

## HAS "NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND" NARROWED SCHOOL CURRICULA?

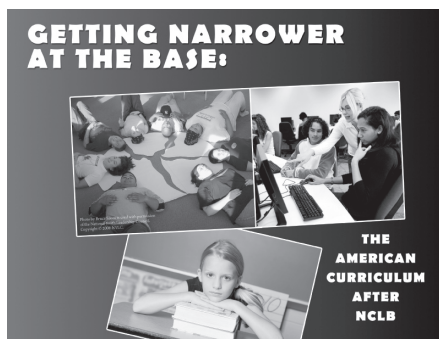
A new CIRCLE report shows that despite public belief to the contrary, pressures from the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) are not causing schools to shift away from teaching social studies, liberal arts, and sciences. In fact, at the middle and high school levels, curricula have remained constant and in some cases expanded since the federal law was passed in 2001.

In grades one through five, the curriculum has narrowed over the last ten years, with more time devoted to reading and math and less to science, arts, and social studies. These declines, though, began in the 1990s before the passage of NCLB. The trends are the same in private and public schools and in schools with majorities of white and minority students.

**IN GRADES ONE THROUGH FIVE, THE CURRICULUM HAS NARROWED OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS, WITH MORE TIME DEVOTED TO READING AND MATH AND LESS TO SCIENCE, ARTS, AND SOCIAL STUDIES. THESE DECLINES, THOUGH, BEGAN IN THE 1990s BEFORE THE PASSAGE OF NCLB.**

"There has been a narrowing of the curriculum in the earlier grades, but you can't place the blame solely on the shoulders of NCLB," said report co-author Peter Levine, director of CIRCLE. "If we seek to broaden the K-12 curriculum to include more citizenship and arts education, amending NCLB will not suffice. Local and state policies, public expectations, textbooks, and other factors are also responsible for recent changes in the curriculum."

CIRCLE analyzed five major federal datasets looking at the how curricula and relevant extracurricular activities have changed at the elementary, middle and high school levels from 1987 to 2005. The datasets employed met the following criteria: (a) collected regularly over time and (b) collected from teachers and/or students as well as district leaders and parents. Funded by the Ford Foundation, the full report, titled *Narrower at the Base: The American Curriculum After NCLB*, can be found at [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).



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WINTER 2009

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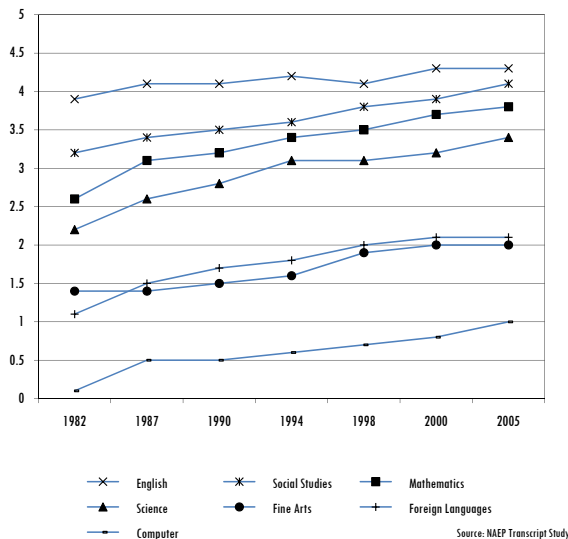
THE RESEARCH ROUNDUP COLUMN HIGHLIGHTS RECENT RESEARCH FINDINGS COMMISSIONED OR GENERATED BY CIRCLE. ALSO INCLUDED IS AN UPDATE ON NEW CIRCLE PRODUCTS SUCH AS FACT SHEETS, RESEARCH ARTICLES, RESEARCH ABSTRACTS, BIBLIOGRAPHIES, AND DATASETS.

## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS STUDYING MORE DIVERSE SUBJECTS

No evidence was found that middle school or high school curricula have narrowed. At the high school level, there was a slight expansion of the liberal arts curriculum between 1998 and 2004. Using the *NAEP Transcript Study*, CIRCLE found that the proportion of high school students who completed major liberal arts courses grew during this time period, and the proportion of 17-year-old students who took courses such as art, drama and music increased significantly as well.

The report cautions that one major limitation of the NAEP dataset is that it reports the credits earned by students who have graduated from high school. As a result, students who

**Graph 1: Average Number of Credits Earned by High School Graduates**



do not graduate from high school are omitted. There is no precise count of high school dropouts nationally, but estimates run as high as 29 percent of those who enter ninth grade. The authors note that, "If the curriculum broadens only for students who make it all the way through high school, then it never broadens for some."

