

## SCHOOLWIDE CIVIC INTERVENTION MAY HELP TO INCREASE COMMUNITY SERVICE PARTICIPATION AMONG STUDENTS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS

CIRCLE Working Paper #70 “A Five-Year Evaluation of a Comprehensive High School Civic Engagement Initiative” describes an evaluation of a high school program designed to encourage schoolwide democratic deliberation. The intervention involved, in part, organizing the school into clusters of 100 to 150 students that met for one hour each week to discuss governance and other school-related issues, perform community service, and pursue other cluster-related activities. The researchers, Hugh McIntosh, Sheldon Berman, and James Youniss, found that over the five-year evaluation, the rate of participation in community service increased by 23 percentage points. The qualitative findings from this study support the idea that adult support plays an important role in building youth civic engagement.

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THE QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM THIS STUDY SUPPORT THE IDEA THAT ADULT SUPPORT PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN BUILDING YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

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### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

In the fall of 2003, the Hudson school began its experiment to encourage student involvement in school governance. The experiment included launching two new programs—clustering and a schoolwide governance program—and moving to a new building designed with ample “public space” to encourage democratic deliberation.

Qualitative findings from the evaluation suggest that overall, the attempt to involve students in school governance worked but some changes need to be made to address specific issues. For example, clusterwide meetings did not always function well due to the large number of students; some students and teachers were disengaged; and there was a general lack of resources including both time and money to support teacher training and program development. According to the authors, “Changes have been made to address some of these issues. For example, deliberation has evolved away from clusterwide meetings to small groups, where students feel more comfortable expressing their opinions. In addition, a policy has been

developed to hold students accountable for using their time productively during cluster meetings.”

The evaluation report also outlined several of the program strengths. First, while clusterwide meetings were less effective, smaller meetings called “student interest groups” showed promise. The interest groups were smaller groups within the clusters where students chose a community issue to focus on. The groups performed various activities such as raising funds for charity, doing community service projects, locating guest speakers, and planning trips and other events. They provided smaller settings for students to develop leadership skills and a sense of community. Furthermore, the quantitative findings from the study suggest that the cluster/governance programs were associated with major improvements in the political knowledge, community service, and school-wide civic engagement of twelfth graders.

### CLUSTERING PROGRAM IMPROVES COMMUNITY SERVICE RATES

Opportunities for community service were built into the design of the clustering program, and the proportion of twelfth graders performing community service in 2007 was 23 percentage points higher than in 2003. The authors attribute this increase to the clustering intervention, since 17% of all seniors (28 of 169) in 2007 reported that the only service they performed was in their cluster. In addition, they note that the increase in community service participation spread widely throughout the student population, including males and females, Whites and non-Whites, high- and low-SES students, highly active students, and students who seldom get involved in non-academic school activities.

### ADULT SCAFFOLDING: A POWERFUL THREE-STEP PROCESS

“Adult scaffolding” is a concept that many community programs use to help young people learn to engage the political system. The idea is that adults provide youth with the support and resources they need to navigate the political system to bring about changes they want to see in their communities. According to two of the lead evaluators, Hugh McIntosh and

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James Youniss, "In the realm of real-world politics, adult scaffolding of youth involves at least three major components: training, access to a political system, and support while participating in that system."

At Hudson High School, these scaffolding components were used to engage students in community service but were not used when teaching students about how governance works. For example, students received step-by-step training on how to conduct a community service project in their required 9<sup>th</sup> grade civics course. Students then had access to real-world community service via the clustering program. Teachers leading clusters and interest groups provided support for students while they performed their community service project. The authors note, "Conversely, the absence of scaffolding, in

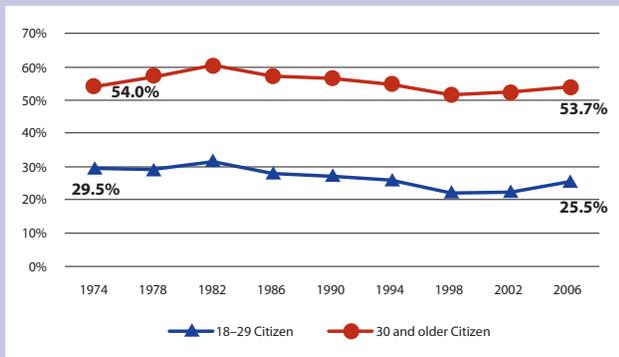
terms of formal training on how a school district is governed, may have contributed to the relative lack of engagement in schoolwide governance among students not sitting on the Community Council. These findings suggest that the type of adult scaffolding that has been successful in helping youth in community programs engage the political system may also work in schools to help students engage in community service and other forms of civic activity."

For a complete copy of CIRCLE Working Paper #70 "A Five-Year Evaluation of a Comprehensive High School Civic Engagement Initiative" please visit <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=371>. ★

### QUICK FACTS ABOUT YOUNG VOTERS IN THE 2006 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

- As we approach the 2010 midterm elections, 2006 is the best comparison year. In the 2006 midterm election, turnout among 18–29-year-olds increased for the second major election in a row—up 3 percentage points in 2006 (25 percent) from 2002 (22 percent).

Graph 1: Voter Turnout Midterm Years Among Citizens, by Age



Source: Current Population Survey (CPS), November Supplements, 1974–2006

- In 2006, young adults voted for the Democratic candidate over the Republican candidate in races for the House of Representatives (58 percent vs. 38 percent), the Senate (60 percent vs. 33 percent) and governor (55 percent vs. 34 percent).
- Young people were more likely than adults 30 and older to identify as strictly independents (26 percent vs. 18 percent) and less likely to identify as Republicans (28 percent vs. 35 percent). Compared to 2002, more young adults identified as independents (up 2 points) though slightly fewer identified as Democrats (down 1 point).

- The youth voter turnout rate was highest in Minnesota (43 percent), Wisconsin (40 percent), and Montana (49 percent). The states with the lowest turnout were West Virginia (16 percent), Texas and Utah (tied at 17 percent).

- The metropolitan areas with the highest turnout in 2006 were the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul, 47 percent), Milwaukee (39 percent), and Detroit (38 percent).

Want to know more about young voters in the mid-term elections? Visit [http://www.civicyouth.org/?page\\_id=241](http://www.civicyouth.org/?page_id=241) to learn more.

