



**CIRCLE**

The Center for Information & Research  
on Civic Learning & Engagement

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## **Study Shows Emphasizing Elections in Civics Classes Has Positive Impact on Political Knowledge and Voting**

With the start of a new school year coinciding with a hard-fought presidential election, educators will be looking for good ways to teach civics to the nation's students. New research shows that using experiential methods to teach explicitly about electoral politics has a positive impact on increasing students' political knowledge.

The study used control groups to assess the impact of using different teaching techniques, including mock elections, legislative simulations, and exposure to elected officials. Called *Politics: The Missing Link of Responsible Civic Education*, it was done by Kenneth S. Stroupe, Jr. and Larry J. Sabato of the University of Virginia Center for Politics and sponsored by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE).

Conducted in 2002 and 2003, the study compared classes that used the UVA Center's National Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) curriculum and a control group of similar classes that did not. According to the study, "the YLI programs have substantial, positive effects on students' level of political knowledge" and, to a lesser degree, some "positive effects on students' political efficacy, pride in politics, and propensity for future political participation." Findings also suggest that increasing the amount of time students spend participating in YLI mock elections can have a positive impact on students' attitudes and behaviors.

"Too often we take 'politics and elections' out of our teaching about government and democracy," said Peter Levine, CIRCLE's Deputy Director. "We know civic education makes a difference in improving knowledge and participation in civic life. But this study provides new evidence that going beyond traditional civics course work by teaching politics directly and in a hands-on way can make an even bigger difference."

The YLI program includes five major teaching resources: a student mock election, an online simulation of Congress called "e-Congress", an interactive CD-ROM used to simulate a US Senate campaign, a "Democracy Corps" an experiential learning program that provides direct interaction with elected officials, and an online social studies curriculum.

The study is part of an ongoing effort by CIRCLE to explore ways to improve and expand civic education. Last year, it published the groundbreaking report, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, a consensus of findings and recommendations among nearly 60 top scholars, educators, and practitioners from diverse political perspectives.

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Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and Carnegie Corporation of New York, and housed at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy, **CIRCLE** ([www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)) is a premier source of impartial, nonpartisan, and comprehensive data, research, and analysis on the civic engagement of young people.