

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

in our nation.”

Finally, the report stresses that to the young people in the study, civic engagement is more than political knowledge, political efficacy, a high level of altruism, and so on. It is about young people seeing themselves as valuable members of the community and the community in turn seeing the importance of young people to the community. The author concludes, “[Civic engagement] is also a formal, consistent statement by the young citizen to society-at-large saying ‘I am a valuable member of my environment,’ and society, in turn, agrees.”

The full report, “CIRCLE Working Paper 25: Civic Views of Young Adult Minorities” can be downloaded from CIRCLE’s Web site at [http://www.civicyouth.org/research/areas/race\\_gender.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/areas/race_gender.htm) ■

### **The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF)** announces the release of *Restoring the Balance between Academics and Civic Engagement in Public Schools*.

The report questions the No Child Left Behind Act’s focus on core academic subjects at the expense of the public school’s equally important role: preparing students to be engaged and effective citizens. The report is the product of a year of discussion with policymakers, education practitioners, community groups, parents, and youth from across the nation.

To order the report, *Restoring the Balance between Academics and Civic Engagement in Public Schools* (56 pp.), please send \$5 per copy (includes shipping/handling) to AYPF, 1836 Jefferson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20036. An online version of the report will be available soon at [www.aypf.org](http://www.aypf.org).

## DEFINING THE CIVIC OUTCOMES OF YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

New research suggests that youth development programs designed to encourage civic activism can help otherwise marginalized youth become active participants in institutions and decisions that affect their lives. The research looked at two types of programs that encourage civic activism and suggests that when compared to traditional youth development programs (e.g., those focused on arts, community garden projects, youth leadership development, community service, etc.), these programs produce important differences in the way young people develop civically.

The research was conducted the Social Policy Research Associates. According to the authors, “While much existing research documents youths’ marginalization from civic participation and society because of their race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and immigrant status, we wanted to draw attention to ways that youth organizing and identity support programs enable young people to act upon their desire to change the forces that relegate them to the margins.”

### YOUTH PROGRAMMING MODELS

The study is based on findings from nine Youth Leadership Development Initiative (YLDI) programs. Eight “traditional” youth development organizations served as a comparison group. The YLDI programs utilized one to two key programming strategies—identity support and youth organizing.

These YLDI program models are unique in several ways. The first program model, identity support, is built around specific identity groups (usually related to either racial, ethnic, gender, or sexual identity) and focuses broadly on civic awareness and connectedness. The second model, youth organizing, encourages young people to assert their political voices on issues that most affect them; this model focuses more on social action. Additionally, YLDI programs strive to put young people, as opposed to adults, in the leadership positions.

### DIFFERENCES IN PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Data was collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods and analyzed using a non-traditional method in which the youths’ experiences in the programs were measured against a scale that ranged from insufficient to optimal. Dr. Cao Yu notes that, “This method of analysis allowed us to see what proportion of the youth in a program are having experiences that reach the highest ‘optimal’ standard and what proportion might be having experiences that do not meet the standard of being developmentally rich or in other words are ‘insufficient.’” The researchers looked at two types of outcomes: (1) developmental outcomes like civic activism and (2) support and opportunity outcomes such as having a supportive relationship and physical and emotional safety.

Looking at the developmental outcomes, the researchers found significant differences between the three different types of programs. For example, higher proportions of youth in both identity support and youth organizing programs reported optimal levels

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on the indicators of civic activism than youth in traditional programs (see Table 2). According to Dr. Cao Yu, "We know that many traditional youth development organizations provide only limited opportunities for youth to participate in community service types of activities. Given the lack of emphasis on this area of programming, the findings here are consistent with our expectations that fewer youth in traditional settings have attained the civic activism outcomes measured in this study." In general, when looking at the opportunity and support outcomes, greater percentages of youth in YLDI programs than in traditional youth development programs reported experiencing optimal levels of supports and opportunities.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In addition to collecting data on the outcomes of the different types of programs, the authors collected qualitative data to try to determine why the programs produced different outcomes. Based on interviews and focus groups, the researchers conclude that much of the measured success of the YLDI programs may be due to well-trained staff, time and resources.

Providing adequate training to staff seems to go a long way in helping young people develop the civic skills necessary for adulthood. According to the report, "The staff of the YLDI programs

approaches their work with older adolescents with much deliberation. They have thought through key issues such as power imbalances between adults and youth, what roles youth can and should play in their organizations and community, and the skills and supports youth need to be effective leaders."

Another key to success is that the YLDI programs allowed adequate time for young people to play lead roles. The authors recommend, "Organizations that seek to support increased youth involvement in decision making need to assess if they are willing and able to slow down their processes so that youth can play an authentic role."

Finally, the researchers found that the YLDI programs had adequate resources that enabled them to have a clear and focused approach. The resources allowed them to provide low staff to youth ratios, develop close mentoring relationships, and population-specific curriculum, all of which contributed to a positive experience for the youth.

The full report "CIRCLE Working Paper 23: A Comparative Analysis of Community Youth Development Strategies" can be downloaded from

[http://www.civicyouth.org/research/areas/race\\_gender.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/areas/race_gender.htm) ■

**TABLE 2: DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES BY AGENCY TYPES**

	I. Identity Support YLDI Agencies (n=145)		II. Youth Organizing YLDI Agencies (n=65)		III. General Youth Development Comparison Agencies (n=257)		
	Insufficient	Optimal	Insufficient	Optimal	Insufficient	Optimal	
<b>Civic Activism Overall</b>	34%	33%	18%	42%	52%	20%	***
Civic Action	28%	30%	15%	42%	42%	19%	***
Efficacy/ Agency	10%	46%	6%	40%	23%	26%	***
Community Problem Solving	11%	33%	3%	37%	23%	20%	***
<b>Identity Development Overall</b>	2%	55%	6%	34%	21%	16%	***
Affirmation	1%	62%	3%	46%	20%	21%	***
Exploration	12%	42%	14%	31%	38%	12%	***
<b>Coping Overall</b>	12%	67%	14%	63%	18%	58%	ns
Positive Coping	10%	54%	9%	49%	21%	49%	ns
Negative Coping	15%	59%	15%	55%	15%	53%	ns

\*\*\* Significant differences between groups at .001 \*\* Significant differences between groups at .01 \* Significant differences between groups at .05