Politics: The Missing Link of Public Education
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Abstract

To assert that politics is the missing link of civic education implies that there is a viable, albeit incomplete, practice of civic education in America’s schools. Unfortunately, this would be an inaccurate representation not only of the overall existence of such efforts, but also of the effectiveness of the public education system in preparing young people to participate in civic life. It also suggests, inaccurately, that civic education is a process left primarily to schools.

Despite widespread disagreement in America on the particular responsibilities of citizenship, civic engagement in a self-governing society must include participating and interacting with government. As such, politics and political participation are a necessary part of civic life in America, and it is incumbent on all members of society to serve a role in fostering the necessary civic education skills required for active civic engagement.

Much has occurred over the last generation to poison the word politics, fostering a culture of apathy and cynicism in America. Unfortunately, when you poison the word, you also taint much of the body that surrounds the process of self-government. In this regard, the failings of one generation have become the reality of the next.

This research was conducted to better understand the problem of declining youth participation in civic life, and to suggest ways to promote civic education that teaches young people through experiential civic learning at school, at home, in their respective communities and through volunteer service.

The research was funded by the United States Congress and by a generous grant from CIRCLE - the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.
Methodology

In collaboration with Dr. Larry Sabato of the University of Virginia, Dr. Richard Niemi of the University of Rochester, Dr. Steve Finkel of the University of Virginia, and the University of Virginia Center for Survey Research, a national survey was developed and administered in the form of a written questionnaire during the months of October and November of 2002. A copy of the full survey appears in Appendix A.

The respondents for the survey were selected using a cluster-sample design. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 3.5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level, and is based on the results obtained through variance estimation on a number of key survey items. For relationships between variables cited in this thesis, chi square is significant at the .05 level. A detailed report may be found in Appendix E.

Within the population of students participating, the specific goals of the research were to:

- Measure political knowledge, attitudes and values of these American high school students in grades 9-12,
- Determine the degree of participation among these young people in both political and non-political community activities,
- Examine the extent to which politics and political participation are part of any of their current civic education courses, and
- Determine whether service learning projects are preparing these students for participation in politics.

The sampling of classrooms, i.e. cluster sampling, is a common sampling technique in education studies as an alternative to simple random sampling. Cluster sampling overcomes many of the obstacles involved in sampling youth. A full list of students is not required for
cluster samples, demand on classroom time is reduced, and labor involved in obtaining
permission of teachers, school administrators and parents is minimized. The result is a design
effect that lowers the confidence level that estimates can be generalized to the full population of
students, but which has been considered in the development of the estimated +/- 3.5 percent
margin of error herein.

The research was conducted as a quasi-experimental study based on Solomon’s four-
group experimental design. Individual civics classrooms randomly sampled for inclusion in the
treatment groups were selected from schools known to have at least one teacher who planned to
use the resources of the National Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI), sponsored by the Center for
Politics at the University of Virginia. The Youth Leadership Initiative is a national program
offering free civic-related teaching resources to public and private middle schools and high
schools nationwide.

Schools participating in the control (non-treatment) groups were randomly selected
among those registered with the National Council for Social Studies and from a random selection
of schools generated from a national list provided by MDR Market Data Retrieval. To ensure
random distribution at the respondent level, participating teachers were instructed to administer
the survey to their earliest class of the day. The resulting set of study groups is summarized
below.
Solomon’s Four-Group Experimental Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Treatment (YLI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This thesis reflects data collected from Groups A&B

The study population includes both students in participating YLI schools and non-YLI schools within similar geographic areas. As of April 2003, more than 2,000 schools in all fifty states were participating in the YLI, but at the time the sample was selected, use of YLI materials was most prevalent in the state of Virginia; therefore, roughly half of the schools selected for inclusion in treatment Group A were from Virginia. The pretest selection yielded the following geographic breakdown:

Pretest Geographical Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Non-Va</th>
<th>Va</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>1346</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This thesis relies on the respected research of numerous political scientists and civic education organizations across the nation, but its primary source was derived by amalgamating
the data of Groups A&B of the Phase One (pretest) portion of the Solomon Four design – 1346 students collectively representing twenty states.

        Forty-five percent of the respondents were male, 55 percent female. The racial
dbreakdown was: 11 percent African American, 10 percent Hispanic (includes students who
selected Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, and Hispanic or other
Latin American), 7 percent Asian American, 74 percent White or Caucasian, 4 percent Native
American; 7 percent selected other.¹ Eighty percent reported that both of their parents were born
in the United States and more than 80 percent said they expect to go on to a four-year college or
university.

¹ In identifying their racial background from the responses offered, students were invited to check all that apply, thus
the cumulative total is greater than 100%.
Defining Civic Education

What is civic education and what does it mean to encourage civic engagement? The answers to these questions vary significantly depending on who one asks.

Research in the field of civic-related topics presents numerous challenges, but chief among them is the lack of uniformity in terminology due to myriad interpretations and understandings of how (even whether) to teach and/or participate in civic life. Academic research and civic-related organizations specialize in a variety of areas that include charitable community volunteerism, voter-turnout, service learning, military service, citizenship training, youth mentoring and government employment, but among them there exists no standardization of teaching models, behaviors, attitudes, outcomes or skills.

Just as most institutions do not agree on a common definition of terms, neither do they share an approach to solving the related problems. If it is possible to agree that active civic engagement requires some degree of participation in one’s community, then legitimate questions arise as to how these behaviors are accurately taught, measured and promoted.

Tobi Walker of the Pew Charitable Trusts asks, “What are the values, skills, characteristics, and knowledge that a person needs to fulfill the rights and responsibilities of citizenship? The answers to these questions are contested and lie at the heart of the United States’ democratic struggle.”

Civic Education: A Broad Definition

To assert that politics is the missing link of civic education implies that there is a viable, albeit incomplete, practice of civic education in America’s schools. Unfortunately, this would be an inaccurate representation not only of the overall existence of such efforts, but also of the
effectiveness of the public education system in preparing young people to participate in civic life. The title also suggests, inaccurately, that civic education is a process left primarily to schools.

Not only is formal instruction in civic education sparse in existence, but also, in schools where some effort at connecting young people with their respective communities exists, many of these efforts are proving insufficient at preparing young people to participate broadly in civic life.

More importantly, America must rethink the definition of civic education, moving away from the notion that schools alone can achieve responsible civic education. To be successful, civic education must be redefined as a responsibility that is reinforced across multiple levels of society, whereby the nation collectively reestablishes a culture of civic engagement.

Too often, community efforts and formal textbook models of civic instruction fail to adequately place civic behaviors in the proper context of citizenship and civic responsibility to a system of self-government. If civic life includes participating and interacting with government, and the purpose of civic education is to promote participation in civic life; then it must be understood that politics and political participation are a necessary part of civic life in America, and that civic education must be reinforced across multiple levels of society.

Problems With “Politics”

Much has occurred over the last generation to poison the word politics. Watergate, the Vietnam War, the election debacle of 2000, and countless political scandals are just a few of the events that have fostered a culture of apathy and cynicism causing too many people to disengage
from politics and government altogether. Unfortunately, when you poison the word politics, you also taint much of the body that surrounds the larger process of self-government.

Promoting the importance of politics to the process of civic education does not discount the fact that the American political process can be intimidating, awkward and unwieldy. Furthermore, promoting the process of politics as worthwhile is not to imply that all politicians are first-rate; but such is also the case with bankers, construction workers, corporate CEOs, waiters, priests, doctors and a host of other professions. Yet, unlike in politics, most people do not use the misdeeds of a few to curtail involvement in the entire process that surrounds the profession.

Consider the impact on the national economy if the actions of several greedy CEOs caused a majority of Americans to withdraw from the stock market. What if rude service at a restaurant meant that you would never again eat out? What would be the effect if the conduct of a philandering priest caused a majority of people to abandon organized religion entirely?

Consider then the effect when misconceptions about politics dissuade participation in a democratic system of self-government. Furthermore, consider the long-term impact when such preconceptions distort how and whether young people are taught to participate in the American political and electoral process.

Where the process of civic disengagement began is unclear, but the nation seems caught in a cycle where distrust breeds apathy and apathy breeds distrust. Today, this unhealthy cycle is negatively impacting a complex series of interdependent relationships at home, at school and within communities that are necessary to support active civic participation. Though weak, the relationships still exist, but their continued erosion threatens to cause great and permanent damage to the nation.
Most recently, the 2000 presidential election, with its myriad problems and the high-profile, bitterly-partisan battle that ensued, did little to restore confidence in America's political institutions. Inadequate machinery and institutional weaknesses bore a considerable portion of the blame for a presidential election-turned-circus. Also few would disagree that human error on the part of election officials played a role in the embarrassing amateur efforts to hand-count ballots, but equally as troubling were the errors on the part of the voters themselves. Consider the number of voters who went to the polls casting multiple votes on the same ballot for the same office, or those with little knowledge of how the voting systems worked, and what is revealed are symptoms of a larger problem looming just beneath the surface – a deep erosion in the civic skills necessary for American democracy to thrive.

*What Motivates a Citizen to Vote?*

Although the phrase “political parties” does not appear in the U.S. Constitution, the American electoral process has evolved to the point where it is virtually impossible for a candidate to be elected outside the framework of the party structure. Indeed, most local offices and virtually all state and federal office seekers interact, associate, and/or have an affiliation with a political party. Simply stated, as the electoral process goes, interaction with political parties is unavoidable in contemporary America.

