

Citizenship Education

▶ Educating Students to be Competent and Responsible Citizens and Leaders

While much of the debate in K-12 education reform today focuses on students' academic performance and college and workplace readiness, an examination of the mission or vision statements of most school districts reveals another key priority, often overlooked in the debate: cultivating active, involved community members, citizens and future leaders. An exclusive focus on English, mathematics and science performance of our nation's students neglects this key purpose of public education: to create an informed citizenry, with the knowledge, skills and will to participate in our government and community affairs. Our public schools have a vital role to play in contributing to the civic development of students, as the skills of citizenship – including leadership and informed decisionmaking – must be learned.

What's Inside

- ▶ What does citizenship education look like?
- ▶ Who is most likely to experience it?
- ▶ How can civic learning support 21st century skills?
- ▶ Civic opportunity and achievement gaps

Citizenship education teaches the values, knowledge, skills and sense of commitment that define an active and principled citizen. Many organizations use the terms civic education or civic learning. State civics or government standards generally place a greater emphasis on knowledge of democratic concepts, institutions and rights than on the practical application of such knowledge to everyday public policy issues. While the importance of teaching students about American history and institutions, constitutional rights and the obligations of citizenship is undeniable, equally important are opportunities for students to practice complex civic skills such as problem solving, leadership, persuasive writing and building consensus, as well as simpler skills like communicating with public officials about an issue of concern.

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* examines research on what constitutes citizenship education, how citizenship education contributes to the acquisition of 21st century skills and civic learning opportunity and achievement gaps.



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High-quality citizenship education: What does it look like?

The Civic Mission of Schools

Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Engagement and Learning, 2003.

The 2003 report *The Civic Mission of Schools* identified six “promising approaches” to civic education, based on research showing that schools can help develop competent and responsible citizens when they:

- ▶ Provide instruction in government, history, law and democracy
- ▶ Incorporate discussion of current local, national and international issues and events into the classroom
- ▶ Design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction
- ▶ Offer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities
- ▶ Encourage student participation in school governance
- ▶ Encourage students’ participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

Citizenship education opportunity: Which student groups are most likely to experience citizenship education in school?

Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School

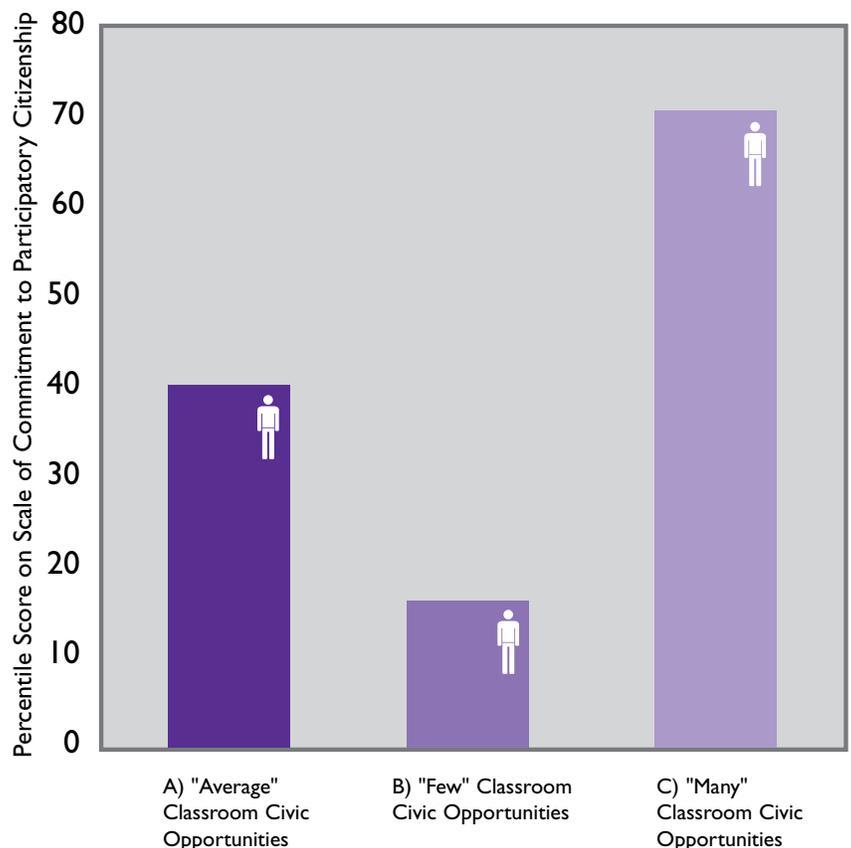
Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh, *The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*, 2008.

