Civic Education for Youth Empowerment: The Impact of We the People and Project Citizen

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The potential for quality civic education programs to foster civic empowerment and engagement among young citizens is explored through an examination of three programs for primary and secondary school students implemented by the Center for Civic Education--We the People/James Madison Legacy Project, Presidential and Congressional Academies for American History and Civics, and Project Citizen. The unique active learning elements of the programs are described. The results of quantitative and qualitative research are presented that demonstrate the effectiveness of these programs in instilling civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills in young people, including high-need students.

Keywords: civic education, youth empowerment, civic engagement, high-need students, civic knowledge, civic dispositions, civic skills

INTRODUCTION

Scholars and educators long have been concerned that young people are disconnected from government and politics. Many young citizens, especially those from less advantaged backgrounds, have insufficient knowledge of government institutions and political processes. They are unfamiliar with the principles that underpin their system of government and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. They have not developed fundamental civic dispositions and skills which precludes informed and meaningful civic engagement. One compelling explanation for the deficiency in youth civic empowerment is the lack of access to high caliber civic education.

This paper examines how civic education programs can foster engagement among young citizens. It addresses the core questions: How effective is civic education in elementary and secondary school in providing students with a foundation that can empower them to participate in political and civic life? And, what are the characteristics of quality civic education programs that promote youth empowerment? We argue that even a minimal amount of civic education can positively influence students' civic empowerment. Students who are exposed to high quality civic education programs will make significant gains in civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills that resonate over the life course. Quality programs integrate the learning of content knowledge with active pedagogies that promote students' development of a civic identity that is oriented toward engagement. Through such programs, students gain a sense of their civic capacity by developing connections to community and civic actors and forming a commitment to

social issues (Kahne and Middaugh, 2008). Improving instructional practices and access to quality civic education can narrow the "civic empowerment gap" that exists for marginalized groups (Levinson, 2012).

To explore the relationship between civic education and youth empowerment we examine three programs of the Center for Civic Education (Center) that are designed to foster engaged young citizens: (1) We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution (WTP) and its offshoot, the James Madison Legacy Project (JMLP), (2) Presidential and Congressional Academies for American History and Civics, and (3) Project Citizen (PC). WTP is a long-standing school curriculum intervention that is implemented at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Students take part in learning activities designed to impart knowledge about the foundations and institutions of government culminating in a simulated congressional hearing. The JMLP delivers professional development to secondary school teachers of high-need students who implement the WTP curriculum in their classrooms. The Presidential and Congressional Academies are intensive, two-week summer programs for teachers and students that expand upon the WTP content and curriculum. The Academies integrate scholar lectures, small group activities, and field trips to provide subject area and experiential knowledge. PC is a widely-used curricular program that engages students in cooperative, project-based learning. Students identify a problem in their community, research policy-based solutions, develop a proposal to address the problem, and design a political action plan. The active learning pedagogies employed by the teachers in the WTP and PC programs have been demonstrated empirically to be effective. Research has shown that these interventions increase students' attainment of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions which are fundamental to fostering youth empowerment.

To provide a context for our case studies of WTP, Presidential and Congressional Academies, and PC, we begin by examining the connection between civic education and youth empowerment that has been established in the scholarly literature and in practice. We then offer overviews of the programs highlighting the elements that contribute to youth empowerment. We also present empirical evidence of the programs' effectiveness in conveying civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills. We employ data from surveys and interviews conducted in conjunction with program evaluations of WTP, the JMLP, and the Congressional and Presidential Academies. Finally, we report the findings of a survey we conducted in 2019 of PC teachers with respondents from fifteen countries where the program has been implemented.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CIVIC EDUCATION

Civic education empowers young people to actively and responsibly participate in government and civic life. Civics and government education provided in schools is important for all students. Quality civic education provides young people with deep educational experiences that enable them to understand their rights and responsibilities and develop skills necessary to uphold the rights of others. Students develop understandings, skills, and attitudes that contribute to the rule of law and improve the communities and lives of people around them. Quality civic education contributes to democratic stability, the protection of human rights, security, and other sustainable development goals.

Effective civic education requires a solid grounding in knowledge and understanding of the philosophical, historical, political, social, and economic foundations of constitutional democracy. Students should consider fundamental questions about civic and political life in order to make informed judgements about government and community affairs. They must recognize that the ideals of a constitutional democracy are sometimes at odds with political practice, and understand the mechanisms to peacefully reconcile competing ideals, values, and goals. Knowledge is a precursor to civic engagement (Owen, 2020). People's confidence in their ability to take part actively in civic life and their sense of political efficacy—their belief that they can personally influence community and government affairs—increase as they become familiar with political institutions and processes (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996).