Free and fair elections are, perhaps, the single greatest symbol of a self-governing society. As such, few would argue against including voting as a primary responsibility of citizenship and of civic education.

Over the last 40 years America has witnessed a steady decline in voter participation, and nowhere is the level of disinterest and nonparticipation higher than among the nation’s youngest
potential voters. Unlike older generations, since 18-year-olds were given the right to vote in 1972, turnout within the 18 to 25 age group has dropped nearly 15 percent. In the Congressional election of 1998 and Presidential election of 2000 this age group accounted for less than 8% of the total votes cast in each of these two national elections.³

Keeter et al (2002) observed, “Fewer Baby Boomers are registered or habitually vote than the generation that came before them, and there is an even larger fall off from Boomers to the generations that have followed them.” Specifically, the research points out:

- 72% of the older generation reported that they always vote
- 53% of the Baby Boom generation reports that they always vote
- 34% of people labeled as Generation X report that they always vote; and
- 24% of what Keeter labels the “DotNet generation” report always voting.⁴

If voting is an important responsibility of citizenship, as this research asserts, then society must first do a better job of persuading Americans of the value of the American political process to the functions of government.

Many well-intentioned efforts to counter the increasing decline in voter participation have attempted to motivate people to vote using what often amounts to little more than a turnout-for-turnout’s-sake approach. This has proven inadequate partly because participants lack any strong sense of personal investment, reducing voting to little more than dispassionate individual participation in a poorly defined group activity.

Compelling voters with pleas wrapped in the emotion of patriotism or a utilitarian appeal of responsibility to one’s community may yield episodic spikes in participation, but these efforts will amount to little more than surface cosmetics until America effectively addresses the fundamental shortcomings of civic education that are pervasive throughout society. Simply
attaching labels does little to promote a more fundamental understanding that voting is the necessary foundation for the continued existence of democracy.

When all the tangential associations are peeled back, at its core voting is an act of participation in American politics. Though it may be portrayed as fulfilling some patriotic duty, strictly speaking, Americans do not go to the polls to reaffirm a devotion to the flag. It is usually the case that one goes to the polls to select his or her choice of various politicians campaigning for public office.

The case has not been made convincingly, nor the lessons taught sufficiently for Americans to appreciate the degree to which voting is the essence of democratic society. Until voting is understood as a responsibility rather than just a right, one’s right not to vote will continue to trump the notion of voting as a duty of citizenship.

*Why Politics is Necessary*

To include politics in the broad mission of civic education is to promote a culture of civic learning and civic engagement and to encourage the development of unbiased pedagogical methods with outcomes targeted at increasing knowledge of American politics and means of political participation, as well as the important relationship of politics to the American system of self-government.

Here also it is important to note that there are different definitions of the terms politics and political participation. More traditional definitions have included voting, lobbying, correspondence and interaction with elected and appointed government officials, running for office, and other similar activities. Another school of thought sees politics and political participation beyond formal government interaction; rather it employs less conventional methods
of social and group interaction as a means of compelling society in a particular direction. The Civil Rights movement is a classic example of how groups can participate in a political movement that is largely driven by forces outside the more traditional relations with government. Though both definitions of politics and political participation differ significantly in approach, each shares the same larger civic-related goal of defining, influencing, and contributing to the American political landscape.

The measures of political participation in this research were broadly defined to include not just traditional measures, but also variables such as the disruption of government meetings and participation in peaceful protests, among others, examining the degree to which each of these activities connects the individual to his or her place within a self-governing, civic society.

In this research, civic education and civic engagement are framed in the context of politics and political education as follows:

- Political (Civic) Attitudes, Virtues and Values: Dispositions, values and predispositions related to politics, government and political participation.
- Political (Civic) Engagement: The direct observation, participation in, and/or influence of the political process in America, specifically as it relates to political campaigns and elections, political movements, and the governing and policymaking arenas.
- Political (Civic) Knowledge: Intellectual skills and textbook facts necessary to observe and comprehend the mechanics and institutions of the political process in America, specifically as it relates to political campaigns and elections, political movements, and the governing and policymaking arenas.
This research examines civic engagement, attitudes and knowledge of politics among American high school students in grades nine through twelve. Its specific purpose is to better understand the problem of declining youth participation in the American democratic process of campaigns and elections as well as declining trust in the political process, to thereby assist in enhancing civic education and fostering long-term civic engagement nationwide.

Markus Prior said it best in his 2002 study, *Political Knowledge after September 11*, “Politics gets undivided attention when things go horribly and perceptibly wrong. Little things that go wrong and accumulate over time do not trigger the same threat perception, but may well be equally damaging. If our threat monitors and self-interest detectors routinely fail to notice the small disasters, saying that they worked when the big crisis came does not prove that our democracy is in good health.”

If democracy and the process of self-government are to endure and thrive, American society must reorient itself to the value and importance of civic education and engagement. To do so requires a shift from passive, even indifferent, observation of politics and government to active participation in the democratic institutions that shape the future of this republic.
The Interdependent Process of Civic Education

In his 1936 acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, Franklin D. Roosevelt said of the American people, “There is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny.”

While much has changed since then, many of the circumstances that confronted Roosevelt’s generation, namely war and economic uncertainty, are present once again for a new generation of Americans. The troubling question that the nation should ask now is whether, during the intervening years, today’s generation has been prepared adequately to meet the civic responsibilities of active engagement in a democratic society? Most indicators suggest the answer is not a favorable one.

For the small segment of the population that actively engages in civic and political life, it is an anathema that apathy and cynicism toward government and politics have exemplified the prevailing attitude of American society for decades. Unfortunately, over time, the failings of one generation have become the reality of the next, and a quagmire has developed that is steadily eroding trust and participation in politics and government.

It has been said of youth that they have "only one conviction; that the only answer they can make is distrust. They have no ardor except for the tentative safety of the quiet suburb, an orthodoxy of indifference. They have only an overriding fear of commitment and a will to be let alone." Unfortunately the popular stereotypes of young people today are not much different than when the previous statement was first made in 1959. As the statement demonstrates, the lack of civic engagement is not unique to today’s generation. Furthermore, it would be patently unfair and inaccurate to suggest that young people are to blame for their lack of interest.
The extent to which young people fail to engage in civic life is a direct reflection of the values and priorities of the society of which they are a part. To find that today’s generation is disengaged from politics is a symptom of society’s neglect of civic education rather than the cause of apathy among young people.

This research found evidence that effective civic education is delivered not just through a lesson at school, but within an intricate matrix of support and reinforcement where parental involvement and formal classroom instruction serve as the foundations upon which trust and early formative political and civic participation are built. This in turn, helps to develop whole communities of interest that produce active and engaged citizens at the apex. In theory, when the entire process functions effectively, the result is a culture of civic engagement and civic education nationwide.

However, it is important to note that all parts of the structure are inter-dependent. Therefore, when any one component is weak, it jeopardizes the strength of the entire structure. Unfortunately there is sufficient evidence that every component of the structure is weakening, and even more troubling is the fact that the structural integrity of the whole is suffering from prolonged neglect.
When families and schools fail to promote civic education and civic engagement, this reduces young people’s trust of government and politics, discourages early participation in formative civic-related behaviors, and lowers the overall interest in the community, ultimately reducing the total number of active and engaged citizens.

Of course this cycle neither starts nor ends with families or schools. Today’s young people – as well as their parents – are products of a generation that distrusts politics, is disengaged, and fails to recognize and promote civic engagement as a learned social behavior.

Clearly, negative societal cues reinforce the overall lack of social and political capital, but the bottom line is that America's young people are not learning civic and political engagement as responsibilities of citizenship because they are not being taught, either at home or at school, that civic and political engagement are responsibilities of citizenship.
Fortunately, most researchers agree that while there are significant problems, the damage is not yet irreversible. If America will only heed the warnings it just may avert a more serious situation later.
Disengaged Families

Today American society must struggle to overcome deeply rooted attitudes toward politics that threaten the health of our democracy. Too many people do not feel invested enough in government to believe that they can make any meaningful impact. Many of these attitudes find their inception at home via the priorities, values and virtues that parents emphasize with their children.

In 1995, Harvard professor Robert Putnam introduced into the mainstream of political discourse the concept of social capital in his article *Bowling Alone* where he found that America’s social and political capital has been eroding for decades. That year Putnam observed, “Members of the generation born in the 1920s belong to almost twice as many civic associations as those born in the late 1960s. The grandparents are more than twice as likely to trust other people (50-60% compared to 25% for the grandchildren). They vote at nearly double the rate of the most recent cohorts (roughly 75% compared with 40-45%), and they read newspapers almost three times as often…we have no evidence that the youngest generation will come to match their grandparent’s higher levels of civic engagement as they grow older.”

In 2002, in a study conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) only about half of the young people said they discussed politics and government with their parents. Students responding to our survey disclosed similar sentiments.

Although 75 percent of students participating in our survey said their father was either very interested (28%) or somewhat interested (47%) in politics and 72 percent said their mother was either very interested (15%) or somewhat interested (57%) in politics, only 15 percent of students reported that their parents and family members engaged in discussions of politics, the
country’s problems or local issues every day. Another 39 percent said such discussions happen once or twice a week. Of the 54 percent who engaged in some level of discussion, less than half (44%) said that when their family talks about politics they voiced their own opinions “almost all the time.”

