



**CIRCLE**

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

## Youth Attitudes Towards Civic Education and Community Service Requirements

By Mark Hugo Lopez, Research Director<sup>1</sup>  
October 2002

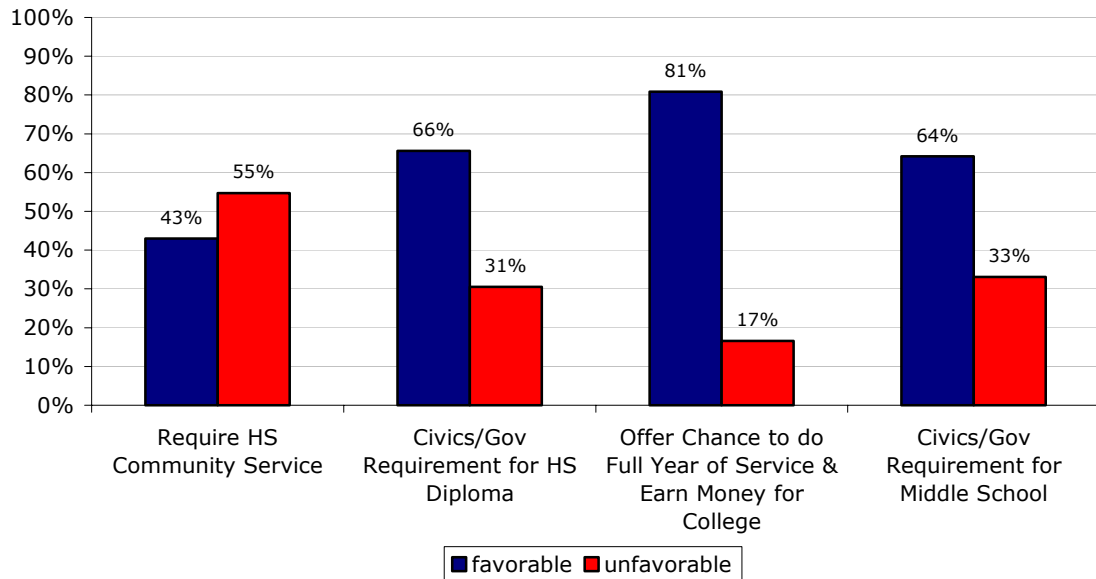
Young people strongly support the idea of required government and civics classes in high school and middle school, but are not in support of community service requirements for high school graduation. In a recent survey sponsored jointly by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement and the Council for Excellence in Government, several questions regarding young people's attitudes towards civic education and community service requirements were asked. These included the following four questions. (Respondents could choose answers ranging from "strongly favorable" to "strongly oppose".)

Are you favorable or unfavorable towards:

- Requiring all graduating high school students to complete a certain amount of community service to receive their diploma?
- Making classes on civics and government a requirement for high school graduation?
- Offering every young person a chance to do a full year of national or community service and earn money towards college or advanced training?
- Making classes on civics and government a requirement for middle school?

Specific results for all four questions from a nationally representative sample of 1,500 young people are contained in Graph 1. Young people are not in support of requiring high school students to complete some community service. However, they do support requiring civics and government classes for high school graduation, offering students a chance to do community service to earn money for college, and requiring civics and government courses in middle school.

