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democratic deliberation. For example, 92 percent of teachers ask students to “compare/contrast candidates’ positions” and 84 percent encourage “active listening.” Activities that encourage communication skill development were more varied. While 80 percent of teachers reported that they encourage students to “support opinions with facts” only 19 percent ask their students to “write elected officials” and only 28 percent have their students “survey the community.” (See Figure 1 on page 1.)

When it comes to electoral politics, teachers again used a range of teaching strategies. The most popular strategies included: discussing the presidential debate in class (99%), mock elections (90%), and acquainting students with the voting process (90%). The least popular activities included: field trips to local polling sites (9%), mock debates (26%), and candidate visits to the class (23%).

Nine out of ten teachers reported discussing the following issues: why young people do not vote, important issues to the students’ generation, democracy as a form of government, and domestic issues in the U.S.

Finally, the researchers asked teachers whether they facilitate student discussions that encourage awareness of civic issues and concepts. Nine out of ten teachers reported discussing the following issues: why young people do not vote, important issues to the students’ generation, democracy as a form of government, and domestic issues in the U.S. The least discussed issues tended to cluster in the “contested issues” category and included: the civil rights movement, cultures outside the U.S., and the Patriot Act.

THE CIVIC OUTCOMES OF VARIOUS TEACHING ACTIVITIES

In addition to asking about the types of teaching activities that teachers employ, the researchers also measured the impact of these activities on student behavior and knowledge. The results of the analysis were mixed. Some activities had positive impacts while others had a negative impact (although some of the negative results may be due to issues with the research methodology and may be explained by the response shift bias theory).

The study suggests that engagement with electoral politics and/or field trips to government offices have a negative impact on students’ sense of political efficacy and make them less likely to want to pursue a career in politics. This may, in part, stem from students’ increased understanding of the day-to-day tasks of political figures and first-hand accounts of the political process. On the other hand, the authors found that when teachers discussed concrete ways other than voting that students could have a voice in political affairs they found positive effects on students’ self-reported political

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