This study investigated the differences in the availability of school-based civic learning opportunities that promote voting and broader forms of civic engagement. It employed surveys of more than 2,500 California juniors and seniors over a two-year period (2005-07) and data from the IEA Civic Education Study – a nationally representative sample of 2,811 9th graders throughout the country.

What the authors found:

Race and ethnicity play a role in high school students’ civic education opportunities. Based on the California student survey, the researchers found that African American students reported having fewer civic-oriented government classes, current event discussions and experiences in an open classroom climate than white students. Asian students reported higher participation in after-school activities, but less experience in open classroom climates, while Latino students reported fewer opportunities to participate in community service, simulations (mock debate, mock trial, etc.) and open classroom climate than white students. Students’ civic education opportunities differed in Advanced Placement (AP) and “College Prep” (CP) Government Classes. The U.S. Government course is a required high school course in California. Students in AP courses were more likely to report experiences of all but one of the civic opportunities

Comparison of Participatory Citizenship Scores for Students with Few Family and Neighborhood Civic Learning Opportunities, by Amount of Classroom Civic Opportunities



Source: Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh, *Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School*, The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2008, <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP59Kahne.pdf>.

measured than students in the College Prep Government classes. For example, 80% of Advanced Placement students reported participating in simulations, compared to only 51% of College Prep students.

Socioeconomic factors play a role in civic education opportunities. Analysis of the IEA Civic Education Study data found that students in classes with higher average socioeconomic status (SES) levels were 2.03 times more likely than students in classrooms with average SES to report studying how laws are made, 1.89 times more likely to report participating in service activities and 1.42 times more likely to report having experiences with debates or panel discussion in their social studies classes.

What the study's authors recommend:

- ▶ Professional development and curricular support for more effective civic learning opportunities
- ▶ Development of new civic learning initiatives focused on universal and/or low SES populations
- ▶ Increased evaluation of the extent to which all groups of students have access to civic learning opportunities.

Does the type of classroom instruction matter?

Paths to 21st Century Competencies Through Civic Education Classrooms

Judith Torney-Purta and Britt S. Wilkenfeld, Department of Human Development, University of Maryland, 2009.

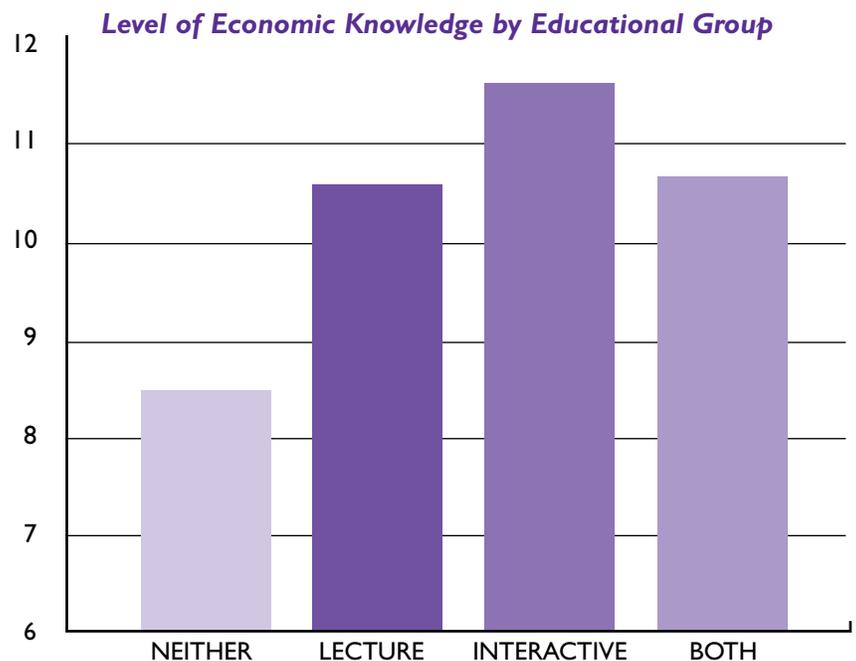
Concern about the level of preparation necessary for American students to perform in the workplace has spurred debates about what skills business leaders and others believe students should have upon entering the workforce. The “21st Century Skills” supported by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills and other groups include basic skills in reading and mathematics, but also include competencies such as: basic knowledge of economic and political processes; skill in understanding what is presented in the media; the ability to work well with others, especially diverse groups; positive attitudes about working hard and obeying the law; and creativity and innovation.