**Graph 1: Attitudes Towards Civic Education & Community Service Requirements, Among 15-25 Year Olds**

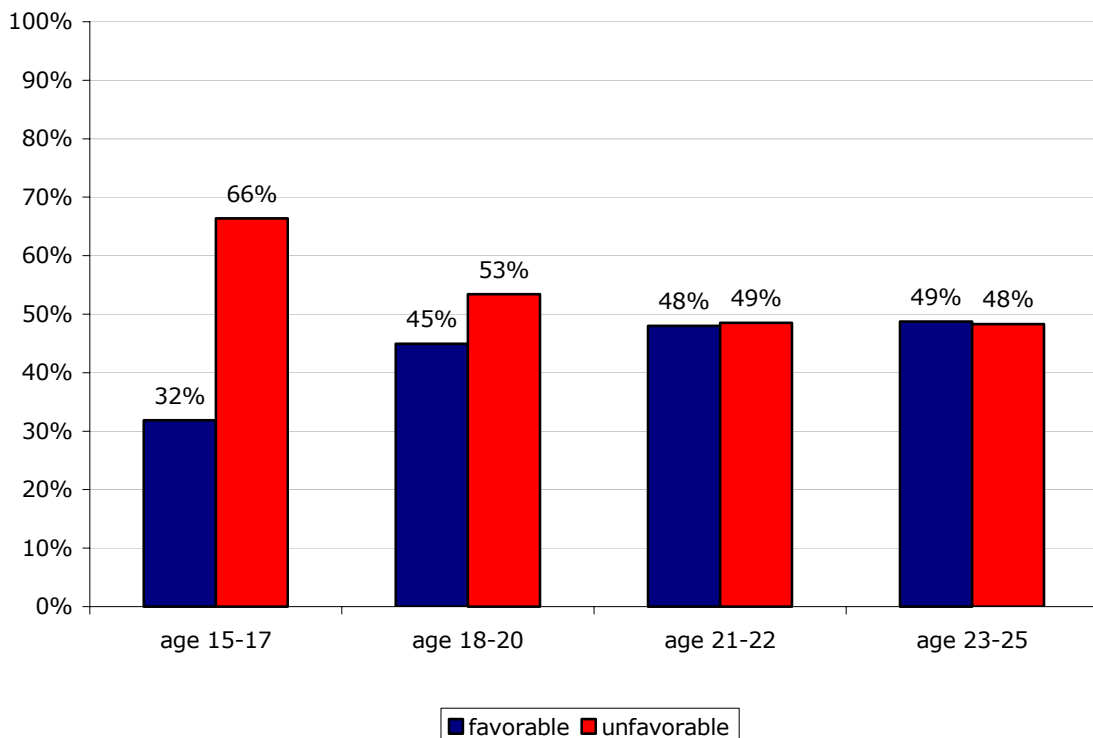


Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

**Attitudes on Requiring Community Service, by Sub-Groups**

Support for requiring community service is weakest among those currently in school, and evenly split among those who are above the age of 21.

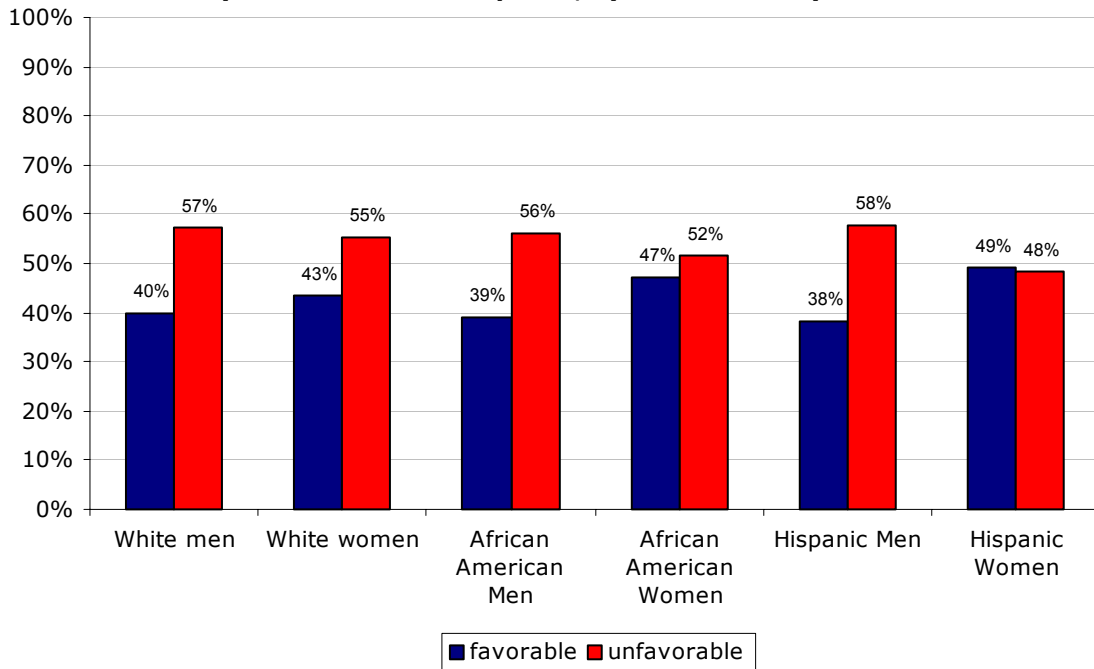
**Graph 2: Attitudes Toward Requiring Community Service for a HS Diploma, by Age.**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

