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New Research Shows Discussion, Debate & Simulations about Current Events Boost K-12 Civics Ed. Scores *Troubling Gaps Still Remain in Students Based on Race, Socioeconomic Backgrounds*

MEDFORD/SOMERVILLE, MA – Ten years after [The Civic Mission of Schools report](#) outlined a set of “promising practices” for teaching civics to America’s K-12 school students, new research shows strong evidence for three of these practices: discussing current events, debating issues (including current controversies), and simulations, such as mock trials or Model UN. But students who are White or better off economically are more likely to receive these practices and they benefit more when they do.

The new report, [Do Discussion, Debate, and Simulations Boost NAEP Civics Performance?](#), released today by Tufts University’s [Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement \(CIRCLE\)](#) shows that students who discussed current events, debated issues and participated in simulations scored higher on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – a test given in grades 4, 8 and 12 nationwide to measure knowledge of civics and American government. The other promising practices of *The Civic Mission of Schools* report (service-learning, extracurricular activities, and student voice in school governance) were not measured by the NAEP.

“Our research clearly demonstrates that 8th and 12th grade students, of various backgrounds, benefitted from receiving these recommended teaching techniques,” said Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, CIRCLE’s lead researcher and author of today’s report. “That being said, uneven distribution of these practices by race and class remains a problem. Also, since White and affluent students tended to benefit more when they experienced these practices, we still need new strategies to narrow gaps in civic education.”

Some of the key findings of the new report include:

- At the 8th grade and 12th grade level, White students and students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds received more of the promising practices.
- Exposure to these practices was associated with higher NAEP scores for all groups. The overall trend is that all groups benefitted at least to some degree from the promising practices. However, White students and socioeconomically advantaged students benefitted more.

Much more detailed analysis can be found in the research report’s fact sheet posted online, including the effect-size analysis, percentile ranks, and results for additional demographic groups, [here](#).

In addition to today’s report, CIRCLE [recently released a working paper](#) describing digital badges as a “promising approach” to assessing important aspects of civic competency other than knowledge. An online Prezi of the working paper can be viewed at:

<http://prezi.com/rtqacupinb7p/untitled-prezi/>. Additional analysis can be viewed on CIRCLE's website at: <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=5406>.

The report released today was supported with funding by the S.D. Bechtel, Jr., Foundation which is also one of the supporters of CIRCLE's recently announced [Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge](#). The Commission will consider the data released today as well as other research on the 2012 election in developing its recommendations for how to enhance young people's informed voting.

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CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org) is a nonpartisan, independent, academic research center that studies young people in politics and presents detailed data on young voters in all 50 states. CIRCLE is part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University. CIRCLE's reputation for reliable, independent, timely research has been hailed by experts in the field of civic partnership, such as Harvard University professor Robert Putnam who said CIRCLE has brought "the best and most serious research to one place."

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service (<http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/>) is a national leader whose model and research are setting the standard for higher education's role in civic engagement education. Serving every school of Tufts University, Tisch College creates an enduring culture that prepares students to be lifelong active citizens.

Tufts University (<http://www.tufts.edu/>) located on three Massachusetts campuses in Boston, Medford/Somerville and Grafton, and in Talloires, France, is recognized as one of the premier research universities in the United States. Tufts enjoys a global reputation for academic excellence and for the preparation of students as leaders in a wide range of professions. A growing number of innovative teaching and research initiatives span all Tufts campuses, and collaboration among the faculty and students in the undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs across the university's schools is widely encouraged.