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*CIRCLE is based at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University (<http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/>). The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service 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.*

## NO EVIDENCE OF CURRICULAR CHANGE AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

The curriculum for grades six to eight (middle school) has not been much affected by the narrowing problem. Using the supplemental survey administered with the *NAEP Reading Assessment* at age 13 (typically, eighth grade), the CIRCLE analysis did not find dramatic changes in the "special" courses that students take (see graph 2 on page 3).

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FINDINGS

According to the report, there has been some curricular narrowing in elementary school, but mostly at first grade. CIRCLE's independent analysis of the U.S. Department of Education's *Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)* data confirms findings previously published by Martin West. There has been an overall decline in attention to the liberal arts subjects of natural science and social studies/history.

The changes were greatest in the first grade (shown in graph 3 on page 3). First-graders spent more than two hours more per week on the main academic subjects in 2003-4 than their predecessors had spent in 1987-8. The biggest contribution to that change was an extra 96 minutes per week of English in the first grade. Time spent on social studies declined by about 12 minutes.

The report cautions that merely comparing 1987 and 2004 conceals a more complex pattern in the intervening years. Time devoted by teachers to all four major academic

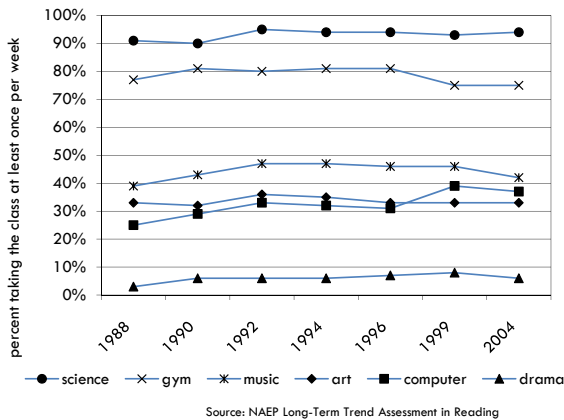


subjects—English, mathematics, social studies, and science—first rose between 1987-8 and 1993-4. This was a period in which the academic curriculum was generally tightened, and standards and high-stakes tests were widely introduced. Social studies and science received more, not less, time during the elementary years as a whole. However, between 1993-4 and 2003-4, while time devoted to reading and mathematics expanded in all grades, time allocated by teachers to social studies and science generally shrank. This trend began before the passage of NCLB and continued thereafter. As a result, time allocated to social studies and science in 2003-4 was slightly below where it had been in the mid-1980s. The authors hypothesize that increased attention

“That mission requires widespread literacy and numeracy. But it also requires specific knowledge of history, government, social issues and current events as well as democratic and civic skills and values. We need to make sure these important areas of study are not lost in school curricula.”

**LEVINE NOTES, “IN A DEMOCRACY, WHAT STUDENTS LEARN IS NOT A MATTER THAT CAN BE LEFT TO THE TECHNICAL EXPERTS WHO WRITE TESTS. IT IS AN ISSUE OF VALUES THAT SHOULD BE PUBLICLY DELIBERATED USING THE BEST AVAILABLE EMPIRICAL DATA.”**

**Graph 2: NAEP-Designated “Special” Classes at Age 13**



to academic achievement first helped social studies and science; but then a tighter focus on reading and mathematics cut into time for these subjects. Moreover, the narrowing trend began before NCLB and affects private schools just as much as public schools. Thus the cause is probably not NCLB but rather a combination of parents’ and teachers’ priorities, textbooks, state laws, local policies, etc.

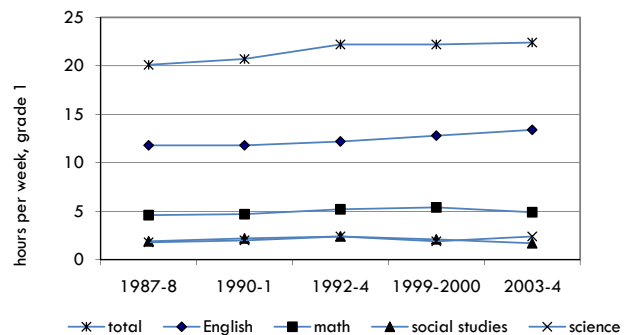
**STILL, BROADER CURRICULUM NEEDED TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR CITIZENSHIP**

Even though the k-12 curriculum has not narrowed consistently, and even though NCLB is not mainly responsible for the narrowing that has occurred, the curriculum may still be too narrow to prepare young people for citizenship. Extracurricular activities such as music, drama, student journalism, and student government, are also too rare.