Even more discouraging is the fact that a majority of students (51%) said that as far as encouraging them to be active in politics and community issues, their parents “didn’t care one way or the other.” Eighty-nine percent said their friends either didn’t care or discouraged such involvement.

Figure 2. Nobody Cares.

Only 11 percent of participants thought it was essential to attend community meetings and local political events, while only slightly more than a third (34%) felt that it was essential to follow political issues in the newspaper and on television.

Only 26% of students said they have “a great deal of interest in national politics and issues facing the nation,” while only 11% said they have “a great deal of interest in local community politics and issues facing the community.”

These numbers are particularly alarming when one considers just how intense and problematic the last two years have been for the nation. If families have not taken the
opportunity to engage in discussions of the nation’s problems during this time period, it is
difficult to imagine what could spark such dialogue.

Declining Levels of Political Trust

In a joint study conducted in 2003 by the Carnegie and the CIRCLE Foundations,
researchers reported, “Confidence that government officials listen to ‘people like me’ has eroded
over the past half-century, especially among young people (ages 18 to 25).” The study charted
the confidence level as it dropped steadily from more than 70% confidence in 1952 to about 40%
in 2000.\textsuperscript{10}

The same was true in this study. In general, young people participating in our research
said they were not very trusting of most people. Only 25 percent of students felt that “most
people can be trusted,” while three-quarters said, “You can’t be too careful in dealing with
people.” When asked about their level of trust in government, only 19 percent felt that
government could be trusted to do what is right “just about always” and 72 percent responded
that government could only be trusted “some of the time.”

When asked to indicate whether they thought that government officials waste money,
nearly 94 percent of students felt that people in government waste taxpayer dollars. Of this
number, 40 percent felt that government wastes a lot, while 54 percent felt the government
wastes some money. Less than 6 percent of respondents felt that people in government do not
waste any taxpayer money.

Only 26 percent disagreed with the statement “most politicians act unethically and are
just out for themselves.” Of students expressing an opinion, 51% felt that “government is run by
a few interests looking out for themselves.”
Not surprisingly, following a period of highly publicized corporate scandal in 2002, less than 2% of students in this survey said they have a lot of trust in large corporations – slightly less than the 4% of students who said they have a lot of trust in political parties.

**Figure 3. Measures of Trust (Percentage in Agreement)**

![Graph showing measures of trust]

**Renewed Faith in the Institutions of Government**

While the vast majority of young people are distrustful of politicians, there is some suggestion that their attitudes toward government and democratic *institutions* have shifted in a more positive direction following the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center in 2001.

In 2002 the University of Minnesota’s Center for Democracy observed that, “Overall, the terrorist attacks and the war appear to have influenced the way young adults feel – about the government, their communities, and – in theory – about their own civic and political involvement. Young adults are now more trusting of government institutions like their older counterparts since 9/11…however, these tragic recent events have not yet impacted young adults’ community or political behavior.”¹¹ The study found that 69% of young people surveyed
said they feel more favorable toward government while 62% say they trust government to do what is right for the country following the September 11th terrorist attacks.\textsuperscript{12}

In a study conducted by the CIRCLE Foundation in 2002 showing nearly two-thirds (64%) believe that government should do more to solve the country’s problems, researchers observed, “It is ironic…that despite being less trusting of their fellow citizen, or perhaps because of it, DotNets appear to be more trusting of their government. For now, at least, they are more willing than older cohorts to see government play a more active role in public affairs.”\textsuperscript{13}

That sentiment was reflected in this research as well. Although the expressed level of general distrust for certain aspects of government and politics by students participating in this survey was high, their level of trust increased dramatically when asked about specific government institutions.

Nearly 90 percent said they have a lot (48%) or some (42%) trust in the Supreme Court. Almost 80 percent expressed a lot (26%) or some (54%) trust in Congress. While 77 percent said they have a lot (33%) or some (44%) trust in the President.

\textbf{Figure 4. Trust of Government Institutions}
Despite their negative portrayal in much of the research, many of their responses in this survey suggest that young people want to believe in American democratic institutions. Nearly three-quarters strongly agreed (27%) or agreed (45%) with the statement, “There is a lot about our form of government that I am proud of.” Even though 55 percent agreed, “politics and government seem so complicated that ordinary people can’t really understand what is going on,” 59 percent disagreed with the statement that “ordinary people have no say in what the government does.”

On the one hand, young people are distrustful and unfamiliar with politics. On the other hand, the numbers seem to reflect a level of faith in the actual institutions of government. Perhaps it is because one can scarcely avoid the topic of government response at all levels to the terrorist attacks of September 11th and the War on Terrorism, but young people seem to recognize that while everything is not perfect with the current system, government plays an important role in their lives.

The inconsistency of the students’ attitudes toward politics and political participation versus their high levels of trust in governmental institutions only underscores the importance of teaching young people that many of the “institutions” in which they express trust are led by political figures elected to serve in that role by the American people during the course of a political campaign.

*Early Formative Civic Participation Lapses*

Given low trust levels and minimal engagement from parents, it follows that young people would demonstrate inadequate exposure to many civic-related activities that serve to
introduce them to the political arena and build a foundation for active civic engagement as adults.

This survey asked young people about a series of civic activities – most of which could be reasonably defined as responsibilities of citizenship. Despite the fact that more than half (53%) agreed with the statement “Politics is a good thing,” a majority of students had not engaged in a host of formative civic activities that are available to them.

- 8% say they have taken part in a sit-in or disruption of government meetings.
- 12% have taken part in a peaceful protest against government policies.
- 12% have written a letter to the media in support of a political issue or cause.
- 13% reported that they had worked for a political party or candidate.
- 16% have contacted an elected official or agency in the US government.
- 18% have donated money to a political group or cause.
- 20% have attended campaign meetings or rallies.
- 24% have contacted an elected official or agency in local government.
- 32% have joined a group to solve problems in the country or in their community.
- 38% have collected signatures for a petition.
- 39% say they have worn a button, etc., in support of a political cause or a candidate.
- 42% have encouraged adults to register to vote.
- 44% regularly give their opinion during family discussions of politics.\textsuperscript{14}
- 48% have tried to persuade someone to vote for a candidate or party they supported.
- 82% have displayed or worn the American flag.
Fortunately it appears that their lack of engagement has not yet impacted the level of importance that young people attach to the act of voting. Nearly 70 percent felt that it was essential to vote in local elections, while 62 percent felt that it was essential to vote for candidates for the U. S. Senate and the House of Representatives. More than 85 percent of students felt that it was essential to vote for President of the United States.

However, this survey also found that despite the fact that 95% of students said that as an adult they were likely to register to vote, among students who were already 18 or older, 35 percent had not registered.
Schools: A Civic Mission Forgotten

Across the nation many schools and educators are doing an excellent job of prioritizing civic education by introducing students to their larger civic and community responsibilities using some excellent teaching practices and civic education programs. However, examples where there exist adequate levels of exposure to comprehensive civic education, as well as the necessary allocation of classroom time to the subject matter, are the exception rather than the rule.

If math, reading, science and history skills enable a person to effectively function in society, it is civic skills that sustain the presence of a self-governing society for the person to function within.

The extent to which American democracy endures, as well as the level of preparation of the next generation of Americans to lead, depends on how well the current generation prepares them to assume these responsibilities of citizenship. As such, civic education courses should be prominent among those that young people study in the formative years of elementary, middle and high school. Unfortunately public policy makers have chosen a different course for the public school system, leaving students unprepared to fulfill many important responsibilities of citizenship.

Standards Movement Neglects Civics

In a political environment where victory hinges on favorable voter approval, elected officials and candidates alike are drawn toward ideas that appear to resonate well with the public. As such, they are as susceptible to whim as pop culture.

Throughout much of the 1990s this was the case in numerous statehouses across the nation on a variety of issues such as tax cuts and tougher sentencing laws for violent criminals.
One of the best examples of this practice was the effort of states to mandate enhanced state-specific academic standards of learning for public schools.

Much of the rush toward enhanced standards at the state level followed on the heels of the federal government’s *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, passed in 1994 by Congress to support and encourage state efforts to develop clear and rigorous standards for what every child is expected to learn.

The problem with much of the *Goals 2000* legislation was not in the specific outcomes it sought to achieve, but rather that its proponents underestimated the negative reaction that many state and local leaders would have toward what appeared to be mandated federal standards on a host of subjects. Some states, Virginia included, perceived the federal effort to be a one-size-fits-all encroachment on each state’s prerogative to develop academic standards that closely reflect local values and ideas.

After years of debate, and a clarification by the federal Department of Education that *Goals 2000* did not represent mandated federal standards, every state eventually acquiesced, if for no other reason than to receive the millions of dollars in incentives the legislation provided to each state to develop and enhance their standards of learning.

Those seeking to improve civic education held out some hope that the *Goals 2000* legislation would serve as a catalyst for enhancing civic education nationwide as the legislation included two goals aimed at fostering civic education. Specifically:

**Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship**

*By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography, and*
every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy. All students will be involved in activities that promote and demonstrate...good citizenship, community service, and personal responsibility.

Goal 6: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning

By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The state mandated standards movement that the Goals 2000 legislation helped to foster was initially unpopular with much of the education establishment, as well as teachers unions such as the National Education Association, but the idea proved very appealing to a majority of voters. The result is the fact that today every state has mandated standards in many core subjects, including English, math science and history.