To foster good civic character, civic education must not only impart knowledge, but also should provide opportunities for students to apply what they learn so that they can develop the dispositions and skills integral to responsible and effective citizenship (Branson, 1998; Branson and Quigley, 1998). Civic

dispositions are orientations related to democratic character formation. They are the public and private traits essential to the maintenance and improvement of constitutional democracy (Branson, 1998). The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools (2011) defines civic dispositions as a concern for others' rights and welfare, fairness, reasonable levels of trust, and a sense of public duty. People who evince a strong democratic temperament are willing to compromise personal interests for the greater good (Stambler, 2011). They embrace their democratic rights, responsibilities, and duties in a responsible, tolerant, and civil manner, and have the confidence to engage in civic affairs (Torney-Purta, 2004).

Civic skills encompass "the abilities necessary to participate as active and responsible citizens in a democracy" (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011: 16). The development of civic skills is essential for critical thinking that facilitates collective action. The National Assessment Governing Board of the U.S. Department of Education describes civic skills as the intersection of intellectual (or cognitive) skills and participatory civic skills that involve "the use of knowledge to think and act effectively in a reasoned manner in response to the challenges of life in a constitutional democracy" (2018: 18). Students employ intellectual skills as they learn to apply civic knowledge to the realities they encounter as citizens (Patrick, 2002). Intellectual skills include the ability to identify, gather, describe, explain, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information pertinent to civic life in order to take informed stands on issues. Participatory skills are required for people to engage in political life. They include the ability to listen to, process, and express diverse views on issues, to work collaboratively to solve community problems, to advocate on behalf of a cause, to build consensus, negotiate compromise, and manage conflict, and to vote and be an active participant in political affairs (National Assessment Governing Board, 2018: 18; Patrick, 2002).

Systematic reviews of research demonstrate that civic education curricula and pedagogy can result in cognitive learning, increases in intellectual and participatory skills, and improved academic achievement (Deakin Crick, Coates, Taylor, and Ritchie 2005). Studies indicate that civic education coursework increases students' future levels of voting and other forms of political participation (Bachner 2010, Crawford 2010, Owen 2013, Owen and Riddle 2017). Civics instruction in middle and high school can impart lasting democratic proclivities and prime citizenship orientations that develop over a lifetime (Pasek et al. 2008, Kahne and Sporte 2008). Learning basic information about government and democratic processes in adolescence provides a foundation for the further acquisition of political knowledge and greater development of civic skills in adulthood (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Owen 2008), including an intention to vote (Cohen and Chaffee 2013). Civic education is particularly important for marginalized populations and students from less advantaged backgrounds. For these students to acquire the knowledge and skills essential for informed, effective citizenship, it must be provided at elementary and secondary levels of their education (Youniss, 2011).

Numerous studies show that teachers and students learn better when they are actively engaged (Atherton 2000; Campbell 2005; Kim, Parks, and Beckerman 1996; Galston 2004; Hess 2009; Hess and MacAvoy 2014; Pasek et al. 2008; Owen 2013, 2016; Morgan, 2016). Active methods that encourage both independent and group work can facilitate students' development of research and public speaking skills. Students who take part in programs that integrate problem-solving, collaborative thinking, and cross-disciplinary approaches develop a greater sense of their own agency as civic actors (Atherton 2000; Tolo 1998; Finkel 2003; Torney-Purta et al. 2001; Torney-Purta 2002; Torney-Purta and Amadeo 2012; Lopez et al. 2006; Owen and Riddle 2017).

UNIQUE ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMS THAT EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE

The programs studied here are unique in that they combine certain elements that effectively and simultaneously build civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions while conveying civics content that aligns with state civics standards. These elements of the WTP/JMLP, the Presidential and Congressional Academies, and PC civics interventions include:

- Engaging in problem analysis and discourse based on constitutional principles

- Intentionally teaching and using dialogue skills to build understanding among young people with different backgrounds and points of view
- Using analytical thinking, research, and presentation skills to prepare and deliver an argument or policy proposal that upholds the provisions of the U.S. Constitution
- Preparing for and participating in inclusive hearing simulations whereby all students in a class or group learn how to work collaboratively to achieve a common goal while engaging in democratic practice
- Experiential and community-based learning through meeting with local resource people and representatives of government, interviewing peers and community members, and taking field trips to relevant sites/offices

WE THE PEOPLE AND THE JAMES MADISON LEGACY PROJECT

We the People is a curricular program that has involved more than 30 million students and 75,000 teachers in the United States in all 50 states and the District of Columbia since 1987. The WTP program is grounded in the foundations and institutions of American government, and is distinctive for its emphasis on constitutional principles, the Bill of Rights, and Supreme Court cases, and their relevance to current issues and debates. Students take part in a range of learning activities, such as group projects, debates, and student speeches. The culminating activity is a simulated congressional hearing where students prepare to answer questions from a panel of judges. WTP middle and high school classes have the option of participating in district and statewide competitions based on the congressional hearings. States send representatives to the National Finals in Washington, D.C. that are held each spring.