“The purpose of schools is not only to prepare workers, but also to create an active and egalitarian democracy,” Levine continued.

With the new Administration and the next Congress set to discuss the reauthorization of NCLB, the report suggests stakeholders, lawmakers and citizens should give attention to the ways education has changed in the last several decades. Levine notes, “In a democracy, what students learn is not a matter that can be left to the technical experts who write tests. It is an issue of values that should be publicly deliberated using the best available empirical data.”

**Graph 3: Time Allocated to Four Major Subjects in Public Schools, First Grade**



**RECOMMENDATIONS**

CIRCLE recommends that all stakeholders—including legislators, educational administrators, teachers, parents, and students themselves—give critical attention to the ways that the American curriculum has changed since the 1980s and 1990s. Citizens may wish to consider the following positions:

**1. Back to basics.** Reading and math are fundamental. Performance in these subjects is inadequate for the whole population and very

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## CIRCLE DESIGNS AND ANALYZES 2008 CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

Designed and analyzed by CIRCLE, the *Civic Health Index* is an annual comprehensive assessment of attitudes, behaviors, and actions of Americans related to civic activities including politics, volunteering, community action, and others. The survey provides a wealth of information about Americans' civic participation. Among other things, the 2008 survey found that citizens were heavily engaged in political activities during the 2008 campaign, but many did not anticipate taking future action on issues raised during the campaign.

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**AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE SURVEY FOUND THAT CITIZENS WERE HEAVILY ENGAGED IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES DURING THE 2008 CAMPAIGN, BUT MANY DID NOT ANTICIPATE TAKING FUTURE ACTION ON ISSUES RAISED DURING THE CAMPAIGN.**

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"What's apparent from our findings is that Americans were actively engaged in this presidential election and devoted to serving their communities," said Peter Levine, director of CIRCLE. "However, there is a lack of opportunities to develop their civic skills and contribute their talents to address our deepest public problems. Our nation needs to cultivate and capitalize on this desire through laws and policies."

The creation of America's *Civic Health Index* and report was a cooperative effort of the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC), CIRCLE, and Harvard University's Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America. The survey was conducted in July 2008 by Peter D. Hart Research Associates with national samples of 1,005 respondents by telephone and 1,000 surveyed online. The full report is available at [www.ncoc.net](http://www.ncoc.net). *Note: unless otherwise noted the findings presented pertain to adults of all ages, not just young adults ages 18 to 29.*

### **MOST PEOPLE DO NOT EXPECT TO STAY ENGAGED AFTER THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

This pre-election survey found that half of participants said they had tried to persuade someone to vote for or against a candidate, which was close to a historical high. The Internet

also expanded political involvement as 39 percent had watched an online video about a presidential candidate and 33 percent had watched a candidate's speech online.

However, the survey showed that more were "frustrated" (43 percent) than "excited" (19 percent) by the election. Many did not expect to work on the issues debated in the campaign in their communities after the election. Less than 10 percent said they planned to contact a local official about an issue and just 14 percent planned to try to change local policies in their school, workplaces, and communities.

### **STRONG SUPPORT FOR POLICY TO INSTITUTIONALIZE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

Despite the low expectations for activism, there was strong and bipartisan support for changes in laws and policies that would support greater civic engagement between elections. Eighty-seven percent favored providing young people with the opportunity to earn tuition money by completing a year of national or community service, and 73 percent believed service-learning should be required of all high school students. Eighty percent also supported holding a national deliberation on major policy issues and requiring Congress to hold hearings on the results.

### **AFRICAN-AMERICANS POLITICALLY ENERGIZED**

Overall, African-Americans were the most engaged, especially in this election cycle, surpassing the rest of the population in voting, going to political meetings and rallies, and talking to other people about politics. This can be partly attributed to the first presidential nomination of an African-



American by a major party, but previous research has found African-Americans, especially youth, to be more civically engaged than their counterparts.

**EIGHTY-SEVEN PERCENT FAVORED PROVIDING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO EARN TUITION MONEY BY COMPLETING A YEAR OF NATIONAL OR COMMUNITY SERVICE, AND 73 PERCENT BELIEVED SERVICE-LEARNING SHOULD BE REQUIRED OF ALL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.**

**THE WORKING CLASS IS DISENGAGED, BUT TECHNOLOGY MAY HELP**

As previous research confirms, people with college experience, especially young people, were found to be more civically active than those who have not attended college. Adults without high school diplomas lagged even further behind. The following pie chart categorizes young people (ages 18 to 29) by types of engagement (See text box to the right for Civic Engagement Classifications). The charts show that young people with no college education were twice as likely to be uninvolved, and none of them were involved in several ways.