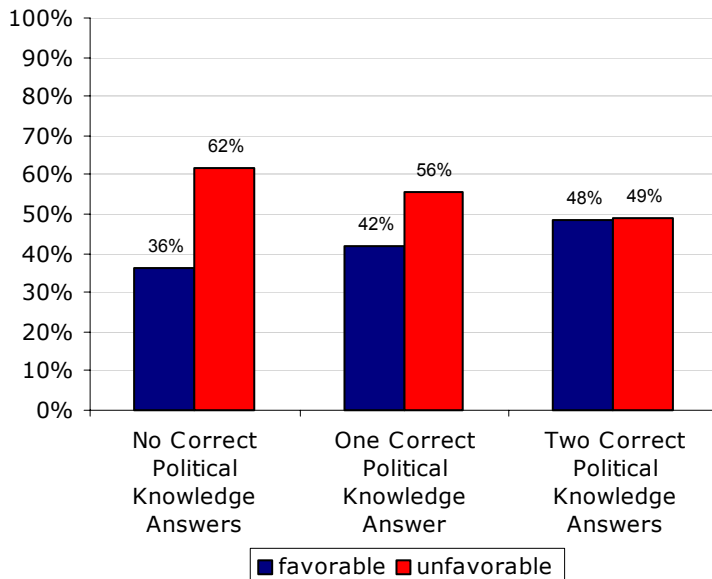
Minority women are more likely to support a community service requirement than their male counterparts, though across all groups, a majority of young people is against requiring community service for high school graduation.

**Graph 3: Attitudes Toward Requiring Community Service for a HS Diploma, by Race/Ethnicity & Gender.**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

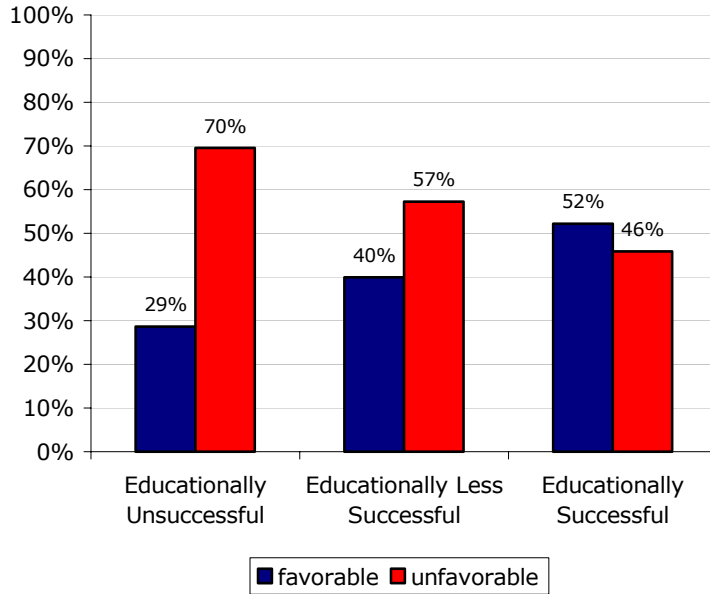
**Graph 4: Attitudes Toward Requiring Community Service for a HS Diploma, by Political Knowledge.**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

Those who answered two political knowledge<sup>2</sup> questions correctly are evenly split across requiring community service for a HS diploma.

**Graph 5: Attitudes Toward Requiring Community Service for a HS Diploma, by Level of Educational Success.**



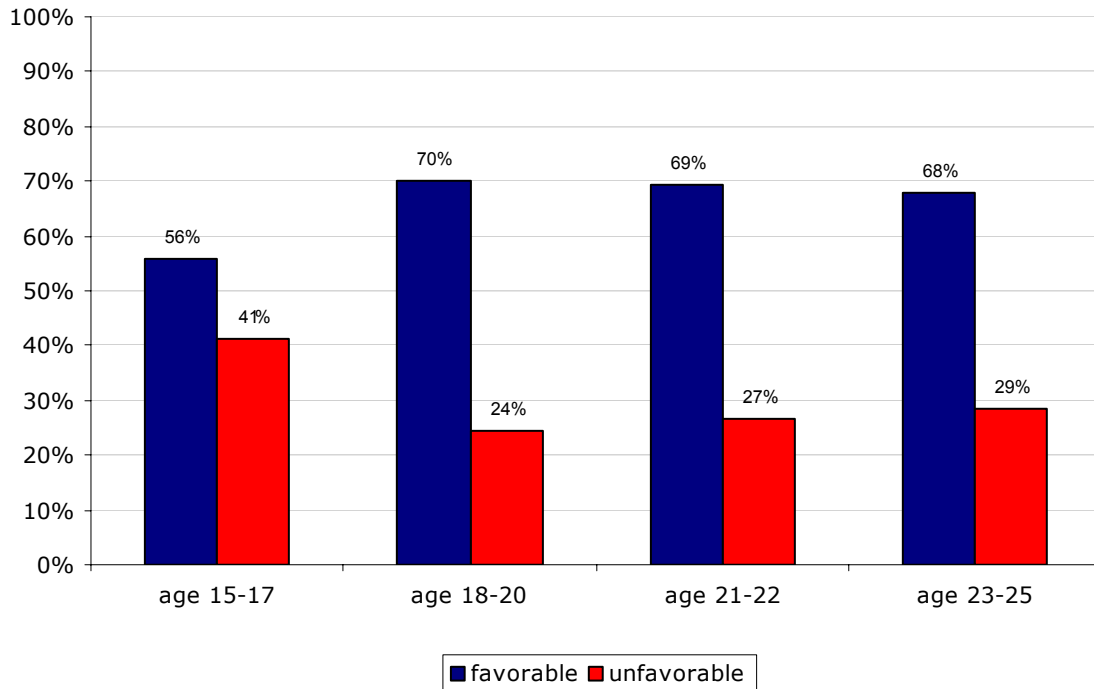
Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

Young people with greater levels of educational success<sup>3</sup> are also more likely to support a community service requirement in high school.