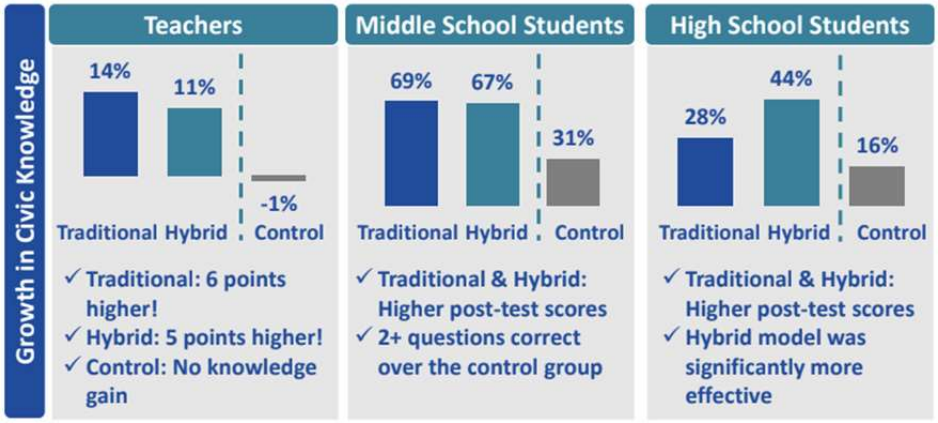
The James Madison Legacy Project is a nationwide initiative that aims to increase the effectiveness of civics instruction in elementary and secondary schools by providing professional development to teachers of high-need students. Since 2015, the JMLP has served over 2,100 teachers and over 120,000 students in 48 states and the District of Columbia. The JMLP professional development program is designed to improve teachers' civics content knowledge and develop their pedagogic skills in order to enhance students' achievement in attaining state standards in civics and government. Teachers participating in the program attend summer institutes where they learn about the WTP curriculum, are educated in subject-area content, and are instructed in effective pedagogies for presenting the curriculum to students. Following the summer institute, teachers implement the WTP curriculum in their classrooms and conduct a simulated congressional hearing.

Evidence of WTP/JMLP Program Effectiveness

WTP has been the subject of numerous research studies since its inception. That WTP students have significantly higher levels of civic knowledge as a result of the curriculum has been consistently validated (e.g. RMC Research Corporation 2007; Owen 2015). WTP instruction is positively related to students' development of civic dispositions essential for democratic character formation and the maintenance of constitutional democracy (RMC Research Corporation 2007). WTP students in Indiana scored significantly higher than students in a comparison group on six types of civic dispositions, including respect for the rule of law, political attentiveness, civic duty, community involvement, commitment to government service, and the norms of political efficacy and political tolerance (Owen 2015), a finding consistent with earlier research (Brody 1994). Participation in the WTP program also corresponds to increased development of civic skills. Voter turnout among WTP alumni is far higher than the national average for their peers, with 82% voting in the 2000 presidential election compared to 48% of voters in the electorate generally, a trend that persisted during the 2008 election (Soule and Nairne 2009). WTP students who participated in the National Finals were more likely to register to vote, write to a public official, investigate compelling political issues, take part in lawful demonstrations, and boycott a product or stores on principle than other high school students (Estrich 2010). Numerous WTP alumni hold prominent positions in government service, including elected office.

The findings for the WTP program have been replicated for the high-need student population participating in the JMLP. The teacher professional development program is offered in both a traditional format where live scholars present civics content and a scalable hybrid format that uses online professional development tools, such as videos, for some units of instruction. Evaluations of the JMLP have employed randomized control trials that compare student and teacher measures of civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills to comparison groups. Surveys were administered prior to the start of the program and at the end of the WTP or civics class taken by the control group. The JMLP has been successful in increasing students' knowledge of American government and politics by improving their teachers' civics content knowledge and pedagogy. (The data in Figure 1 are from Cohort 2 (2016-17) of the program.) JMLP teachers' knowledge increased significantly after participating in the PD program, while the control group teachers showed no gains. JMLP middle school students' knowledge increased by over 65% from pretest to posttest compared to 31% for the control group. While the findings are somewhat less dramatic at the high school level, the JMLP students still gained significantly more knowledge than the comparison group students. JMLP teachers employ active learning elements associated with the WTP curriculum and use program resources, such as the WTP textbook, lesson plans, and primary source documents.

FIGURE 1
JMLP TEACHER AND STUDENT KNOWLEDGE GAINS



The JMLP positively influenced students' civic dispositions. (The data are from Cohort 3, 2017-18, of the JMLP which is reflective of the findings for the prior cohorts.) Upon completion of the program, 91% of JMLP middle and high school students indicated that they thought it was important for people to turn out to vote, an increase from their pre-JMLP responses. 66% of middle school and 73% of high school students stated that they paid more attention to what's going on in government and politics post-program. Three-quarters of middle and high school students felt more prepared to become involved in their community as a result of the JMLP.

PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ACADEMIES FOR AMERICAN HISTORY AND CIVICS

The first Presidential Academy for teachers and the Congressional Academy for students were held simultaneously at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland during a two-week period in the summer of 2019. Teachers could attend program with one or more students (usually two to four students) from the same school or district, although this was not a requirement. Teachers and students who came from the same school were able to share experiences with each other and collaborate on civics and history activities at their school in the ensuing academic year. The unique residential aspect of the program

facilitated an intensive civic learning experience that included both planned activities and opportunities for informal interactions among the participants.

Presidential Academy for Teachers

The Presidential Academy for American History and Civics is an intensive professional development program for high school teachers. The summer session run in conjunction with the Congressional Academy for students continues into the ensuing academic year with four online webinars with scholars and access to an online community of participants and mentor teachers. The program deepens teachers' understanding of Constitutional history and principles and provides them with the opportunity to share ideas and practice active learning methodologies that they can use with students in social studies classrooms. By enhancing teachers' content knowledge, professional networks, and use of active learning methods, the program aims to have a lasting impact on teachers' classroom practice.

Forty-six teachers from schools serving high-need students in various states attended the first Presidential Academy. Participating teachers served students from a wide range of backgrounds. 96% of teachers instructed students from high-need populations, including students who received reduced cost or free lunches (77%), minority students (77%), students living in poverty (64%), English language learners (45%), students with disabilities (43%), and students far below grade level (43%). All but one teacher taught at public schools. School sizes ranged from very small (45 students) to over 4,000 students. The average school size for participants was approximately 1,100.

Teachers participating in the Presidential Academy came from diverse backgrounds. Nearly two-thirds of teachers were female and one-third male. The average age for teachers was 45 with the youngest being 27 and the oldest 61. Approximately 60% of teachers identified as White, 23% as Black, 7% Hispanic or Latino, 7% as Asian American, and 4% Native American. Teachers were highly educated, as 70% had earned Master's degrees and 10% had doctorates in education or another field.

The teachers' agenda included the same civics and history topics and field trips as the Congressional Academy, but their academic sessions were separate from the students' sessions. Complementing discussions with scholars, mentors engaged teachers in discussions of the academic content as well as instructional activities that could be used with students. The teachers also prepared for a simulated congressional hearing that took place on the final day of the Academy, which deepened their understanding of how to organize and facilitate a student hearing.

Evidence of Presidential Academy Program Effectiveness

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the Presidential Academy was conducted by Civic Education Research Lab. Teachers responded to surveys before and after the program that measured their content knowledge, use of pedagogies in the classroom, and their views about the usefulness of the program elements. Interviews with a diverse sample of teachers were conducted, and written responses to open-ended questions were collected.

Teachers' content knowledge increased significantly as a result of the Presidential Academy. The vast majority of teachers indicated that they gained knowledge of the philosophical and historical foundations of the American political system, the Constitutional Convention, the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, Constitutional amendments, seminal Supreme Court cases, the American presidency, Congress, the Supreme Court, the challenges faced by American constitutional democracy in the 21st century, and voting and elections. On average, teachers correctly answered 46 of 60 questions correctly on the pretest and 50 on the posttest. The increase was statistically significant at $p \leq .01$.

Teachers evaluated the elements of the Presidential Academy in terms of their usefulness for effective instruction. Participants were nearly universal in their praise of visits to historic sites/field trips and scholar lectures. Over 80% of teachers found informal discussions with other teachers and historical presentations to be very useful. A majority of Academy participants considered sessions on model lesson plans, small group discussions, teacher-student meetings, and sessions on using primary sources to be very useful. 60% of teachers indicated that learning about the simulated congressional hearings—the culminating activity of the WTP curriculum—was very useful. 98% of participants felt prepared

implement the hearings into their classrooms. 70% of teachers who were teaching an appropriate course definitely planned to use the hearing in their class in the fall semester.

Teachers provided reflections on the Academy in interviews and open-ended survey items. Like the Congressional Academy students, teachers found the interactions with participants from across the country to be beneficial, especially learning of their shared commitment to civic education. They enjoyed sharing ideas about how to create engaged young citizens:

- "The Academy gave me a chance to learn something about myself and the content that can be presented to students in a variety of classes. It has shown me that the importance of civic education for students and adults is something that should be forefront in the mind of everyone one in the country, especially the policy makers. The need for civic education is more profound and necessary in today's world."
- "I really enjoyed the opportunity to interact with other civic educators as well as learning from scholars. My most important take away from the academy was how to get my students to take ownership and see themselves in the Government curriculum."
- "The most important part of the program is the interaction with professional colleagues who truly care about civic education. There is great interest in improving civic education in our nation."
- "I liked the interactive conversations with speakers. The field trips were great exposure. I will take away the fact that the Constitution is a living document that is changing. I take away the thought of who are 'We the people.'"
- "I enjoyed the interaction with the other participants. My main take-away will be wealth of knowledge regarding different viewpoints and values of other regions of the United States."

