

## 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).