Unfortunately, what developed was a patchwork of standards nationwide with varying degrees of excellence that lack any measure of uniformity. Goals Three and Six of the Goals 2000 legislation notwithstanding, very few states have adopted standards requiring the teaching of civic education in the nation’s schools.

This is particularly surprising given that forty states have specific language within their respective state Constitutions suggesting the mission of their public school system is to provide instruction that enhances the ability of its citizens not only to function within, but to preserve a system of free and democratic self-government.¹⁶
Despite the rhetoric, there remains little tangible evidence that civic education is a priority in public schools. While many federal and state policymakers, as well as many educators, agree that there is a civic mission for schools, in reality state policies and school practices often fail to provide students with a quality civic education curriculum. Fewer still devote significant attention to political involvement as a component of their civic instruction.

According to statistics gathered by the Center for Civic Education (Tolo 1999), while all but one state has implemented K-12 content standards for civic education, only three have created separate state standards devoted solely to civic education. Furthermore the Center found that:

- Only twenty-three states specifically require that civic education be addressed within their social studies standards.
- Twenty-nine states require students to take a government or civics course in high school, but many do so without mandated state standards outlining what students are expected to learn.
- While some civics topics are tested statewide in thirty-one states, only three states have tests dedicated to civics. Virginia is an example of a state that has adopted standards for the twelfth-grade government class, but has no end-of-course measure of student proficiency.17

The development of math and reading skills are, without question, outcomes that are essential for ensuring that students have the ability to compete and succeed not just domestically, but also in an increasingly diverse global economy. Equally as important are the knowledge, skills and outcomes learned through quality civic instruction, such as: leadership; tolerance; efficacy; citizen and community interdependence; local, state and national structures of
government; Constitutional principles of freedom and equality; foundational elements of
democracy; political structures; public speaking; resource management and citizenship.

For decades, the decline in civic instruction was also bolstered by an overriding
assumption in the intellectual community that such training does nothing to enhance civic
participation. Weiss et al (1998) observed that until recently “the accepted wisdom in the
political science profession [was] that civics classes have little or no effect on the vast majority
of students.”18

All of these factors may explain why, during roughly the same ten-year-period period that
states mandated standards in reading and math, from 1988 to 1998 the number of fourth-graders
taking social studies fell ten percentage points nationwide to just 39 percent.19

At the high school level “government” class remains the most common, but it is taught
during the last year of high school, and in many cases for just one semester. According to
Patrick and Hodge (1991), in most of these classes government is taught more from an
institutional standpoint rather than teaching students how to actively engage in the functions of
democracy.20

When asked to select all previous grade levels where they had taken a course in civics or
American government only a small percentage of students in our survey reported having taken
any such course in grades prior to their senior year: (Note: These figures are not a cumulative
total as students were instructed to select all that applied.)

- 22% reported taking a course in 9th grade.
- 17% reported taking a course in 10th grade.
- 39% reported taking a course in 11th grade.
In describing the nature of the civic education classes they had taken previously, 90 percent of students participating in this research reported that they had discussed current political events as part of the class, but less than half (47%) said that their previous classes in civic education provided them with an opportunity to work on projects that address a community or national issue. Only 21 percent reported ever being required to write to an elected official as part of their courses in civic education. Only forty-two percent took courses that involved role-playing exercises and simulations such as a mock congress or mock political campaign.
Students’ Perceived Level of Preparedness and Expected Future Involvement

In its landmark 1998 study of civic participation among young people ages 15-24, the NASS survey found:

- “Young people have a poor understanding of what it means to be a citizen and have only vague ideas about the public responsibilities that accompany citizenship.
- Young people suffer an information and skill deficit about politics and the process of voting. Their lack of understanding of citizenship prevents many from becoming more involved in the political process.”  

The U.S. Department of Education disclosed similar findings when it released the results of its evaluation of civic instruction in America in 1999. The assessments found that one-third of America's high school seniors do not understand the basic fundamentals of American government. The Department's study also found:

- “Only 25 percent have better than a rudimentary understanding of the American governmental system; and
- Less than 10 percent of respondents were able to supply two reasons why it is important for citizens to be involved in the democratic process.”

The 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress’s (NAEP) Civics Assessment showed that nearly one-third of high school seniors lacked a basic understanding of how the American system of government operates. Niemi and Junn also found that the design of the National Assessment of Education Progress’s (NAEP) Civics Assessment test “suggests through the questions that are asked that seniors should be expected to know about government (structures and formal processes) but not about politics.”
Following a national study of civic education in America's public-school system, in 1999 the Center for Civic Education concurred with the Department of Education findings, stating, "students often do not have the civic knowledge, are not trained in higher-order civic intellectual skills, and the civic dispositions necessary to connect civic facts and concepts to the responsibilities of citizenship."\textsuperscript{25}

Students participating in our research also felt ill equipped to actively participate in American government. When asked about their level of preparedness, less than a third of students said they “feel well prepared to participate in political life,” in America. Only 33 percent agreed with the statement, “If I wanted to make my political views known, I would know where and how to contact the right people.”

\textbf{Figure 6. Students’ Perceived Levels of Preparedness.}

This is also consistent with the attitudes expressed by young people in the NASS survey where 55 percent of students agreed with the statement “schools do not give enough information to be able to participate in the electoral process.”\textsuperscript{26}
Expectations of Future Involvement

When asked how likely it is that they will participate in political activities in the future, student responses in our survey underscore an aversion to most early formative political activities that is reflective of their overall lack of exposure to the political process both at home and at school. Their responses suggest that not only are young people uninvolved now, but unless steps are taken quickly, students expect to remain uninvolved in civic activity as adults.

The following reflects the cumulative percentage of students who responded “very likely” and “likely” to engage in each activity.27

- 13% - to run for elected office.
- 18% - to take part in a sit-in or disruption of government meetings.
- 19% - to work for a political party or candidate.
- 25% - to attend campaign meetings or rallies.
- 27% - to write a letter to the media or post views on the Internet in support of a political issue or cause.
- 30% - to take part in a peaceful protest against government policies.
- 35% - to contact an elected official or agency in the US government.
- 39% - to join a group to solve problems in the country or in your community.
- 42% - to donate money to a political group or cause.
- 42% - to contact an elected official or agency in local government.
- 46% - to collect signatures for a petition.
- 57% - to wear a button or display a bumper sticker or yard sign in support of a political cause or a candidate.
- 66% - to attempt to persuade someone else to vote for a candidate or party.
- 74% - to try to encourage others to register to vote.
- 84% - to display or wear the American flag.
- 88% - to discuss political issues with friends or family.
- 90% - to vote in a national election.
- 90% - to vote in a state or local election.
- 93% - to register to vote.

Perhaps it is their age that fosters a more rebellious response, but it is interesting that a higher percentage expect to engage in a protest against the government than to engage in other more traditional political activities, including attending campaign-related events, working for candidates for public office and contacting the media to voice support for a political issue or cause.

That they expect never to run for political office or donate money to a political candidate is somewhat understandable, but to see that fully 60 percent never expect to contact an elected official in the federal government is troubling.
Nearly one-third said that it is unlikely that they will ever attempt to persuade another person to vote for a candidate for public office.

More than half (54%) said it was unlikely that they will contact a U.S. official.

61% said it is unlikely they will write a letter of support for a political issue or cause.

Nearly 70% said they were either unlikely or very unlikely to ever work for a candidate for public office.

Knowledge Indicators Low

The importance of political knowledge in influencing participation in the political arena is well established in a variety of areas including: making electoral decisions (Moon, 1990, Lanoue, 1992); as a sustainer of democratic principles (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993, 1996, 2000); assisting in the retention of political messages (Price and Zaller 1993); to process political
communications (Fiske, Lau, and Smith 1990); as a signifier of attention paid to political issues (Zaller 1990); as a indication of receptiveness to inter-generational interaction on political issues (Jennings 1996); as a motivating factor for youth participation (Stephen Bennett 1997); as a gender-specific factor in determining participation (Burns, Lehman Schlozman, and Verba 2001).

While knowledge does not guarantee participation, clearly it is the foundation upon which active and informed participation is based. Unfortunately, young people demonstrate an embarrassing level of unfamiliarity with many important details of the functions of government and the American political process.

In our survey, when asked which Party – Democrat or Republican – currently has the most Members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, less than half, 49.5 percent actually knew that the Republican Party controlled a majority. Nearly one third incorrectly thought that the Democratic Party is considered to be more conservative than the Republican Party. Forty percent could not identify a characteristic that causes a government to be considered “non-democratic,” while almost 30 percent could not identify the primary purpose of the Bill of Rights.

Despite their strong feelings about government being controlled by special interests (51% agreed), more than half (55%) did not have the skills necessary to identify which branches of government are most susceptible to being influenced by lobbying. Similarly, when asked to select an answer that best describes the purpose of a political action committee (PAC), only 24 percent knew that at PAC is an organization set up to raise money for a candidate for public office. The remainder of students either answered incorrectly (23%), or stated that they simply did not know (52%).
Their overall lack of knowledge about Congress was further demonstrated when only 23 percent correctly knew that most legislative bills introduced in Congress are rejected in committee and never reach the full House.

