

NEW CIRCLE WORKING PAPERS ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Beginning in 2002, CIRCLE began funding much needed research on the civic and political engagement of young people. To date, this funding has resulted in nearly 70 working papers, 15 reports (published by organizations other than CIRCLE), and eight books. The publications represent exciting and diverse additions to the research on civic engagement. At CIRCLE we remain committed to bringing together researchers from multiple fields to create an interdisciplinary collection of research on youth civic engagement. All reports can be downloaded free from CIRCLE's Web site at www.civicyouth.org. The following is a listing of the most recent CIRCLE reports along with a short abstract for each report.

■ **McDevitt, M. (2009).** *Spiral of Rebellion: Conflict Seeking of Democratic Adolescents in Republican Counties.* (CIRCLE Working Paper No. 68). Retrieved from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP_68_McDevitt.pdf

In CIRCLE Working Paper #68, a study of adolescents living in red and blue counties during the 2006 midterm elections shows a striking pattern of Democratic youth thriving in political expression and debate when exposed to Republican ideological climates. Democratic adolescents were more likely to talk with parents and friends about politics, disagree openly, test opinions, and listen to opponents if they lived in Republican counties compared with Democratic youth living in liberal or balanced counties. Compared to Republican youth residing in the same communities, Democratic youth in Republican counties were also more likely to engage in political discussion, to pay attention to news media, and to express confidence in their ability to comprehend campaign issues. The results of the report suggest that Democratic identity is frequently expressed in deliberative and conflict-seeking activities, while Republican identity is often grounded in knowledge. Overall, the study suggests the value of peer-critical discussion as a strategy for youth political mobilization.

■ **Finlay, A., & Flanagan, C. (2009).** *Civic Engagement and Educational Progress in Young Adulthood.* (CIRCLE Working Paper No. 67) Retrieved from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP_67_Finlay_Flanagan.pdf

In CIRCLE Working Paper #67, Finlay and Flanagan study the correlation between civic engagement and educational progress among

young adults (those between the ages of 16 and 30 at baseline) and find that those who make academic progress over a four-year period are also more likely to participate in civic activities such as voting, volunteering, and accessing social media to discuss current events. This relationship holds for young adults from low-income backgrounds as well as high-income backgrounds. The authors note that some groups are more likely than others to make educational progress over the four years. They find that low-income youth who make academic progress over the four years are more likely to participate in sustained engagement, such as volunteering and voting, than low-income youth who make no educational progress. The authors note that factors such as divorce and having young children are especially disadvantageous in furthering educational progress. They propose several interpretations of their findings: educational progress may lead to higher levels of engagement; sustained service may link young adults to opportunities and mentors that assist them in continuing their education; and more motivated young adults may be more likely to continue their education and get engaged in civic affairs.

■ **Castle, K., Levy, J., & Peshkin, M. (2009).** *Local and Absentee Voter Registration Drives on a College Campus* (CIRCLE Working Paper No. 66). Retrieved from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP_66_CastleLevyPeshkin.pdf

In CIRCLE Working Paper #66, authors Kim Castle, Janice Levy and Michael Peshkin assess the outcomes of an in-person campus drive in 2008 in which students were offered a choice of college-state voting in Illinois, or home-state voting by absentee ballot. The study found that the great majority of students who came from swing states chose to vote back home. Students from swing states preferred home-state voting over local voting by an 8-to-1 ratio. The study also found high turnout rates both for students who voted locally and by absentee ballot. 79% of students who registered locally voted, and 84% of students who got an absentee ballot voted. Although absentee voting is more complicated than local voting, most students chose absentee voting. The study concluded that:

- Students can be diligent voters with high turnout, both by absentee ballot and in local voting.
- Students who can vote in their home state or their college state are strongly influenced in that choice by the closeness of the presiden-

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tial election.

- Even in the internet era, in-person voter drives reach many students who would not otherwise vote.

■ Hutchens, M.J., & Eveland, W.P. Jr. (2009). The Long-Term Impact of High School Civics Curricula on Political Knowledge, Democratic Attitudes and Civic Behaviors: A Multi-Level Model of Direct and Mediated Effects Through Communication. (CIRCLE Working Paper No. 65). Retrieved from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP_65_Eveland.pdf.

In CIRCLE Working Paper #65, authors Hutchens and Eveland examine the effects of exposure to various elements of a civics curriculum on civic participation, two forms of political knowledge, internal political efficacy, political cynicism, news elaboration, discussion elaboration, and various forms of interpersonal and mediated political communication behaviors. The data are based on a longitudinal study of high school students in a challenged large urban school district in Ohio. Two approaches to instruction are contrasted: stimulating political communication by discussing media sources and engaging in political debate; and, rote learning of traditional civics content. Both approaches correlated negatively with civic outcomes, but there could be several interpretations of that correlation.

■ Torney-Purta, J., & Wilkenfeld, B. S. (2009). Paths to 21st Century Competencies Through Civic Education Classrooms: An Analysis of Survey Results from Ninth-Graders. Washington, DC: Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and American Bar Association Division for Public Education. Retrieved from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website: <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/CMS-ABA21stCentSkillsStudyFullFinal.pdf>

Civic education, especially when it is interactive and involves discussion of current issues, is an important way to develop the skills young Americans need to succeed in the 21st century workforce. Students who experience interactive discussion-based civic education (either by itself or in combination with lecture-based civic education) score the highest on “21st Century Competencies,” including working with others (especially in diverse groups) and knowledge of economic and political processes. Students who experience neither interactive nor lecture-based civic education have the lowest scores on all of the 21st Century competencies examined. This group, which comprises about one-quarter of all American students, shows not only low levels of knowledge but also a relatively low level of willingness to obey the law.

The report was commissioned by the American Bar Association Division for Public Education and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools with some involvement by CIRCLE. ★



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