However younger people who never attended college were well represented and participated in online groups. Thus, the Internet, social networking sites, cell phones and other technologies may provide opportunities to engage them more, which may reduce the civic gap among younger generations. ★

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS**

**Electoral specialists:** Engaged in three or more electoral activities (registering, voting, volunteering for a candidate or campaign, attending political meetings and rallies, giving money to a candidate in person, giving money to a candidate online, and talking to someone about voting for a particular candidate).

**Service specialists:** Engaged in three or more service activities (volunteering, belonging to a group/organization, going to a club meeting, and working on a community project).

**Citizen-centered:** Both attended a public meeting where community issues were discussed and worked with people in the community to solve a problem.

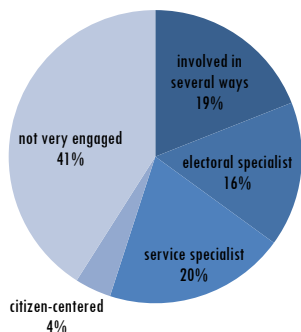
**Involved in several ways:** Qualified for more than one of the above categories.

**Not very engaged:** Qualified for none of these categories.

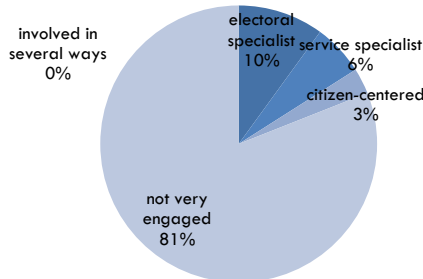
*Note that because some people are involved in several ways, the slices labeled "electoral specialists," "service specialists," and "citizen-centered" do not include everyone who qualified for those categories. Those who qualified for more than one are "involved in several ways."*



**Figure 1: Young Adults with Some College Experience**



**Figure 2: Young Adults with No College Experience**



## A CLOSER LOOK AT THE RECORD 2008 YOUTH VOTE

An estimated 23 million young Americans under the age of 30 voted in the 2008 presidential election, 3.4 million more voters as compared to 2004. CIRCLE estimated that youth voter turnout rose to between 52 percent and 53 percent, an increase of four to five percentage points. Compared to 2000, the increase in youth turnout is at least 11 percentage points.<sup>1</sup>

### EDUCATIONAL GAP REMAINS

Continuing the trend observed in the past elections, young people with no college experience were underrepresented in this election. For instance, while just 57 percent of U.S. citizens under 30 have ever attended college, 70 percent of all young voters had gone to college.<sup>2</sup> The same disproportion can be seen when looking at those without a high school diploma. While youth with no high school diploma make up 14 percent of the general youth population, only six percent of young voters in 2008 had no high school diploma (see Figure 2 on page 7).

Young voters with no high school diplomas showed lower trust in the electoral process (14% “not at all” confident that votes would be counted accurately compared to 1-2% for youth with high school diploma or higher), showed higher levels of support for health-care coverage than other groups (18% compared to 9% overall), and were more racially diverse and more likely to be African-American (27%) or Latino (22%), while less likely to be white (47%).

### YOUNG VOTERS STRONGLY SUPPORT BARACK OBAMA AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

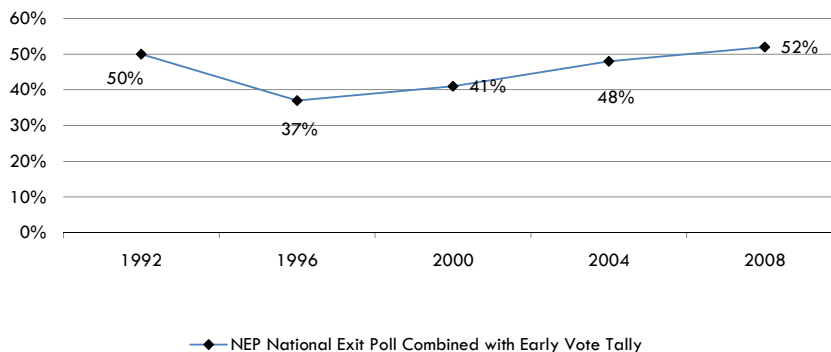
Barack Obama received his strongest support from the 18-to-29 year-old voting bloc; more than two-thirds of these voters cast their ballot for the Obama/Biden ticket. Senator McCain received about a third of the youth votes. Moreover, young people were more likely to self-identify as a “Democrat” (45%) than an “Independent or Something Else” (29%) or a “Republican” (26%).