Teachers appreciated the opportunity to enhance their content knowledge so that they could better prepare their students:

- "I enjoyed the conversations and listening to others' views. It is very helpful to have a conceptualization about something, such as citizenship, that you may not be individually aware of. For example, I am happy to know that there are levels of rights implied by the Fourteenth Amendment and that citizenship is not defined originally in the Constitution. Also, to hear reasoning for viewpoints that I had never heard of, or that initially I may not agree with. Learning to truly listen and consider one another's beliefs is a welcome respite in our current, hostile world."
- "What I liked most about the Academy was learning the deep thought and division that the founding fathers took when creating this country as well as the deep thought and division our country has gone through since then in how technology, new ideals, expansion, and becoming a major world influence has changed. The most important takeaway from the program is that our country was created with major problems and division and that we still have major problems and divisions, but we keep trying to better ourselves and truly find an identity as one nation."
- "Bringing other professionals together for the exchange of ideas. I did get content knowledge for sure from the academy but also classroom management and implementation of the content ideas as well."
- "The topics were covered in depth, which allows us to have a better understanding. That translates to us being able to transfer that knowledge to our students."

The comments also emphasized the importance of the site visits/field trips as essential program elements:

- "I like being with and among some of the brightest and talented civics teachers from across the country. The field trips were amazing. I was exposed to different ideologies of thinking from the scholars."
- "I appreciated the opportunity to work with colleagues and enjoyed the site visits very much."

Congressional Academy for Students

The Congressional Academy for American History and Civics empowers secondary school students from diverse backgrounds by strengthening their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to engage in government and civic life. At the first Academy in July 2019, 104 young people from more than twenty states lived and studied together for two weeks. The participants were ethnically diverse, from urban and rural settings, and had varying amounts of prior knowledge of American history and civics. Three-quarters of the students attended schools with high concentrations of students at risk of academic failure and living at or near poverty level. The participants included approximately 16% African American, 14% Asian American, 19% Latinx/Hispanic, 45% White/Caucasian, and 7% multi-racial students. 66 identified as female, 35 as male, and 1 as non-binary. Most students were 16 or 17 years old and rising high school juniors and seniors. Almost all students had taken a basic course in social studies or American history prior to the Academies.

The Congressional Academy acknowledged each young person's existing knowledge and background and sought to improve their civics and history knowledge, skills, and dispositions. It provided a structured academic curriculum, time, and support to motivated teenagers to deepen their understanding and build their skills for effective participation. Participants were immersed in the study of constitutional history and principles as well as contemporary issues following the intellectual framework of the WTP curriculum. They engaged in intensive, interactive academic sessions, group work, simulations, and field trips with noted history and political science scholars and experienced classroom teachers. Students' academic work culminated in a simulated congressional hearing where they prepared responses to questions relating to the U.S. Constitution, which was a challenging collaborative experience and performance-based assessment. They strengthened their skills to make reasoned, evidenced-based arguments; to communicate their ideas in a clear and professional manner; to work with others as a team; and to respond to questions raised by adults.

Evidence of Congressional Academy Program Effectiveness

Survey and interview data on the Congressional Academy students were collected by the CERL at Georgetown University research team. Survey data measured students' civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills. A pretest survey was administered to students prior to the start of the Academy; students took the posttest at the program's conclusion. Students were not permitted to use any form of personal technology or to consult other materials while taking the surveys. 101 students completed the pretests and posttests. The effectiveness of the program on high-need students was compared to those who were more advantaged. 80 students attended Title I (TIS) schools with large concentrations of low-income students that receive federal funds to assist in meeting educational goals and 21 students attended schools without a Title I designation. The CERL team also conducted semi-structured personal interviews with a diverse sample of students. Interview subjects were asked about their background in civics and history education, motivations for applying to the Congressional Academy, experience with various aspects of the program, and key takeaways. Student quotes also were obtained through open-ended questions on the posttest.

Overall, students' knowledge, dispositions, and skills increased as a result of their participation in the Congressional Academy. The findings were especially pronounced for the high-need student participants who entered the Academy having had fewer opportunities and resources to support their development of civic orientations than their non-TIS colleagues. (For a detailed analysis see Owen and Hartzell 2019.) All students gained significant civic knowledge as measured by their scores on a 40-item knowledge index. A paired samples t-test was performed to determine the difference in pretest and posttest knowledge scores. (See Table 1.) For all students, the average pretest score was 21.61 and the average posttest score was