This study examines how civic education classroom instruction develops skills needed to succeed in the 21st century workforce. Drawing on the data from the IEA Civic Education Study, which included a nationally representative sample of 2,811 9th graders from throughout the country, the authors examined classroom practice among a variety of civic education classrooms (lecture-based, interactive discussion-based, both lecture-based and interactive discussion-based, and neither lecture-based nor interactive discussion-based) with scores on items measuring 21st century competencies.

The authors' analysis found:

- ▶ Students who experience interactive discussion-based education (either by itself or in combination with lecture-based civic education) score the highest on 21st century competencies, including working with others 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.

The authors suggest that educators seeking to strengthen their programs should focus on enhancing interactive, discussion-based teaching methods with a strong content focus as part of every student's educational experience.



Source: J. Torney-Purta & B.S. Wilkenfeld, *Paths to 21st Century Competencies Through Civic Education Classrooms: An Analysis of Survey Results from Ninth-Graders*, (A Technical Assistance Bulletin), Chicago, IL: American Bar Association Division for Public Education, 2009, <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/CMS-ABA21stCentSkillsStudyFullFinal.pdf>.

What's citizenship education's long-term impact on civic participation?

The Civic Achievement Gap

Meria Levinson, Boston Public Schools, for *The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*, 2007.

The Civic Achievement Gap shows that young people (as well as adults) who are non-white, poor, and/or of immigrant populations demonstrate considerably lower levels of civic and political knowledge, skills, positive attitudes and participation, compared to white, wealthier and/or native born youth and adults. In terms of civic knowledge, Levinson notes that in the 4th, 8th and 12th grades, African-American, Hispanic and poor students perform significantly lower on the civics test of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) than white, Asian and middle-class students.

A difference is also noted in civic participation of adults, as people living in families with annual incomes under \$15,000 vote at barely half the rate of those living in families with incomes over \$75,000 (45% versus 80%). Those wealthier individuals were also six times more likely to be politically active, measured in ways that include working for a campaign, serving on the board of an organization, participating in protests or contacting elected officials.

“... people living in families with annual incomes under \$15,000 vote at barely half the rate of those living in families with incomes over \$75,000 ...”

A sizeable gap also is found in a sense of efficacy – the belief that individuals, generally, can influence government and that they, personally, can influence government. Levinson reported that political efficacy increases in direct relationship to personal income, “with the poorest individuals expressing attitudes almost a full standard deviation lower than the wealthiest; it also is significantly correlated with race/ethnicity, with Latinos at the bottom, African-Americans in the middle and white respondents at the top.”

Levinson suggests that this civic achievement gap is important for the civic and political empowerment of poor and minority individuals, but does not offer specific recommendations for closing that gap.



ECS Resources:

The ECS Citizenship Education Database.

This 50-state database, updated in 2009-2010, highlights state policies on citizenship education, including high school graduation requirements, state standards and assessment requirements.

www.ecs.org/citizenshipeducationdatabase

The District Leaders Network for Civic Engagement and Service-Learning

This ECS-facilitated network of district superintendents and school board members from across the nation is committed to high-quality citizenship education, engaging and mentoring other leaders to support effective and sustainable civic education and service-learning for every student. Members are provided with networking opportunities, access to resources, strategies, and the latest research to support civic engagement and service-learning at the school district level.

www.ecs.org/DLN

Other Resources

Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools is a coalition of 40 organizations committed to improving the quality and quantity of civic learning in American schools. Its goal is to increase and improve civic learning in grades K-12 by working for policies that implement the recommendations of the Civic Mission of Schools report.

www.civicmissionofschools.org

CIRCLE: The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement

CIRCLE conducts research on the civic and political engagement of young Americans. Its Web site contains an extensive collection of research summaries and reports on all facets of civic engagement, including citizenship education.

www.civicyouth.org

Policy Recommendations

Policymakers and education leaders are in a unique position to encourage and support high-quality citizenship education. Strengthening the quality and increasing opportunities for citizenship education for all students is essential to encourage the next generation of American citizens to be informed and active.

State policymakers should consider:

- ▶ Re-evaluating existing content standards and accompanying assessments (if any) for a focus beyond civic knowledge, to include civic skills and dispositions
- ▶ Looking beyond social studies as the only venue for citizenship education; civic skills can be acquired across disciplines, and through the use of service-learning, in virtually any content area
- ▶ Investing in professional development for existing teachers (providing best practices in social studies and participatory teaching strategies)
- ▶ Working with postsecondary schools of education to strengthen pre-service and in-service education in civic education
- ▶ Ensuring systems are in place to make sure all students, especially minority and low-SES students, have opportunities to learn the skills of citizenship through their regular academic coursework
- ▶ Providing support for additional research in high-quality civic education, civic achievement outcomes and examination of civic opportunity gaps in K-12 education.



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