One of the most striking characteristics of this election was young people’s united support for Barack Obama, regardless of their political affiliations. Thirty-three percent of young white voters self-identified as “Democrat,” and yet, 54 percent voted for the Democratic candidate. Similar trends were seen with African-Americans and Latinos: a large number of youth self-identified as Republicans yet voted for Barack Obama, signifying youth support for Obama seemed to cross racial and partisan lines.

### YOUNG WOMEN MORE MOBILIZED

Young women voters also came out to the polls in larger numbers—55 percent of young voters were women, which was consistent with the overall trend (53 percent of all votes were cast by women). This trend, however, was especially strong for young African-American voters, 61 percent of whom were women.

Figure 1: Voter Turnout Among 18-to-29 Year-Olds, 1992-2008



## CIRCLE FACT SHEETS

CIRCLE has produced numerous Fact Sheets, which are brief documents with basic information and graphs on various topics. The following Fact Sheets have been recently added to CIRCLE's Web site:

### ■ YOUNG VOTERS IN THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

This fact sheet provides information about young voters in the 2008 election. It reveals that young Americans voted for Obama across party and racial lines, but youth with no college experience were underrepresented at the polls. Voter turnout estimates are also presented. Based on data from the Edison/Mitofsky National Election Pool, National Exit Poll, 2008.

### ■ QUICK FACTS ABOUT YOUNG VOTERS IN THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (PRE-ELECTION SERIES)

A series of state-by-state fact sheets about young voters in the 2008 presidential election. They provide basic information on youth voting in the 2000 and 2004 general elections and the 2008 primaries and caucuses, along with demographic data on young citizens.

### ■ STATE VOTER REGISTRATION AND ELECTION DAY LAWS

This fact sheet on state voting laws shows which provisions (such as early voting or same-day registration) are in effect in each state and which of these rules is most likely to raise youth turnout.

## AS FOR ADULTS, THE ECONOMY WAS THE TOP VOTING ISSUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

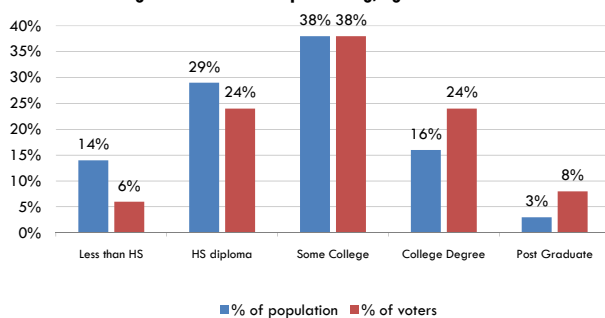
The economy was a top issue for young people, as it was for adults. Youth were more likely to oppose U.S. offshore oil drilling (39 percent versus 28 percent of all voters). More young people said a candidate's race was a factor than the general voting population (24 percent versus 19 percent). Almost half of young voters said they would be "excited" if Obama won, as compared to 30 percent of the overall electorate, and just 20 percent of voters over the age of 60.

## A DIVERSE COHORT

The 18-29 age voting bloc is more diverse than older voters—youth voters classified themselves as Hispanic/Latino; Black; and gay, lesbian, or bisexual in much larger proportions than the electorate as a whole.

CIRCLE youth voter statistics immediately after elections are estimates compiled from the National Exit Polls, which have produced turnout trends that closely track the trends in the Census Current Population Survey (CPS), which is the other reliable source for estimating youth voter statistics. CPS voting data for 2008 will not be available until spring 2009. ★

Figure 2: Education Gap in Voting, ages 18 to 29



1. The following formula was used to calculate turnout percentages using the National Election Pool, National Exit Poll =  $(\% \text{ of age group in ntl poll}) / (\text{total votes cast}) / (\text{age group's CPS citizen population})$ . The source of votes cast varies from year to year. For 1992, 1996, and 2000 the "day after" vote tallies came from the AP as of 6 am the day after the election as published in the Washington Post. For 2004 the vote tallies came from CIRCLE's collection of vote tallies as reported by the media as of 6 am the day after the election. In 2008, CIRCLE used overall vote count projections by Curtis Gans, director of American University's Center for the Study of the American Electorate. All figures used to calculate turnout are available upon request. Caution should be used when comparing estimates between years due to the above factors. Our turnout estimates should be used to determine a directional change in voting. Turnout figures are only estimates.