While most expressed a strong desire that as an adult they would vote for President, more than 70 percent did not know that the procedure by which a candidate is nominated to become President of the United States is established by organizations in which they had expressed virtually no trust at all – political parties.

More than 30 percent did not know that Richard “Dick” Cheney serves as the Vice President of the United States. Even fewer (29%) were able to name even one of their states’ two United States Senators.

Given these responses, it will come as no surprise that when asked whether they enjoyed courses they had taken in school related to civic education only 10 percent of participants in this survey said that it was their “favorite subject.”

**Compelled Volunteerism**

Nearly simultaneous to the decline in mandated standards for civic education, has been the increasing tendency within public schools toward the practice of service learning. This growing phenomenon prompted the National Association of Secretaries of State to observe that, “youth volunteerism is on the rise and is at record high levels.” Furthermore, it concluded, “youth today are actually more involved in volunteering than their peers were a decade ago.” The report also noted that, "[youth] volunteer activities are heavily focused on social services and one-on-one interaction within their community."28
Although the study cautioned that the nature of youth volunteerism was largely “individualistic,” it did give hope to the idea that this new generation of Americans would be more receptive to active participation in other aspects of civic life as well.

What the study did not show was the growing trend in public schools toward requiring community service as a component of instruction. It seems somewhat Orwellian to use the phrase “required volunteerism” to describe service learning in today’s public schools, but increasingly that is the case.

According to a 2001 report from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, 64 percent of all public schools and 83 percent of public high schools offered community service as a curricular component in 1999. A second report by the same organization in that year noted that of all students in grades six through twelve nationwide, one-fifth are in schools that require them to perform community service.

By that standard, it appears there are more schools requiring service learning and charitable community volunteerism than there are those with mandated standards for civic education.

In our research, more than 56 percent of students reported that they had participated in a community service activity or volunteer work in their community within the past year. In a question about future activity, 89 percent said they expect to participate in volunteer or charity work in the community as an adult.

Of the number who had already participated in volunteer activities, 46 percent said their school encouraged their volunteer activity; 27 percent said a school group required the activity and 24 percent said their volunteer activity was required by the school or as part of a class. In a separate question asking students to indicate whether certain activities were part of any previous
civic education courses they may have taken, 32 percent of students said they had performed community service and volunteer work as a part of a class.

**Figure 8. Catalyst for Volunteer Activity.**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of students who performed volunteer activity based on different catalysts.]

*Service Not Connecting*

Although there appears to be no cause-and-effect relationship between the lack of mandated standards for civic education and the rise of service learning, it does beg the question of whether, in the absence of mandated civic education, educators are substituting charitable service as a means of exposing young people to the larger civic issues of their respective communities.

The problem is not that, in increasing numbers, schools are requiring students to volunteer. The problem is that service to community is not connected to the governmental infrastructure within which the organization operates. Beyond the respectable practice of charitable activity, most educators do not utilize service learning in a way that places the service in the context of government and other civic-related issues and institutions.
On this point, there is an overwhelming body of evidence to suggest that charitable volunteerism is not a sufficient replacement for courses that teach young people how to be involved in the American democratic process.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, political knowledge and community involvement are taught as units independent of the other, and more often than not where service is a component, it is offered as an outside activity that does not connect the service to any meaningful civics curricula at all.\(^{31}\)

Benjamin Barber and Richard Battistoni (1993) observed, “community service in school settings began as extracurricular activity” that was only “weakly linked (if at all) to civic responsibility and citizen education.\(^ {32}\) They continued, “Service is often segregated from civic responsibility, and is instead associated with altruism or charity – a supererogatory activity of good men and women rather than an obligatory activity of responsible citizens.”\(^ {33}\)

Tobi Walker of the Pew Research Center noted, “If the learning goal [of service learning] is to educate young people about politics and the complex nature of societal problems and social change, then service does not appear to meet theoretical expectations.”\(^ {34}\)

Noting the disconnect between service learning and the governmental and political arena, Newmann and Rutter (1983) noted that service programs generally emphasize an “individualistic conception” of community service that does not require “active participation in churches, clubs, unions, or civic associations.”\(^ {35}\)

Kirlin (2002) observed, “One reason for the weak empirical results relative to civic engagement is that many service and volunteer programs have failed to sufficiently address development of fundamental civic skills such as expressing opinions and working collectively to achieve common interests as part of their design.”\(^ {36}\)
Perry and Katula (2001) found that most service learning projects do not effectively promote active civic engagement in political activities such as voting, contacting elected officials or being active in other public policy affairs of the community.\footnote{37}

According to Keeter et al, “DotNets are not turning to political volunteering in larger numbers. Just 3 percent say that they volunteered for a political group in the past year. Nor are they citing any of their volunteer work as a means to address a political or social problem. Just 10 percent say so, compared to 21 percent of Xers, 26 percent of Boomers and 22 percent of Matures.”\footnote{38}

A 2001 study by Harvard University’s Institute of Politics underscored the importance of exposure to government and politics and direct contact between elected officials and students: “Students are often exposed to community service as early as elementary school, yet many educators and practitioners feel that there is little room for political involvement until students are old enough to vote. Community service is seen as a written and unwritten requirement for college admission, political involvement is often not.”\footnote{39}

Few would argue that community service is not an important responsibility of citizenship. Indeed, charity is a hallmark of any gracious and civilized society. Nevertheless, how unfortunate – during the fleeting moment when students are taking an active interest in the needs of their community – to miss the opportunity to also connect them with the larger world of government and public policy that plays such an influential role in shaping the circumstances that precipitate the need for the volunteer organization in the first place.

If the research is to be believed, it would not be a great exaggeration to say that most American public schools avoid the topic of politics and governmental participation altogether. In
states where courses in non-history based civic education are offered, i.e. American government, Civics, Political Parties etc, it is true nearly nationwide that there is little or no accountability in the form of state and/or local academic standards, nor are there mandatory end of course proficiency exams. This lack of commitment to civic education has impacted students’ level of participation in civic activities, as well as their knowledge of American government and politics.

Clearly, schools are deficient in content-specific standards related to civic and political participation, but America will never solve a problem of this magnitude by simply adding more of the same type of instruction that has proven ineffective in the past.

Of all the varied attempts at civic education - from textbook facts on foundations of government to mentoring and charitable service, and nearly everything in between - none has focused comprehensively on the importance of teaching politics and political participation as a catalyst for engagement in American democracy. This has resulted in damaging attitudes and declining levels of trust and efficacy that threaten to preclude their participation as adults. Therefore, any national call to action must ensure that the civic education product being delivered in schools actually results in teaching America’s children how to participate in the democratic process of self-government.
Restoring the Foundations
Civic Education Begins at Home

There is conflicting evidence of the specific role that parents play in encouraging their children to actively engage in politics and government. Keeter et al (2002) found that homes where discussions of political issues occurred were more likely to produce actively engaged children. Though not specifically directed only at their experiences at home, M. Kent Jennings (1996) found that what children learn about the political process in their formative years at school and at home has a “good deal of continuity and provides a certain degree of stability” in terms of what that person is likely to draw upon as an adult.

At the same time, Beck and Jennings (1991) asserted that, “Habits of political attentiveness are not nurtured successfully in many a politicized home; nor does coming from a non-politicized home environment preclude subsequent adult political involvement and interest.”

Our research found significant evidence that parents play an important role in fostering interest in politics and in determining whether young people engage in civic activities. Specifically:

Students who said their family discusses politics, the country’s problems or local issues “every day” were far more likely to say they had a great deal of interest in national politics and issues facing the nation than those who said their family never holds such discussions (54% vs. 7%).

Likewise, among those whose family’s held such discussions at least once or twice a week, they were more likely to say they have at least some interest in local community politics and issues facing the nation than those who said their family never holds such discussions, or did so less than once a month (76% vs. 52%).
**Parental Support Fosters Trust and Participation**

Students were twice as likely to say that they felt well prepared to participate in political life in America if their parents have also encouraged them to be active in politics and community issues. Of those who felt well prepared to participate in political life, 73% came from families that discuss the country’s problems or local issues at least once or twice a week when they are together.

Students also were far less likely to be cynical and apathetic when parents had encouraged them to be involved. Where there was encouragement from parents, students disagreed, by a margin of nearly 3 to 1, that “public officials don’t care what ordinary people think” and “ordinary people like me have no say in what government does.”

Among students whose parents encouraged them to be involved, 53 percent agreed with the statement, “government is run for the benefit of all people.” In homes where there was no encouragement from family members, only 44 percent of students felt that government is run for the benefit of all people.

Students who received encouragement from their parents to be involved in politics and government were more likely than those who received no encouragement to report they had joined a group to solve problems in their community or country (40% vs. 25%); more likely to have attended a campaign meeting or rally (27% vs. 13%); more likely to have worked for a political party or candidate (18% vs. 9%); more likely to have contacted officials at the local or state level (33% vs. 17%) and federal level (20% vs. 12%); more likely to have encouraged adults to register to vote (51% vs. 34%); more likely to report that they expect to register to vote
as adults (98% vs. 92%) and to be involved in volunteer activities in the future (94% vs. 85%).

**What Parents Can Do**

To develop a national effort to rebuild civic education parents should consider the following recommendations:

- Facilitate discussions of political and community issues during times when the family is together. If parents feel uncomfortable or too unfamiliar with issues to facilitate such discussions, they may consider introducing current issues and political discussions by encouraging children to read newspapers, newsmagazines, or view news programs on TV or the Internet.

