know the exact reason for the declining trust in government, the main news headlines in 2002 involved an attack on the United States and the invasion of Afghanistan. Four years later, the news was dominated by Katrina and the federal response and by the war in Iraq. Right now, most young people seem to want the government to address problems but doubt that it is effective.”

The complete findings can be found on CIRCLE’s Web site at [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org) 

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