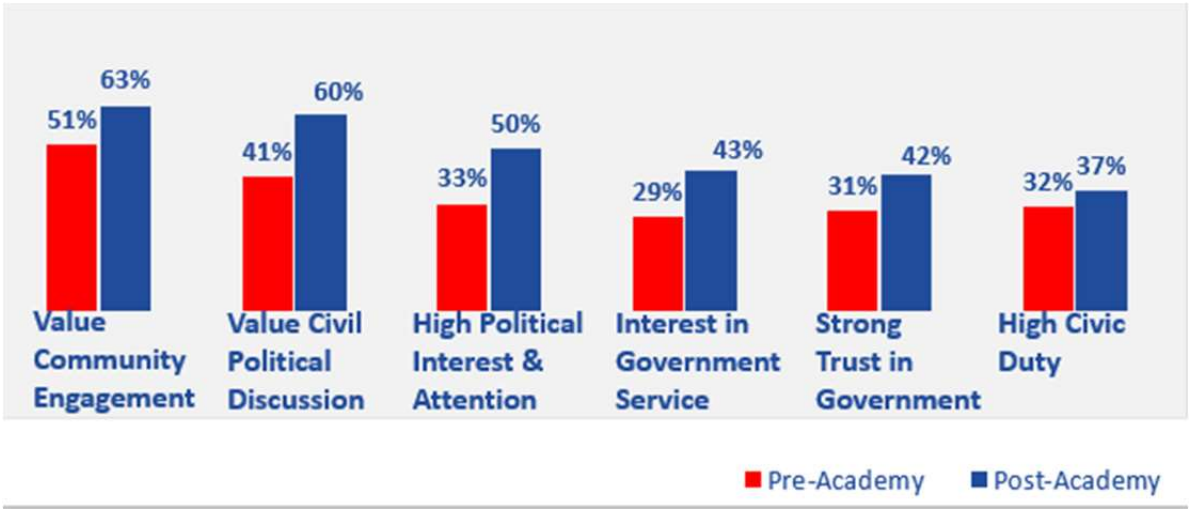
25.26. The mean difference in the pretest-posttest scores was 3.55 which was statistically significant at p≤.01. Students attending Title I schools began the Academy with lower knowledge scores than non-TIS students. Their average score on the posttest increased by nearly 4 points compared to 2½ points for their non-TIS counterparts.

TABLE 1
MEAN SCORES ON KNOWLEDGE OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

		Title I School	Not Title I School	All Students
Political Knowledge	**Pre**	20.66	25.24	21.61
	Post	24.49	27.71	25.16
	x̄ Difference	3.83	2.47	3.55
	Sign. t	.00	.00	.00
	n	80	21	101

Participation in the program markedly enhanced all Academy students' civic dispositions. Students' scores increased significantly on measures of political interest and attention, political discussion, community engagement, government service, civic duty, and trust in government. (See Figure 2.) The TIS students made significant gains. Title I students' interest in and attention to government and politics improved from 31% very interested pre-Academy to 44% post-program. The extent to which high-need students greatly valued political discussion increased greatly from 35% pre-program to 55% after participating. The percentage of TIS students who agreed that they could become involved in their community and make a difference increased from 47% to 61%. High-need students became far more interested in government service either through a career in government or elected office, rising from 27% to 42% who were highly interested. The exception was respect for the rule of law, as the preponderance of students began with strong agreement that it is important for government officials and for themselves to obey rules and laws. Non-TIS students' belief that government officials must respect the rule of law increased slightly, but views otherwise remained stable.

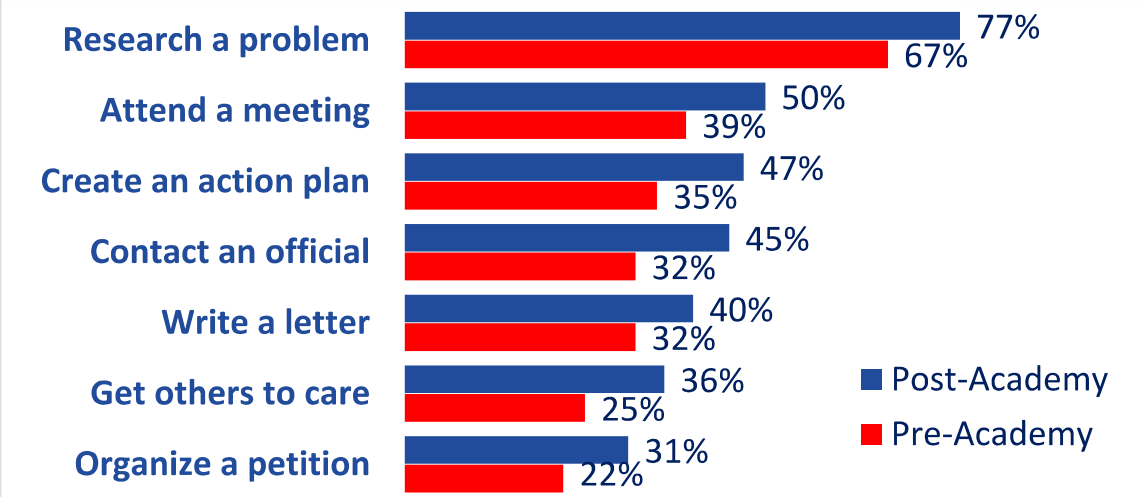
FIGURE 2
STUDENTS' CIVIC DISPOSITIONS PRE/POST CONGRESSIONAL ACADEMY



We used a hypothetical situation to determine if students thought that they could take a variety of civic actions to work toward solving a problem in their community to measure civic skills. The survey item asked: If you found out about a problem in your community that you wanted to do something about, how well do you think you would be able to do each of the following: 1) research the problem, 2) create a plan to address the problem, 3) get other people to care about the problem, 4) attend a meeting about the problem, 5) express your views in front of a group of people, 6) write a letter to a local news outlet, 7) organize a petition, 8) contact a government official, 9) use social media to publicize the problem, and 10) use social media to organize people to take action to solve the problem. The students could respond that they definitely could, probably could, probably could not, and definitely could not take each action.