### ***Making Civics and Government Classes a Requirement in High School***

There is general support for making civics and government classes a requirement in High School. However, support is weakest among those most likely to be affected by new requirements, namely those currently in high school.

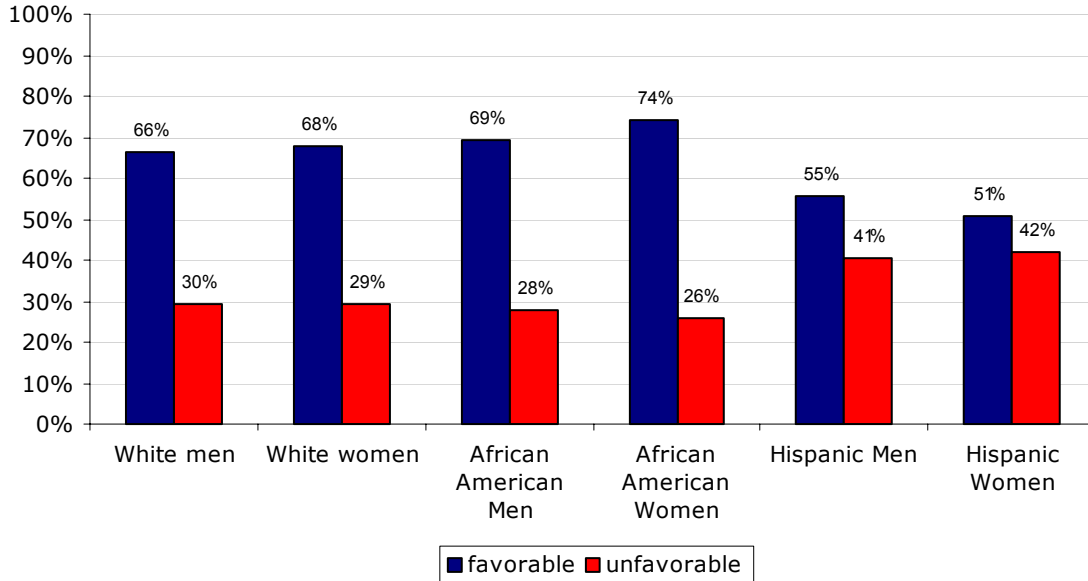
**Graph 6: Attitudes Toward Making Civics/Government Classes a Requirement for HS Diploma, by Age.**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

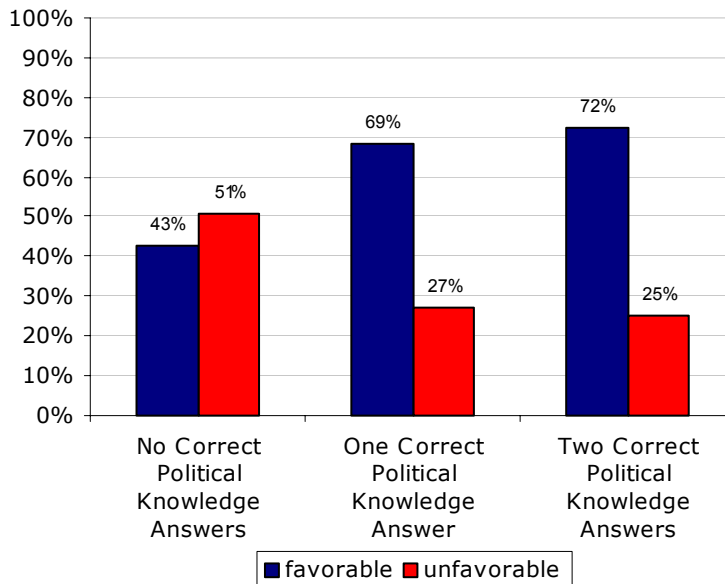
Support for making civics and government classes a requirement in high school has strong support among white and African American students, with African American female young people showing the strongest support. Young Hispanics however show the weakest support for requiring civics and government classes for high school graduation.