2. See CIRCLE Fact Sheet "Electoral Engagement Among Non-College Attending Youth" (July 2005)



## DIVERSITY AND EQUITY IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: TWO NEW CIRCLE WORKING PAPERS

BY J. FOSTER-BEY, JAMES B. HYMAN, AND PETER LEVINE

*Following is a summary of the two new reports written by J. Foster-Bey, James B. Hyman and Peter Levine.*

In order to support efforts to reach groups that are underrepresented in volunteer and service programs, we present two new background papers that examine rates of voluntary service and other forms of civic engagement among various subgroups of Americans. These papers were commissioned by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The papers are: CIRCLE Working Paper #62, "Do Race, Ethnicity, Citizenship and Socio-economic Status Determine Civic-Engagement," and CIRCLE Working Paper #63, "Civic Engagement and the Disadvantaged: Challenges, Opportunities and Recommendations." They can be downloaded from the CIRCLE Web site at <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=326>.

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**AS SHOWN IN THESE PAPERS, VOLUNTEERING AND OTHER FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BENEFIT THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE AS WELL AS THOSE WHOM THEY SERVE. WE SHOULD THEREFORE BE CONCERNED WHEN ANY GROUPS OF AMERICANS MAY NOT BE ACCESSING THESE BENEFITS.**

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As shown in these papers, volunteering and other forms of civic engagement benefit those who participate as well as those whom they serve. We should therefore be concerned when any groups of Americans may not be accessing these benefits. But we should be particularly concerned where any group whom we believe to be disadvantaged by reason of income, education, class, race or gender are underrepresented in these programs. These are the groups whom we believe stand to gain the greatest individual and community benefits from their engagement and service.

The papers we have prepared draw upon and summarize current empirical evidence. By examining recent data and reviewing the literature, we provide explanations for why volunteering rates may differ. We explore two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis #1:** When activities such as volunteering in formal organizations, participation in national service projects

and membership in civic organizations are used to measure "civic participation," there are substantial differences in measures of civic engagement between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged individuals.

**Hypothesis #2:** But there is little difference in civic engagement between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged people when other civic activities such as "working on community problems" and "social protest" are examined.

Interestingly, there is no conflict between these hypotheses and therefore both could be true. If true, the first hypothesis could suggest that disadvantaged persons may be less interested in volunteering and similar forms of civic participation. This implies that there may be a need for greater education and outreach. That is, we may need to show disadvantaged Americans why these more formal modes of civic engagement create value for them and their communities. But it might also mean that disadvantaged persons may have fewer opportunities or face more barriers to participating in volunteer programs and similar forms of civic participation. This suggests an additional need to examine possible barriers to participation and to pursue strategies aimed at removing these barriers.

The second hypothesis, if true, suggests that funders, policymakers and program managers should expand their thinking about what constitutes legitimate civic participation and begin exploring more creative approaches to support and recognize these alternative forms of civic participation.

The two papers provide empirical data to inform discussion of these issues. The first paper, by J. Foster-Bey, uses the single most reliable and current dataset to estimate rates of volunteering and civic engagement by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (defined in terms of family income and educational background). Foster-Bey's source is the *Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Volunteering Supplement for 2005-7*. The *CPS Volunteering Supplement* was sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Sixty-thousand households were surveyed: a very large and high-quality sample, compared to any other survey of voluntary participation in America. The CPS asks about several forms of civic engagement, not only volunteering but also attending community meetings





## CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

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- “Applicants Flock to Teacher Corps for Needy Areas,” by Megan Greenwell, **Washington Post**, December 06, 2008
- “Student Voting Efforts Appaled,” by Jeannie M. Nuss, **The Boston Globe**, 12/3/2008
- “‘Be the Change Inaugural Ball’ Will Celebrate Community Service,” by Suzanne Perry, **The Chronicle of Philanthropy**, 11/26/2008
- “At Least 52% of Young Americans Voted This Year, New Data Show,” by Sara Hebel, **The Chronicle of Higher Education**, 11/24/2008
- “Obama’s Millennial Marketers: Young Voters Helped Sell Obama To The Nation – And Now He Hopes To Hold On To Them,” Mary Gilbert, **The National Journal**, 11/21/2008
- “The 2012 Landscape,” by Carrie Dann, **MSNBC**, 11/20/2008
- “Blacks, Youths Turn Out; Vote Record Holds,” by Valerie Richardson, **The Washington Times**, 11/6/2008
- “Young Voters Have Some Clout, and They Used It,” by Martha Irvine,, **Associated Press**, November 4, 2008
- “Obama Plans to Use Young Voters,” by Sara Murray, **The Wall Street Journal**, 8/28/2008
- “Getting Out the Vote, Keeping Up with the Youth,” by Brookes Barnes, **The New York Times**, 8/13/2008
- “Voter Rolls Trend Younger,” by Associated Press, **The Washington Post**, 8/13/2008

*Between July 1 and Nov 18, 2008, CIRCLE was cited in 1,253 stories in newspapers, blogs, radio shows, and other media sources, including 829 print media articles. In addition, Associated Press items that cited CIRCLE’s research were used 6,780 times in various media. The total circulation of the publications that cited our work during this period is estimated at 560 million.*

and working on community problems. There are questions, too, about the venue of volunteering and whether and how volunteers were recruited. The CPS offers rich information about respondents’ backgrounds.