Students' confidence in their ability to take action to solve a community problem improved on all of the indicators with the exception of expressing their views in front of a group of people. (See Figure 3.) The percentage of students responding that they definitely could research a problem increased from 67% on the pretest to 77% on the posttest. There were increases of 10 percentage points or greater in the number of students reporting that they definitely could create an action plan (pretest 35%/posttest 47%), get others to care about the problem (pretest 25%/posttest 36%), attend a meeting about the problem (pretest 39%/posttest 50%), write a letter to a public official (pretest 32%/posttest 40%), organize a petition (pretest 22%/posttest 31%), and contact a public official (pretest 32%/posttest 45%).

FIGURE 3
STUDENTS' CIVIC SKILLS PRE/POST CONGRESSIONAL ACADEMY
PERCENTAGE RESPONDING "I DEFINITELY CAN"



Students' interview responses reinforced the findings from the survey data. Students identified their most important takeaway from the Congressional Academy. They expressed that they had gained a greater understanding of the foundations of American democracy and how government works. Many students indicated that they had a greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens:

- "I really was able to understand how our government works, and the history behind how we got it to."
- "I think I trust our government a bit more now that I understand better how it works."
- "The most important takeaway was the importance of understanding our rights as citizens."

Students were especially appreciative of the opportunity to interact with diverse peers and have civil discussions on difficult topics:

- "I mostly liked being able to engage in advanced discussion on given topics. The Academy acts as an outlet for many teachers and students to express their beliefs and debate different

opinions and viewpoints. The most important takeaway is that everyone is entitled to their opinion and as a society we have the responsibility to respect said opinion."

- "What I liked most about the Academy was being able to interact with others that have different mindsets and beliefs. The most important takeaway from this program was realizing that my political point of view is not the only view in our society now."
- "I most enjoyed interacting with students from different backgrounds and getting to know the reasoning behind their different views. The most important takeaway in my opinion is to be educated on a topic before making decisions and to always listen, especially when you don't agree."

Students felt empowered to take part actively in their communities, government, and politics:

- "The most important takeaway was that civic participation is everyone's duty."
- "The most important take away was that if I want change to happen, I need be involved in my community."
- "The most important takeaway for me was to get involved with our government and politics. I have a voice in society."
- "The most important takeaway was that I realized I could definitely have a career in politics."
- "I liked the community I built and how comfortable I felt sharing my ideas, views, and opinions. I think the biggest takeaway was not to be afraid to talk, share your ideas, ask questions and help others and yourself."
- "I enjoyed the people I have met and relationships I've made both personally and professionally. I also liked being able to grow and discuss with a diverse group of people and being able to have those discussions has really been a big takeaway in terms of civic discourse. I am also now thinking of a career in politics."

PROJECT CITIZEN

Project Citizen is a curricular program that empowers young people at the middle school, high school, and university levels with knowledge and skills for grassroots participation. Through the program, students learn how to monitor and influence public policy. Entire classes work cooperatively to identify a public policy problem in their community. They then research the problem, evaluate alternative policy solutions, develop their own public policy proposal, and create a political action plan to encourage local or state authorities to adopt their proposed policy. Classes develop a portfolio and present their project to a panel of adult experts in a simulated public hearing. While developing and presenting their project, young people interact with community resource people, consult various sources of information, and make use of multiple modalities of communication, which can include in-person meetings and online technology.

The program is adaptable to a wide variety of social and political environments. It provides marginalized populations with the opportunity to address problems that affect them, to have a voice in how to solve those problems, and to create better, more inclusive policies. Through the Center's Civitas International Programs, PC has been adapted and used in more than seventy countries. Several Civitas partners have also introduced PC through a human rights lens in which students learn about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, consider the rights of themselves and others, and develop a policy proposal that upholds the human rights of the affected populations.

Independent evaluations of PC students internationally (Tolo, 1998; Atherton, 2000; Morgan, 2016) have demonstrated:

- Increased levels of civic and public policy knowledge
- Improved participatory skills and political knowledge
- Improved public policy problem-solving skills

- Improved civic discourse skills
- Increased participation in the political process
- Greater interest in politics and use of media
- Increased tolerance and support for rule of law and fundamental rights; less authoritarian attitudes

A PC student in Colombia stated: "It was a very positive project because we understood that the problems and their solutions are not exclusively a government issue, but of the whole community. We are all active actors of the change, and I think my life changed because today I am a more mature, responsible citizen."