**Graph 7: Attitudes Toward Making Civics/Government Classes a Requirement for HS Diploma, by Race/Ethnicity & Gender.**



Source: CIRACLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

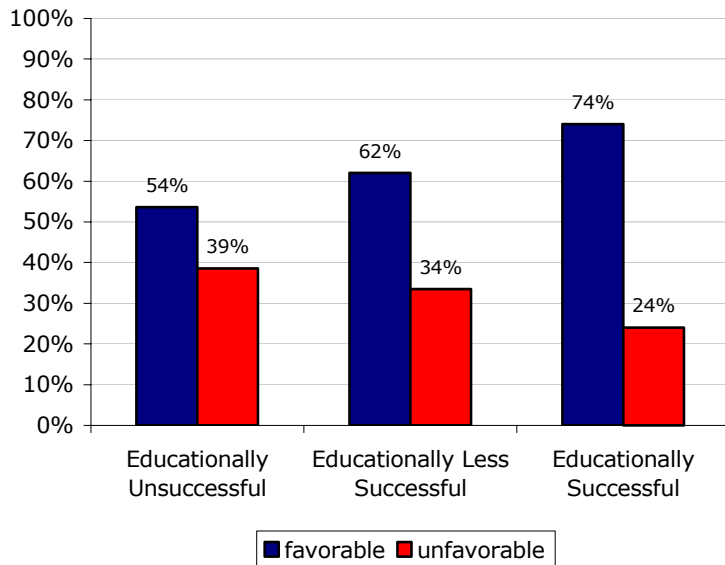
**Graph 8: Attitudes Toward Making Civics/Government Classes a Requirement for a HS Diploma, by Political Knowledge.**



Source: CIRACLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

Young people with greater political knowledge are also more likely to support a high school civics and government requirement.

**Graph 9: Attitudes Toward Making Civics/Government Classes a Requirement for a HS Diploma, by Level of Educational Success.**



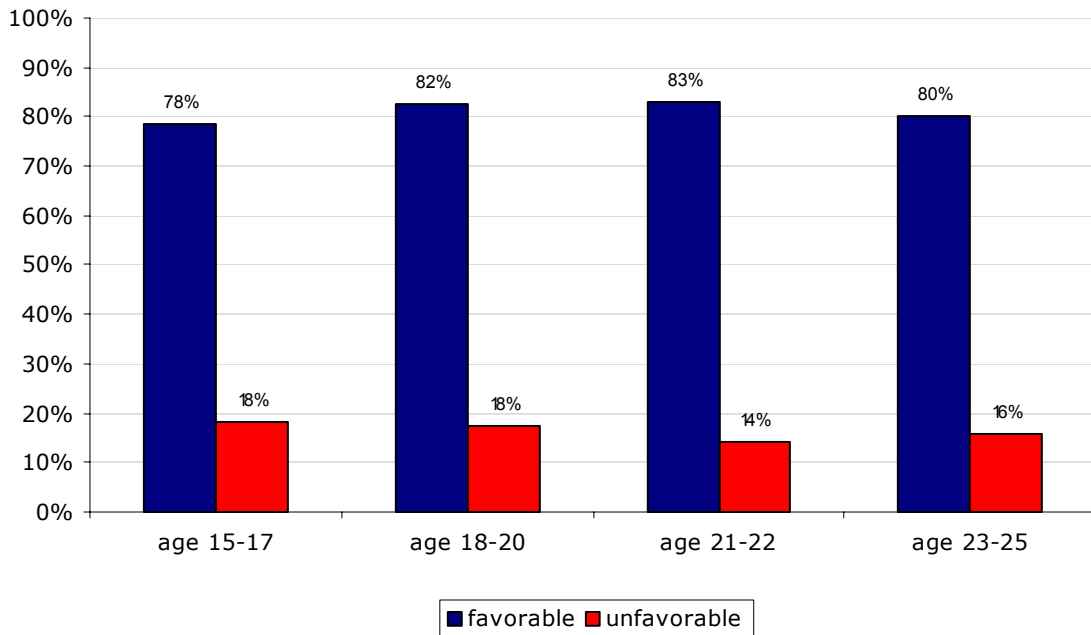
Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

Similarly, the greater a young person's level of educational success, the greater is support for making civics and government courses a requirement for a high school diploma.

### ***Support for Offering every Young Person a Chance to Earn Money for College by Doing Community or National Service***

Generally speaking, there is wide support across all age groups for a policy that would offer young people the chance to earn money for college in exchange for doing community or national service.