Foster-Bey uses this dataset to show that race and ethnicity and socioeconomic status are each predictors of voluntary participation. Whites and people of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to say that they “volunteer” and are somewhat more likely to say they engage in the other civic activities measured in the CPS.

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### FOSTER-BEY USES THIS DATASET TO SHOW THAT RACE AND ETHNICITY AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ARE EACH PREDICTORS OF VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION.

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But for all of its strengths, the CPS does not measure many activities that have also been defined in the literature as “civic engagement.” These activities—voluntary contributions of money and/or time—include voting, protesting, contacting the news media, participating in religious congregations, and working for political candidates, among others. The CPS Volunteering Supplement has two other limitations: it began recently and it does not ask questions about volunteers’ motives or opinions.

Therefore, a second paper by James B. Hyman and Peter Levine draws on a wide variety of surveys and published studies to set a broader context. Their paper summarizes historical trends since the 1970s and provides hypotheses about why we may see different rates of participation in various specific forms of civic engagement by race, ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status. This paper concludes with recommendations for the Corporation to consider as it refines its strategy for inclusion. ★



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.

## POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AFTER THE ELECTION: WHAT'S NEXT?

Millions of youth were mobilized in the 2008 election cycle. Youth voter participation increased by at least 3.4 million young people compared to 2004. Moreover, youth were a constituency that was targeted by numerous campaigns, and many young people actively worked to elect the candidate of their choice.

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### HOWEVER, A RESULTING QUESTION THAT HAS BEEN ASKED BY THE MEDIA, PUNDITS AND OTHERS IS: WHAT WILL YOUTH DO AFTER NOVEMBER 4<sup>TH</sup>?

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However, a resulting question that has been asked by the media, pundits and others is: what will youth do AFTER November 4<sup>th</sup>? To answer this question, it's important to recognize that there are many groups and organizations, in schools and otherwise, whose youth programs operate year-round, and are focused on youth contributing to their communities in various ways, including but not limited to electoral participation. For many organizations, the election has fit into a broader plan for engaging young people.

As a result, even before the election, numerous organizations and schools were thinking about what to do after November 4<sup>th</sup>. In fact, there are so many examples that we could not possibly share them all here. But we have identified two that we would like to highlight. The first example showcases the efforts of Mobilize.org to provide financial resources directly to young people so they can implement their own ideas to impact policy. The second example features a day-long conference for teachers called “Teaching Election 2008.” This conference was designed to enhance teachers’ understanding of major election issues and provided teacher training.

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### MOBILIZE.ORG IS PROVIDING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR MEMBERS OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION TO LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER AND BUILD FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THEIR OWN IDEAS.

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**Example #1 Mobilize.org:** Mobilize.org is providing the opportunity for members of the Millennial generation to learn from one another and build financial support for their own ideas. On January 9-11, 2009 Mobilize.org hosted a “Constitutional Convention: Building Democracy 2.0” in Philadelphia, PA. The “grant summit” format of this event is something that Mobilize has been using to put resources directly in the hands of young people who have ideas and are ready to act. The event led participant teams through a series of sessions where ideas are discussed, written-up, “pitched” and assessed by others at the event. In the end, a handful of ideas received up to \$10,000 in support from Mobilize.org.

“Throughout the election we’ve been looking at November 5<sup>th</sup>,” says Ian Storrar, Chief Operating Officer of Mobilize.org. The rationale for this format, Storrar says, is that they “want this to be an institutionalized model for discussing big ideas [and] coming to some kind of consensus around things that we can do.” “Constitutional Convention: Building Democracy 2.0” had many partners, including: the National Constitution Center, the National Conference on Citizenship, Change.org, Why Tuesday, Generation We and Declare Yourself.

For more information on “Constitutional Convention: Building Democracy 2.0” please visit <http://www.mobilize.org/>.

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### TEACHERS ALSO LEVERAGED THE 2008 ELECTION SEASON FOR STUDENT LEARNING THAT COULD SET THE STAGE FOR STUDENT DISCUSSION AND INVOLVEMENT AFTER THE ELECTION.