- Insist on quality civic instruction at school. Visit the school to learn whether and to what extent students are required to take civic education courses. Where the standards are inadequate, request that the schools consider enhancing their curriculum.

- Encourage children to explore the many opportunities that exist for participation in civic-related community and political events.

- Vote. Discuss the importance of voting with children and underscore the lesson by taking children to the polls on Election Day.

**Improving the Plight of Civic Education in Schools**

Because schools are the only institution to reach virtually all of the nations’ youth, much effort must be put toward teaching young people how to participate in democracy. As demonstrated, far too many schools are failing to achieve the civic mission many of their
respective state Constitutions so clearly outline, and the Goals 2000 legislation sought to promote. Furthermore, what is offered in the form of service learning and textbook teachings is failing to adequately introduce students to the practical and experiential skills that promote participation and functionality in civic life.

Aside from parental influence at home, schools present the best opportunity to reverse the growing negative impression that young people have of the American political process. But simply increasing the number of civic education classes is not likely to address the problems facing civic life, particularly if such classes continue to omit comprehensive units on politics, political involvement and the participatory nature of democracy.

*What Schools Can Do: A Forward Approach*

Contrary to conventional wisdom of the last decade, Niemi and Junn found that, when appropriately designed, “civics course work and other elements of the school environment do influence high school students’ civic knowledge,”

While textbook knowledge is a basis for active political participation, there is evidence in a number of national youth surveys as well as the 1998 NAEP test, that civic and government courses that actively engage students in their communities, government and the political process improve the likelihood that students will be involved in a variety of civic activities, including voting, when they are adults. Textbook facts and charitable volunteerism are essential to a well-rounded concept of citizenship, but research has not shown that these teaching models, when offered alone, result in greater civic engagement.

According to Cawelti and Shaver (1999), civics courses that focus only on the mechanical and institutional components of government are not as effective at fostering adult
engagement as those that actively engage students in the current issues of their community and at all levels of government.\textsuperscript{47}

To that end, every state should implement rigorous mandated standards in participatory civic education at every grade level from kindergarten through twelfth grade with end-of-course proficiency exams such as a NAEP Civics Assessment (retooled to include more comprehensive measures of political knowledge and political participation) that is administered at both the middle school and high school level. These standards should include experiential learning that exposes students to the vast array of opportunities for participation in democracy and the American political process.

\textit{Teaching Politics and Political Engagement}

The American form of government is unique in that its survival and perpetuity rely on the active participation of its citizens. Unlike other forms of government where continuity is ensured through various outside factors, the United States’ form of government – at nearly every level - depends on its citizens to select representatives to carry on the mission of government. If the citizens fail in that responsibility, there simply is no alternative selection method. Politics is the process by which American citizens engage in such selection.

It is true that there are aspects of the political system, the American electoral process in particular, that preclude young people from participating until they reach the age of 18. Because voting provides one with a sense of power and influence, it is easier to feel that one has a vested interest in other areas of civic participation when one has the ability to influence and contribute to the selection of the community’s leaders. However, more often than not, this is used as a
convenient excuse for not exposing young people to the process at an earlier age. Teaching practices should avoid the notion that civic engagement is defined solely by the act of voting.

It is important to take advantage of the potential that early formative civic engagement opportunities present for teaching the importance of voting and civic engagement later in life.

No doubt, many people – chief among them parents – would oppose the idea of teaching partisan politics in the public school system, and for good reason. It is unacceptable to engage in teaching practices that reflect or seek to impose a particular bias or political ideology on young people. Quality civic instruction would seek just the opposite.

To include politics in the broad mission of civic education is to develop pedagogical methods with outcomes targeted at increasing knowledge of American politics and its important relation to a system of self-government. A more comprehensive approach to civic instruction with an emphasis on political participation would:

- Foster a synergy between the formal study of politics and government and the application of civic knowledge to practical aspects of everyday civic life.

- Introduce, through experiential learning, the intricacies of the political and policymaking process, as well as issues that are specific to their local community to illustrate the importance of the process of politics.

- Facilitate discussion of difficult – even controversial – current issues to introduce young people to the vast array of opinions that collectively make up a free and democratic society.

- Expose young people to the process by which Americans select their elected representatives. To paraphrase the mission statement of the Center for Politics at the
University of Virginia, politics is the engine that drives a representative democracy. It is the vehicle by which Americans choose their representatives i.e. “politicians.”

**Politics Matters**

This research found that for students who said they had discussed current political events as part of a previous civic education class, or had taken classes that required them to contact elected officials, or had a class that included role playing and simulated activities such as a Mock Congress, were more likely to show greater interest in politics and future political activities than students who had not had such experiences in a previous class.

Students who had discussed politics in class were more likely to express interest in national politics and issues facing the nation (91% vs. 73%). These students were also more likely to anticipate future involvement in numerous political and community activities, including: registering to vote (96% vs. 88%), attending campaign meetings and political rallies (29% vs. 17%), contacting government officials or agencies in local government (50% vs. 20%), contacting government officials in the U.S. government (43% vs. 14%), discussing political issues with friends and family (93% vs. 68%), expressing a likelihood of voting in a national election (94% vs. 75%).

Discussions of political issues in class also seemed to be related to whether students responded correctly to numerous questions measuring their knowledge of certain aspects of the politics. Comparing students with past experience in classroom discussions of politics with those who said previous classes had not included such discussions, students with past experience answered correctly more often than those without such experience on questions where it is
reasonable to assume a relation between political discussions in class and the subject matter of the question. This survey asked:

- *Which of the following groups is most likely to vote in U. S. presidential election?*  
  (82% of students with past experience in classroom discussions answered correctly vs. 69% of students without such experience.)

- *Which of the two major parties is considered to be more conservative than the other?*  
  (81% of students with past experience in classroom discussions answered correctly vs. 74% of students without such experience.)

- *Which of the two major parties has a more pro-life position on abortion?*  
  (72% of students with past experience in classroom discussions answered correctly vs. 62% of students without such experience.)

- *Which of the two major parties supports more regulations on business in order to protect the environment?*  
  (79% of students with past experience in classroom discussions answered correctly vs. 54% of students without such experience.)

- *Which of the two major parties has a more supportive stand on affirmative action for African-Americans and other minority groups?*  
  (88% of students with past experience in classroom discussions answered correctly vs. 82% of students without such experience.)

Comparing students who said their previous classes in civic education had required them to write or contact elected political officials with those who said their previous classes had not required them to do so, students who had written or contacted politicians were more likely to say they expect to contact officials in the U.S. government in the future (57% vs. 35%), make contact in the future with local politicians (66% vs. 42%). Students required to contact elected officials
were also more likely to say they were interested in national political issues (93% vs. 88%) and local political issues (74% vs. 68%).\textsuperscript{51}

Though not a strong relationship, comparing students who said their previous classes in civic education had included role-playing opportunities such as a mock Congress or political campaign, with those who said their previous classes had not included such activities, students who had participated in role-playing activities were somewhat more apt to say they were “very likely” to engage in certain political and community activities in the future including: registering to vote (81% vs. 74%), voting in a state or local election (69% vs. 59%), joining a group to solve the country’s or the community’s problems (17% vs. 10%).

\textit{Positive Effects of Political Participation}

Keeter found that, “high school graduates who participated in political organizations at school vote more frequently (38% vs. 21%) [and] are more attentive to news (36% vs. 24%).”\textsuperscript{52}

Overall students in our study were less involved in clubs, organizations and study groups that focus on political and community activities, than in organizations that are traditionally more non-civic related such as sports groups and religious organizations.

- 20% reported membership in a school group that deals with politics,
- 17% felt it was essential to join a group supporting their views on political issues,
- 36% had attended a meeting of the student government or council, despite the fact that 70% said there was a system of student government at their school,
- 48% said they were a member of a charitable or service organization at school,
• In a separate question about activities outside of school, 45% said they are a members of a charitable or service organization; 11% said they were an active member of a group that deals with politics and political issues,
• 59% have voted in a mock election,
• 86% have voted in a student government election,
• 68% were members of a school-related sports club, team or league,
• 60% were members of an arts, music, language or culture club,
• 64% were members of a religious or church organization.

Nevertheless, students who said they were members of a political group at school demonstrated higher levels of civic participation and more favorable attitudes toward voting and participation than non-members.

Students who said they were members of a school group that deals with politics or political issues were more likely than nonmembers to say they have a great deal of interest in issues that affect the nation (41% vs. 22%) and locality (18% vs. 9%). They were more likely to have attended campaign meetings (32% vs. 16%), worked for a political candidate (23% v. 10%), contacted elected officials in the U.S. government (25% vs. 13%), contacted local elected officials (40% vs. 21%), persuaded someone to vote for a candidate they support (63% vs. 44%), and encouraged adults to register to vote (56% vs. 38%).

They were also more likely than non-members to view certain political activities as essential including: voting in local elections (77% vs. 69%), voting for candidates for U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives (72% vs. 63), voting for candidates for President of the United States (92% vs. 85%), and following political news in the newspaper (42% vs. 32%).53
Teacher Support

When asked to identify those people who have encouraged them to be active in politics and community issues, civics teachers emerged over parents as the individuals who have provided the greatest level of encouragement to young people participating in this research. Regardless of whether it was successful, 76 percent reported that it was their civics teacher who encouraged them to be active in politics and community issues.