**■ Graph 10: Attitudes Toward Offering Students a Chance to do Community Service to Earn Money for College, by Age.**

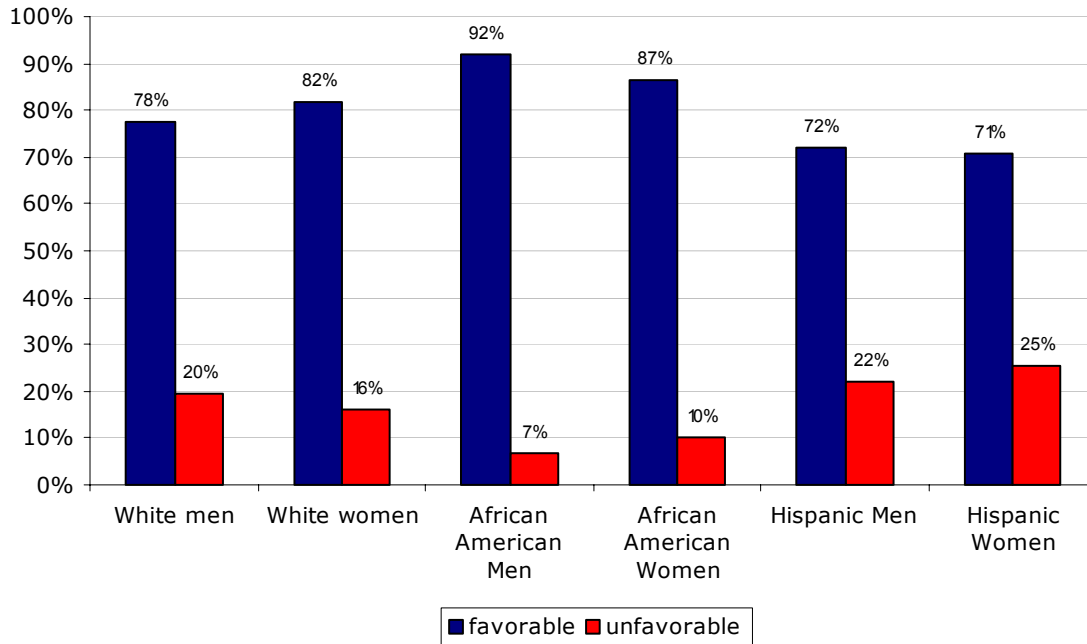


Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.



African American youth show particularly strong support for the idea of offering money for college by doing national or community service. Hispanic youth are less likely to support the idea, though a large majority of Hispanic youth is favorable towards such a policy.

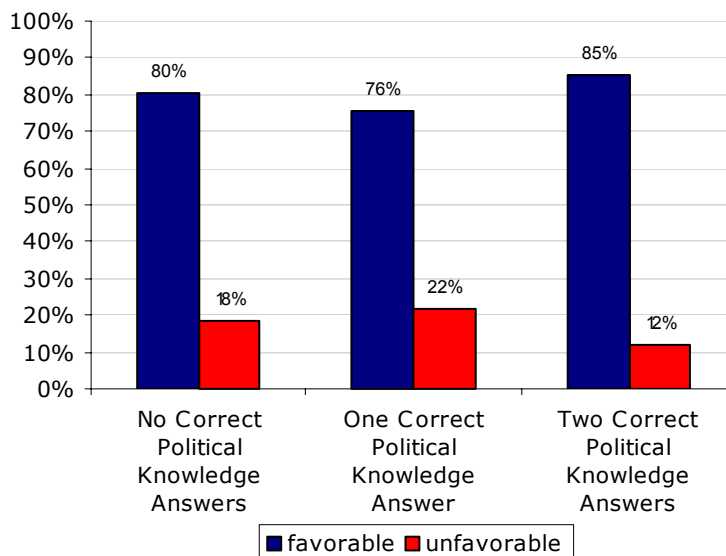
**Graph 11: Attitudes Toward Offering Students a Chance to do Community Service to Earn Money for College, by Race/Ethnicity & Gender.**



Source: CIRACLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

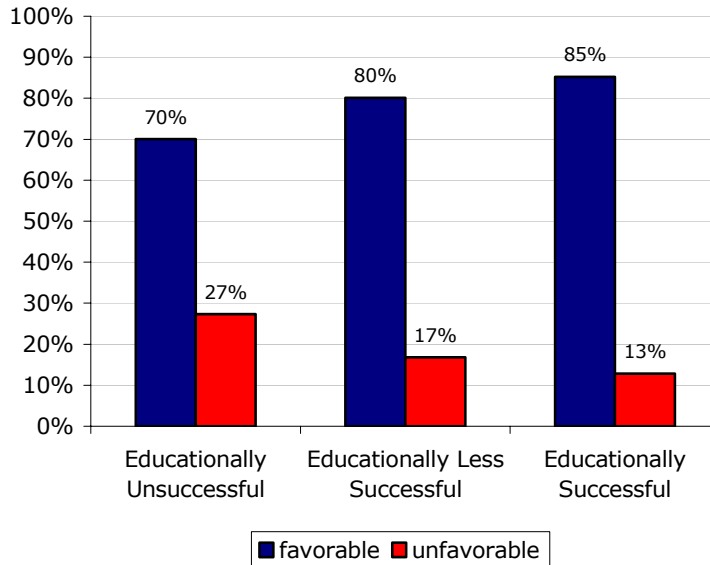
**Graph 12: Attitudes Toward Offering Students a Chance to do Community Service to Earn Money for College, by Political Knowledge.**

Support is strong no matter how much political knowledge young people demonstrated in our survey.



