



Equalizing the Pursuit of Civic Empowerment:

***Breaking down the barriers to full participation
by historically marginalized youth***

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I Love America

Tiffany Nova (8th grade, Dorchester, MA, 2005)

I love the country that made us slaves
I love the country that segregates
I love this country
I love how we are old enough to go to war and risk our lives
But we're not old enough to drink or drive
I love how we had to FIGHT to receive equal rights
I love the government that doesn't care
The richest country that isn't aware,
Of the youth living amongst poverty
I love Mr. President who doesn't see what I can see
I love this country for going to war and killing our fellow "Americans"
They live for America and DIE for America
Now they died as strong soldiers and troops
One day you'll realize how much you love this country too...



inform/persuade others

protest

vote

join civic organizations

A competent and responsible citizen:

withdraw

campaign

boycott

mobilize others

1. is informed and thoughtful
2. participates in his/her community
3. has moral and civic virtues
4. acts politically by having the skills, knowledge, and commitment needed to accomplish public purposes

run for office

petition

engage in civil disobedience

blog

contact elected officials

create art (visual, rap, etc.)

(Civic Mission of Schools; Keeter et. al.)



Key attributes of good citizens:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Attitudes
- Behaviors

Strong, direct correlation among these:

Knowledge + Skills + Attitudes = Engagement



Civic Achievement Gap: Knowledge and Skills

- Data from 4th, 8th, 12th grades (NAEP), 9th grade (IEA), and adults (Delli Carpini and Keeter)
- Uniform results:

Higher scores on content knowledge and skills:	Lower scores on content knowledge and skills:
Whites and Asians	Blacks and Hispanics
Two-parent families	Single-parent families
Middle class (>200 books in home)	Poor (<100 books in home)

Civic Achievement Gap: Behaviors

2004 Election: Voting Rates of Citizens

Whites: 67%

Blacks: 60%

Hispanics: 47%

Asians: 44%

Income >\$75,000: 80%

Income <\$15,000: 45%

Natural born citizens: 65%

Naturalized citizens: 54%

Source: U.S. Census

Civic Achievement Gap: Behaviors

Super Tuesday 2008: Young Voter Participation

	attended college	no college
% of young voters	79%	21%
% of all young Americans	50%	50%
% of eligible young voters who voted on Super Tuesday	25% ↑ 1 in 4	7% ↑ 1 in 14



Civic Achievement Gap: Behaviors

	under \$15,000	over \$75,000
campaign work	4%	17%
campaign contribution	6	56
contact	25	50
protest	3	7
board member	1	6
political org affiliation	29	73
informal community activity	13	38

Latinos < blacks and whites; blacks more “outsider” activities;
immigrants < native born



Civic Achievement Gap: Attitudes

- Political and social trust
- Political efficacy
- Personal efficacy
- Political/Civic identity
- Civic duty

*Positive correlation
with civic and political
participation*

*Negative correlation
with poverty,
minority status,
immigrant status*

*Sources: Verba et. al.; Dawson; Smith and Setzer; Putnam;
Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University;
Sidanus et. al.; Sanchez-Jankowski; Lopez.*



Attitudinal Gap: Trust, Identity

“The government gives them drugs, builds bigger prisons, passes a three-strike law and then wants us to sing ‘God Bless America.’ No, no, no. Not, ‘God bless America!’ God damn America! That’s in the Bible: for killing innocent people, God damn America for treating our citizens as less than human!”

Rev. Jeremiah Wright



Attitudinal Gap: Efficacy

“I just feel like there ain’t nothing nobody can do. And then I also feel like...the other reason why I haven’t voted is because ...when Bush wasn’t supposed to win, it’s like, well, why do people vote? Why? It ain’t going to make no difference [I]f the government, they’re going to pick whoever they want, they go with whoever they want to win anyway. And that’s how it happened. It happened. Whenever whoever they say is going to win.”

(Aisel, 19 yrs old, African American, Atlanta, 2003)



The Civic Achievement Gap: Why does it matter?

- Legitimacy
- Stability
- Equality
- Democracy



School-related correlates with civic engagement:

- Overall educational level
- Civics courses
- Extracurricular/after school participation
- Student government
- In-class debates
- Political/civic participation
- Personal invitation to participate
- Family practices (e.g. discussion at home)



Civic Learning Opportunity Gap:

“High school students attending higher SES schools, those who are college-bound, and white students get more [civic learning] opportunities than low-income students, those not heading to college, and students of color.” (Kahne and Middaugh, 2008)

Students in high vs. average SES classes are:

- twice as likely to report studying how laws are made
- almost twice as likely to report participating in service activities
- nearly 1½ times more likely to report having experiences with debates or panel discussions in their social studies classes



Recommendations:

1. Better schools and reduced drop-out rates
2. Increased civic education:
 - ❖ Earlier
 - ❖ More
 - ❖ More often
3. Democratic classroom and school culture
 - ❖ Student government
 - ❖ Class officers
 - ❖ In-class discussion
4. Incorporation of students' own interests and experiences
 - ❖ Local knowledge and issues
 - ❖ Current events
 - ❖ Community concerns and attitudes
5. Reframed history curricula and textbooks
6. Guided experiential civic engagement: for students and teachers