A quality civic education system recognizes that teachers are the key to its successful administration and implementation. Teachers must be supported through in-service training and professional development programs that provide them with the tools needed to implement such programs. In addition, the federal government should provide additional funds for programs and organizations that develop teaching resources geared toward the field of civic education. In this regard, colleges and universities also have an important developmental role to play, the details of which are discussed in the next chapter.

A New Approach to Service Learning

The pervasiveness of mandatory volunteerism does call into the question the extent to which young people would volunteer without being required to do so. Keeter found that “59% of students whose high schools required volunteer work actually volunteered in 2001, compared to 37 percent of students without such requirements.” In Keeter’s study, when asked who initiated their involvement in volunteer organizations, most young people said they were active through outside initiative, either “someone else put us together” (20%) or they were recruited by
the group (39%), noting that, “a simple but direct invitation to participate can make a critical difference for those ages 15-to25-years.”

Regardless of the catalyst, a willingness to participate in volunteer activities seems to be prevalent among American middle school and high school students. Those interested in promoting civic education should not miss this important opportunity to expand charitable activities to include exposure to other important facets of civic engagement.

Barber and Battistoni (1993) note that, “democratic society inherently demands collective decision making. Thus, young adults must practice the skills necessary for civic engagement; cognitive understanding of democracy is not sufficient.” However, they assert that in designing service programs, a choice must be made between, charitable volunteerism and civic-oriented service. It must be determined if the program will focus on “service as an exercise in altruism” or “enlightened self interest” which emphasizes “mutual responsibility and the interdependence of rights and responsibilities.”

Yet there seems to be no apparent reason why service could not be re-designed with a well-rounded approach that achieves both the charitable, altruistic aspects of community volunteerism and introduces students to the vast array of governmental, political and civic organizations and individuals capable of impacting the volunteer organizations and its clientele.

Kirlin, suggests, “the most significant step is rethinking the front end of service and volunteer programs so that students have as much latitude as possible to learn and practice civic skills through the process of designing and organizing their activities themselves. This doesn’t mean disengaging the service experience from the classroom content. Rather, it means facilitating students’ discovery of what problems exist, whom they need to contact to address the issues, and what types of projects they will undertake.”
At first it may seem a difficult union, but with minimal effort several steps could be taken to connect service learning with government and politics and thereby, significantly amplify the benefits and networks that young people acquire through service.

*Connecting Charity with Politics*

Three factors suggest an opening in current service learning practices that would enable a much stronger connection to government and politics: 1) the current growing national infrastructure for service in public schools; 2) favorable attitude among school administrators for service; and 3) evidence of a desire on the part of young people to participate in such programs.

As a matter of practice, current service learning projects would continue but the design could be enhanced by also identifying and facilitating connections to government and politics. Connecting service projects with government and political organizations that focus on the same subject would not impede the “individualistic” nature of students’ attitudes toward service. As such, volunteerism would serve as a means of not only employing existing social and political capital, but to enhance it as well.

The solution need not be overly complex. There is virtually no area of service where a connection to government and politics does not exist. Consider a few examples:

A volunteer at homeless shelters, soup kitchens and food banks should also be required as part of the service learning project to make connections with, among others, the United States Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service or the Department of Health and Human Service’s Bureau of Primary Health Care. Through these and other government agencies, students would learn how to collaborate with community health organizations and social service
agencies to deliver food and quality care to the homeless, as well as develop and improve programs that provide meals to people in nursing homes and day care centers.

For students interested in mentoring at-risk youth or serving as tutors to children there is the Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families where students may work directly with foster and biological parents, children, and case workers to help shape the services that states provide to vulnerable children and families. At the Bureau of Indian Affairs, students may work with parents and students to develop programs that help more young Native Americans stay in school and be successful.

For students with an interest in helping the environment, the student would also be introduced to the Environmental Protection Agency and the numerous branches of the agency such as the Office of Air and radiation where they could learn about programs to improve air quality and control pollution. There is also the National Park Service where they would learn to protect forests, manage wildlife and natural habitats.

Coordinating local blood and bone marrow drives, nursing home visits, or volunteering at local HIV/AIDS clinics also have an abundance of connections to government and politics, including the federal Administration on Aging, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Center for Disease Control’s Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention.

Students interested in traveling to less-developed countries as a component of their service would find assistance and could learn more about governmental involvement through the United Nations or the federal government’s Agency for International Development or the Foreign Agricultural Service.
To enhance exposure to politics, each of these projects could also incorporate research and contact with candidates for local, state and federal office to determine the candidates’ position on issues related to the student’s particular service interest.

One final note: The role of schools goes beyond classroom instruction. Like all other community organizations, schools must move beyond simply doing what is mandated, and serve as a role model and motivational organization within communities. When a school promotes civic education and engagement as a priority for the good of the community rather than just a responsibility of the job, the message has a trickle-down effect upon the entire community.
Building a Culture of Civic Education

The lack of civic engagement is not unique to young people. Many researchers have found that most Americans do not know the specific details of government process and policy, as well as the names of most public officials. So it is a narrow view of the problem to approach civic education as a matter left to any single institution. Apathy and cynicism toward government and politics are pervasive throughout society, and require solutions that are multifaceted. To do anything less ignores a disengaged adult population that is all too content to complain about public policy, all the while ignoring the next town hall or city council meeting and staying at home on Election Day.

Furthermore, if young people are to learn and engage in their community, they must be able to do so in a larger environment that not only encourages, but also values active citizen participation. Such an effort requires reinforcement and support not just in the classroom, but also from individuals and institutions across every level of society.

No one would suggest this is an easy undertaking. While many agree on the need, unfortunately the ongoing effort for change remains with a relative few. Furthermore, in many cases, factors contributing to the problem such as lack of trust and efficacy have been building for decades, and are not subject to quick fixes.

In a country as large as the United States, it is all too easy for residents in one part of a state to feel disconnected from their neighbors in another part of the same state. Given that, it is understandable that issues involving a federal government confined mainly in Washington D.C. would seem distant and irrelevant for most Americans. Furthermore, although it is a system built on citizen participation, politics and government do not have a reputation for being the most welcoming and user-friendly institutions. These and other circumstances combine to give the
appearance that the problem is so large as to be seemingly insurmountable. Without question, it will not be solved overnight.

Because of myriad influences, attitudes and values related to politics and political participation are among the most difficult variables to change. As such, the best we should expect is incremental change over a period of years. But there are steps that can be initiated immediately to begin the important process of building a society committed to civic education and civic engagement. As suggested, the first steps must begin at home and at school. From there it extends outward to include, federal, state, and local elected officials as well as institutions such as the business community, colleges and universities, the media and volunteer groups.

*What Federal, State and Locally Elected Officials Can Do*

There is, perhaps, no group of individuals who have any greater power to influence civic life than those persons elected to hold federal and state offices. There simply is no excuse or reason for the lack of mandated standards for civic education in America.

The all-important first step that would set the stage for enhanced civic instruction nationwide, is for elected officials to back their rhetoric with education policies and funding that supports civic education. A teacher can be highly motivated, but if he or she lacks the necessary resources to keep young people engaged in the subject matter throughout the school year, interest will fade and students will not learn the spectrum of responsibilities that accompany citizenship.

Similar to the incentives of the Goals 2000 legislation, the federal government should develop a system of incentives for the individual states specifically aimed at encouraging the
development of mandated standards in civic education with end-of-course exams to ensure accountability.

Because of the bureaucratic structure of the educational hierarchy in America, many local government officials see little or no role in the process of encouraging civic engagement and civic education. In most localities, local officials lack any significant jurisdiction over matters of mandated curriculum standards. Given that, many excuse themselves of responsibility over the matter entirely.

Like all other elected and/or appointed government officials, local government officials should make civic education and civic-engagement a priority by creating and encouraging opportunities for enhanced citizen involvement at the local level and by calling on state and federal officials to promote civic education and civic engagement.

To establish civic engagement as a priority in American life, there are additional steps that elected officials can take to help curtail the decline in civic education, including:

- Offering, encouraging, and publicizing volunteer opportunities within their campaign, as well as the public offices that they hold.
- Establishing citizen boards and commissions, and visiting local schools and communities.
- Facilitating opportunities for people to gather to discuss politics and government.
- Conducting townhall meetings and offering other opportunities during the campaign season for the public to attend debates, submit debate questions via the Internet, and, when possible.
- Creating more opportunities for youth participation (introductions, debate questioners, campaign volunteers) at campaign events.
• Advancing public policies that promote civic engagement by all Americans through legislative measures that rebuild public confidence in government and advance opportunities for enhanced civic engagement.

What the Media Can Do

• Devote significant blocks during primetime to broadcast ballot returns in all elections, not just presidential election years.
• Publicize and broadcast civic-engagement opportunities within local communities.
• Spotlight individuals and organizations working to promote civic education and renew civic engagement.
• Allocate additional space to letters to the editor, guest editorials, and news stories highlighting civic engagement opportunities; develop community and volunteer spotlight segments on the evening news.
• Recognize educators who are promoting civic education and civic engagement.