Source: CIRACLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

**Graph 13: Attitudes Toward Offering Students a Chance to do Community Service to Earn Money for College, by Level of Educational Success.**



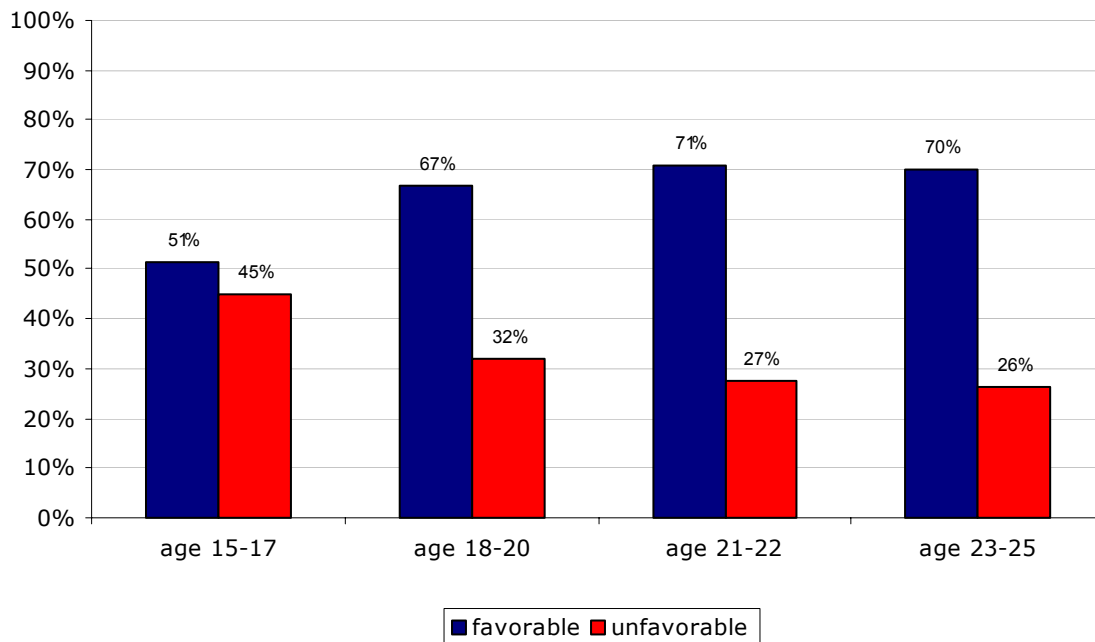
Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

Support for offering money for college in exchange for national or community service is strongest among young people who are more educationally successful.

### ***Support for Civics and Government Course Requirements in Junior High School/Middle School***

Support for a middle school civics/government course requirement is strongest among young people older than 21, though a majority of all young people between ages 15 and 25 have a favorable view of the requirement.

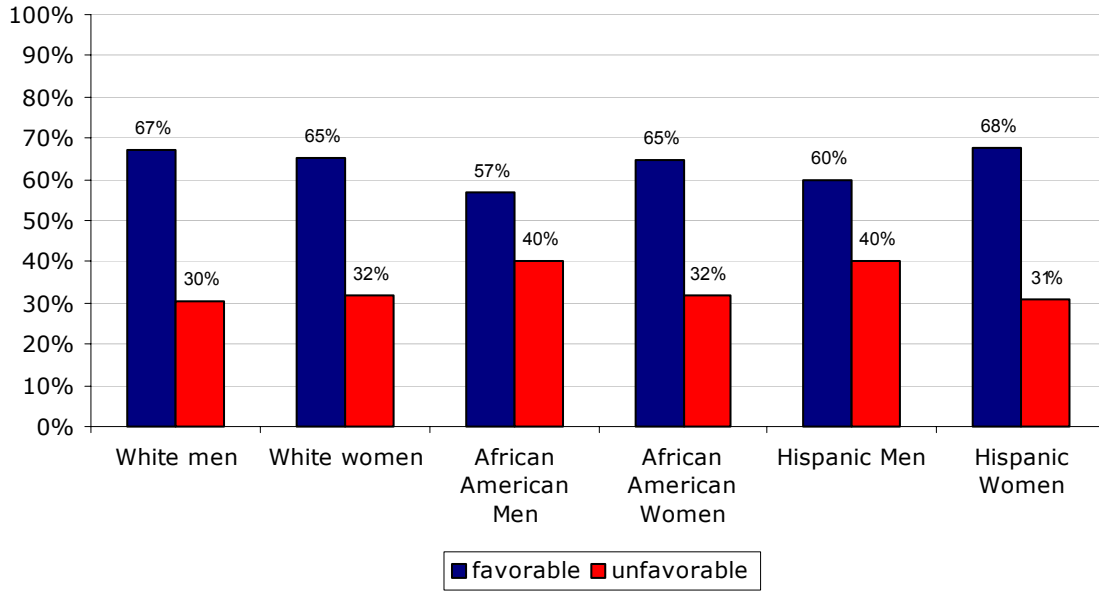
**■ Graph 14: Attitudes Toward Requiring Civics/Government Courses in Junior High School/Middle School, by Age.**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