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**Example #2 Teaching Election 2008:** Teachers also leveraged the 2008 election season for student learning that could set the stage for student discussion and involvement after the election. Diana Hess, Simone Schweber and Joey Anderson, were ready to take advantage of this opportunity, as the organizers behind “Teaching Election 2008,” which occurred on September 20, 2008. Associate Professors and Associate Preceptor, respectively, at the University of



Wisconsin's School of Education, Hess, Schweber and Anderson report that the event gathered over two hundred people, the majority of whom represented teachers of varying k-12 grades. Dave Ross and Carla Geovanis, both teachers at West High School in Madison, WI, also helped organize the conference.

The event was organized as a daylong series of practical workshops for teachers around specific topic areas or teaching skills. For example, there were workshops that were geared at helping teachers before November 4<sup>th</sup> (Example: "Comparing the Candidates: Key Policy Positions of McCain and Obama") and other workshops were helpful beyond the election (Examples: "The U.S. Role in a Changing World: Engaging Students in Foreign Policy" and "What Causes Young People to Become Politically and Civically Engaged").

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### MANY OF THE WORKSHOPS PROVIDED THE OPPORTUNITY FOR TEACHERS TO LEARN AND TALK ABOUT TOOLS FOR ONGOING CIVIC EDUCATION, PARTICULARLY FOR DISCUSSIONS OF IMPORTANT PUBLIC ISSUES.

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Many of the workshops provided the opportunity for teachers to learn and talk about tools for ongoing civic education, particularly for discussions of important public issues. These workshops included: "Preparing Students for Civic Deliberation on Difficult Public Issues," "Student Voices & Annenberg Classroom: Tools for Lasting Civics Education," and "Kids Voting USA – A Community Commitment to Democracy." Each participant at the event was given a resource guide filled with listings of electronic teaching resources that provided information on where to find curriculum and lesson plans, as well as ideas for where to go for fact-checking federal and state issues.

*Teaching Election 2008* is proving to have an effect on teacher practice and on the community at large. According to Hess, "I know many of the teachers (and student teachers) who developed units using the materials that were showcased at the conference. We were especially pleased to get feedback from elementary school teachers about how the conference motivated them to teach about the elections. There was lots of media attention—[TV] and newspaper...so I think another way the conference had an impact was to let the public know about what was happening in the schools with respect to election teaching—and also to encourage parents to build on what was happening in classrooms."

For more information on *Teaching Election 2008* please contact Dr. Diana Hess at [dhess@wisc.edu](mailto:dhess@wisc.edu). ★

## CIRCLE EVALUATES BOSTON-AREA SOCIAL NETWORKING PROJECT

The Corporation for National and Community Service is funding CIRCLE to test a customized version of a powerful community mapping software platform, YouthMap, with Boston-area students from very diverse colleges and universities. The software is first being evaluated with Tufts University students. The software, developed by Community Knowledge Base, is also being used by newspapers, local governments, and other clients to map and analyze their communities' civil society. Users enter information about issues, problems, and local organizations; the software generates analytical diagrams and maps that help them in planning.

The version being used by Boston-area college students will have several important layers:

1. a personal social network layer that will connect to available online communities such as Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn;
2. a collaboration layer that will enable students to work together on campus, across campuses, and between campus and community;
3. a gaming layer that will encourage friendly team-building and competition;
4. and, a community network layer to help students represent and visualize local issues and community networks.

In the fall semester of 2008, about 23 students from Tufts University used a beta version of YouthMap to produce three interesting and creative projects in just a few class periods and some homework assignments. They also began to build an impressive Boston-area map, with hundreds of nodes and links. Stay tuned for more information about this exciting project! ★



**Continued from Page 3**

unequal. We need to focus our attention on these subjects until all students can read, write, and calculate. The trends toward more reading and math in elementary education are desirable.

**2. The liberal arts.** Education today is too instrumental. It is all about outcomes, especially economic outcomes. It overlooks the intrinsic value of subjects like history, fine arts, natural sciences, foreign languages, and current events.

**3. Cultural literacy.** The only way to be literate is to have a base of facts, concepts, and vocabulary. We obtain that base best by studying history, natural science, social science, and foreign cultures. The trends shown in this report indicate that we are failing to emphasize cultural literacy in the early years; and that is why reading scores are flat despite increased time devoted to reading/language arts.

**4. Civic mission.** The purpose of schools is not (only) to prepare workers, but also to create an active and egalitarian

democracy. That mission requires widespread literacy and numeracy. But it also requires specific knowledge of history, government, social issues, and current events. We are losing those elements of the curriculum.

This discussion should be based on reliable information. Thus it is important for the federal government to collect and disseminate detailed data about the courses, extracurricular activities, and other opportunities that our students receive at all ages and grade levels. ★