What Colleges and Universities Can Do

Given that K-12 civic education teachers receive their training at colleges and universities, opportunities abound to reinforce the importance of politics and political participation as a component of civic instruction. This vital role in enhancing civic education nationwide can be achieved by:
• Introducing civic education as a priority of the social studies classroom.
• Emphasizing the importance of politics and other aspects of civic life during pre-service and in-service teaching education programs.
• Explore and utilize the varied resources of civic-related organizations to underscore the broad range of opportunities available for teaching participation in American democracy.

• Only twenty-one states require additional in-service training in civic education for teachers to maintain their certification. Given that, colleges and universities should encourage a greater focus on civic education training by offering to existing classroom teachers continuing education credits that are based in civic education.

**Step Outside the Ivory Tower**

Obviously additional research is necessary to better understand the many factors that influence and promote civic engagement. However, as additional research is conducted it should offer practical solutions that can be applied at the primary delivery points for civic education, namely.

In his book, *Campaigns and Elections American Style*, James Thurber wrote, “Campaigns are objects of analysis for academics. For scholars, election campaigns do not represent a personal gamble, a deeply felt ambition, or a commitment to the objective of winning. Campaigns are not political causes to academics, but rather a focus of intellectual interest. Academics are interested in why people vote; professionals are interested in how to get them to vote, especially for a particular candidate. Academics study who contributes money to campaigns and why; professionals are interested in how to get people to give funds to their candidates. These perspectives seem to be worlds apart, but in order to understand campaigns they must be brought together.”
The National Youth Leadership Initiative at the University of Virginia Center for Politics represents an effort to use research in the development of practical resources for teaching civic engagement. The program combines academic research with the experience of politicians in order to teach young people about the importance of politics in American democracy.

Developed to fill a void in the K-12 classroom, the program offers civic-related resources and social studies course units that are specifically linked to each state’s unique academic curriculum standards, with a particular focus on political participation as a necessary component of civic education.

Begun as a pilot project with fourteen schools in central Virginia, the program has now expanded to all 50 states. Today, more than a half-million students at more than 2,700 schools nationwide have used the resources of the program, indicating not only a dearth of such materials, but also a clear desire on the part of educators for quality civic education resources.

Today, the program represents the largest effort on the part of any college or university in the nation to develop and distribute teaching resources and large-scale student activities designed around civic education. But with more than 95,000 public elementary and secondary schools and more than 26,000 private schools in 17,000 school districts nationwide, the responsibility is too large for any single organization to effectively address.

Colleges and universities across the country should serve as a role model for the community by hosting discussions and symposia that promote civic and community engagement. In addition:

- Develop requirements and/or a point of contact for college students to learn how to engage in civic life at home and within the school and surrounding community.
• Offer teaching resources to local classrooms to enhance the learning experience and connect students to other institutions in their community.

What Private Enterprise Can Do

• Encourage civic engagement among the workforce.
• Provide support to research and community organizations that promote civic education and civic engagement through financial contributions and service opportunities for employees.
• Encourage employees to vote and offer flextime or comp-time opportunities as an incentive to volunteer for civic and political organizations.

What Volunteer Organizations Can Do

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 2001, Americans of all ages volunteered, donated blood, and made financial contributions. Many hoped that this outpouring of community assistance would translate into more active participation in other facets of civic life. Unfortunately, one need look no further than the voter-participation levels of the November 2001 elections to realize that America's commendable "Good Samaritan" instincts and the spirit of community interest that swept the country in the months immediately following the September tragedies show little sign of translating into more broad-based civic engagement.61

To assist in combating the problem, volunteer organizations should take several steps to introduce volunteers to the larger community of which the organization is a part, and to explain how government and politics affect the organization. Volunteer organizations can encourage
civic engagement and promote civics education by linking volunteerism with other facets of civic life in America by:

- Making connections with the government and politics. Encourage volunteers to understand the issues affecting the organization and to participate in the electoral process to promote these issues.

- Providing volunteers with information on the organization's funding sources, particularly if the organization is supported in whole, or in part, by public funds.

- Creating opportunities for volunteers to participate in lobbying activities and other public meetings with the political community.

- Engaging volunteers in any opportunities to discuss the organization with elected officials and other community leaders and organizations.

- Encouraging volunteers to contact their elected officials to discuss the goals of the organization and support for funding.

- Cross-referencing similar community and governmental organizations in literature to provide volunteers with a better understanding of how the organization fits in to the larger community.
Conclusion

There is a Chinese proverb that states, “One generation plants the trees under which another takes its ease.” If the generation to whom Roosevelt spoke at the Democratic National Convention in 1936 planted the proverbial seeds of unprecedented civic engagement, then the Baby Boom generation that followed was all too willing to lose sight of the effort required to maintain and foster such engagement long-term.

Sadly, where civic education is concerned, evidence suggests that America is rapidly losing its “planters” altogether. Over the last four decades far too many citizens have been content to “take their ease,” allowing civic engagement to steadily attrite from the priorities of American life.

Not since Roosevelt’s generation has the world faced a greater international threat than it does today. There could not have been a more sobering example of the fragility of societal institutions than the frightening sight on September 11th of two, hundred-story buildings rocked from their foundations, cascading to the ground. The attacks force conscientious people to realize just how much about society and the nation is taken for granted; that things once regarded as solid, permanent, and unwavering are in fact only as strong as the effort society puts into building and protecting them. The same may be said of democracy.

For all its shortcomings and imperfections, the American system of government remains a model for democracy and freedom. But, as the nation witnessed in 2001, what seems a bastion of strength one day, can be destroyed the next if it is not guarded carefully.

As America begins a new century, every citizen committed to strengthening democratic principles must renew his or her pledge to responsible civic education – fostering a nationwide commitment to ensuring that Americans are taught and encouraged to become actively engaged
in civic life. To do anything less jeopardizes the foundations of a free and self-governing society.

There are many ways to undermine a system of government. Terrorism is only one means. The National Association of Secretaries of State warned, “nobody can say for sure how long a country can remain truly democratic when it lives off of its political and social capital, but the prospect of a democracy without citizens is a sobering oxymoron.”

How troubling it would be to someday find that while we protected our nation well from outside threats, it was our own internal neglect that resulted in its demise.
References


3 U.S. Census data analyzed by the author. For the 1998 and 2000 elections, results are 5% and 7.7% respectively and represent the percentage of total voter turnout among people 18-24 years of age.


12 Ibid.
Keeter et al., pp. 39.

In a separate question that asked how often family members discuss politics, the country’s problems or local issues when you are together, 15% said every day, 39% said once or twice a week. In a question that followed, students were asked how often do you voice your opinion when your family talks about politics. The percentage sited is the number that responded “almost all the time.” See Appendix A for more information.

Nationally, during the 2000 Presidential election cycle, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that voter registration among all age groups was 69.5%, among young people age 18-24, voter registration was 51%. See www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p20-542.pdf for more information.

The idea that schools would provide at least some exposure and/or training in civic education is reflected in the constitutions of 40 states, 13 of which define the central mission of their schools as a place to promote citizenship, as well as civic engagement in American democracy. See Tolo, Kenneth, W. (Project Director). 1999 The Civic Education of American Youth: From State Policies to School District Practices, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin, Policy Research Project Report, Number 133, pp. 13-16. Available at: www.civiced.org/ceny_civedpolicyreport.pdf.

Ibid.


Niemi, Richard G. and Jane Junn , pp. 50

Niemi and Junn, pp. 35. Authors also found that “Seventy-one percent were able to answer the sole question about political behavior (apart from the “table-reading” item already discussed). This was a question about which group – middle-aged professionals, college students, the unemployed, or factory workers – is likeliest to vote in U.S. presidential elections,” pp. 45.


New Millennium Project, pp. 4.

Percentages reflect those students who selected either “very likely” or “likely” among all responses including “Don’t Know.”

New Millennium Project, pp.5.


34 Walker, pp. 186.


38 Keeter et al., pp. 20.


41 Jennings, Kent M. “Political Knowledge Across Time and Generations.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 60. no. 2. pp 249.


43 Even with parental encouragement, more young people than not still felt that government and politics is too complicated for ordinary people, but this is perhaps a better reflection of their lack of exposure to politics than a feeling of ineffectiveness.

44 See Appendix B for cross tabulations.

45 Niemi and Junn, pp. 51.


Represents the responses of students who answered “a great deal of interest” and “some interest.”

Represents students who responded “very likely” or “likely.”

Although they were included in overall reports of student responses to knowledge questions, students who skipped the question were not included in the calculations for this section. This set of comparisons represents only those students who actually responded to the question. See Appendix D for all cross tabulations.

Reflects students who responded with either “a great deal of interest” or “some interest.” Looking only at those who responded with “a great deal of interest” the numbers are obviously smaller but the relationship is even stronger for both national issues (36% vs. 24%) and local issues (18% vs. 9%).

Keeter et al., pp. 34.

See Appendix C for cross tabulations.

Keeter et al., pp. 33.

Ibid., pp. 35.


Ibid.


Tolo, pp. 160.

In Virginia, one of the states directly impacted by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the voting-age population was estimated at 5.3 million in the last census. According to statistics released by the Virginia State Board of Elections, only about 35 percent of the voting-age population--those eighteen and older--voted in the 2001 statewide election. For more information, see [http://sbe.vipnet.org/nov2001/elec_loc_turnout.html](http://sbe.vipnet.org/nov2001/elec_loc_turnout.html).


New Millennium Project, pp. 1-3.