African American young men and Hispanic young men support for a middle school civics and government course requirement is weaker than all other groups.

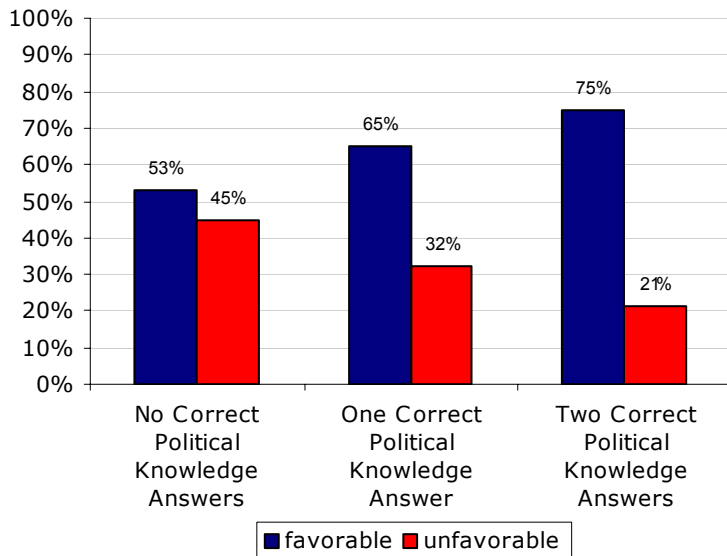
**Graph 15: Attitudes Toward Requiring Civics/Government Courses in Junior High School/Middle School, by Race/Ethnicity & Gender.**



Source: CIRACLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

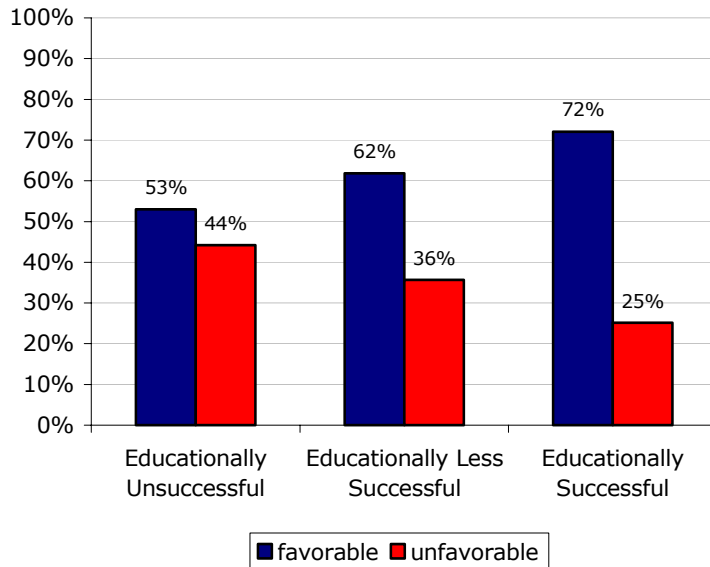
**Graph 16: Attitudes Toward Requiring Civics/Government Courses in Junior High School/Middle School, by Political Knowledge.**

Young people who have demonstrated a greater level of political knowledge are also more likely to support a middle school civics/government course requirement.



Source: CIRACLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

**Graph 17: Attitudes Toward Requiring Civics/Government Courses in Junior High School/Middle School, by Level of Educational Success.**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, 2002.

Young people who are more educationally successful are also more likely to support a middle school civics/government requirement.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> I thank Peter Levine and Carrie Donovan for comments on a previous draft of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are my own.

<sup>2</sup> In the CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government survey, each participant was asked two multiple-choice political knowledge questions such as “How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a Presidential veto?”

<sup>3</sup> Those who are “educationally successful” have completed college or intend to complete college. Those who are “educationally less successful” have completed some college and do not intend to complete a bachelor’s degree. Those who are “educationally unsuccessful” have completed a high school diploma or less, and do not intend to complete more schooling.