Evidence of Project Citizen Program Effectiveness

We conducted a survey of teachers who use PC in November 2019, and received a total of 106 responses from fifteen countries, including Armenia, Croatia, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, India, Jordan, Lithuania, Montenegro, Peru, Romania, Senegal, Slovenia, South Africa, Thailand, and the United States. The sample included 27 primary grade (grades 1 through 6), 47 lower secondary grade (grades 7 through 9), and 28 upper secondary grade (grades 10 through 12) teachers as well as 3 teachers of university students, and a teacher of street children in a circus association. Survey participants were asked about the activities that their students engaged in as part of PC and how effective they felt specific aspects of the program were in helping students to develop a range of civic skills. They also described projects their students created while participating in the program.

The majority of teachers reported that their students took part in the core active learning elements of the PC curriculum. Around 90% of students created a portfolio of their work and presented an action plan to their school or class. 78% of teachers had their students work in their school or community to help solve a problem. A majority of students reached out to stakeholders about their project, as 73% contacted public officials and 68% presented an action plan to community leaders. About 60% of student shared their PC activities on social media. The smallest percentage of students—about one third—attended community meetings or wrote letters to the editor. In open-ended responses, teachers detailed other PC activities in which their students engaged. 35% of teachers described a public presentation or showcase that their students put on to raise awareness of their issue. In some cases, the students took to television and radio airwaves or produced educational flyers to promote their cause. 24% of teachers had their students visit or collaborate with partner organizations, civil associations, and NGOs. One quarter of teachers had their students present their issue to parents.

The projects implemented by PC students tackled a wide range of issues. Teachers described projects focused on issues related to school and public safety, bullying, public health, access to food, poverty, public amenities and services, respect for diversity, preservation of cultural heritage, animals, environmental concerns, climate change, reading initiatives, and democratic processes. Some projects were focused on the schools that the students attended. One project involved renovating the school bus stop, while another sought to increase mass transportation options for students. PC participants brought forward their concerns about school buildings that were in disrepair and initiated actions to rectify the situation, including fundraising. Some PC projects worked on getting breakfast and lunch served at schools. Others sought to revise the curriculum to include coursework that would be relevant to students, such as classes in entrepreneurship.

Many of the projects involved public information campaigns and engaged community members. PC students worked with community leaders to decrease street crime in their neighborhoods. Projects related to public health concerns addressed drug and alcohol abuse, underage vaping, the importance of using sunscreen, and teen pregnancy. A project team in Croatia established a campaign to promote awareness of automatic external defibrillators (AED) and taught people how to use AED, as cardiac arrest from heart disease is common. The problem of stray dogs in a city was addressed by encouraging people to adopt stray pets from shelters by providing an allowance for food and vaccinations. Students in New Delhi worked to provide support and safeguards for transgender individuals who are marginalized. PC students

addressed environmental concerns by reducing litter, promoting sustainable urban transit, building community garden spaces, and campaigning to reduce energy consumption.

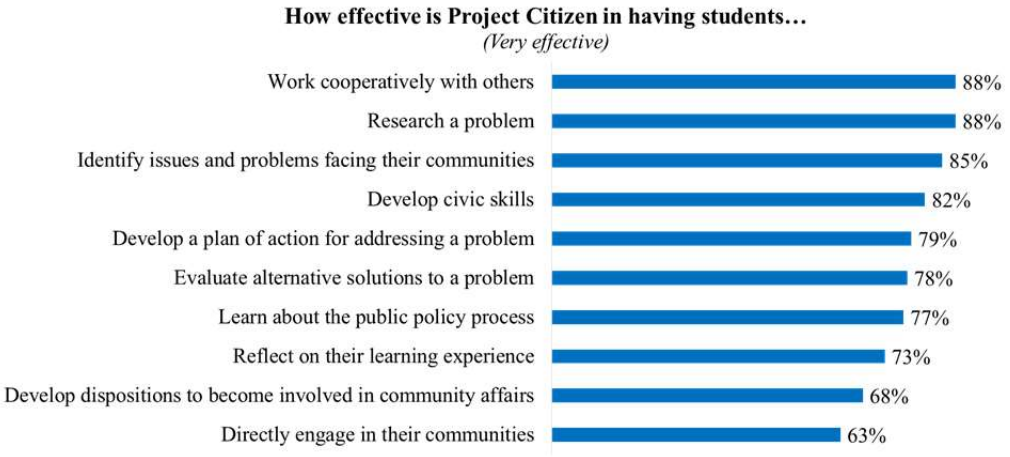
Some of the PC projects have led to policy changes or government action. A number of projects dealt with road safety, especially in communities with high volumes of traffic. One class was able to get a crosswalk installed in their village after raising awareness of the dangerous consequences of unregulated foot and car traffic with local government officials. Another class addressed the lack of pavement and road signs near their school and succeeded in getting officials to improve road conditions and signage. A school in Long Beach, Mississippi, received an MDOT grant from the city to create the Discovery Nature Trail. A number of PC classes in the U.S. worked together on banning smoking from restaurants and public places. A state law was passed after legislatures learned about their project. Students' in Mississippi were able to save the W. J. Quarles house, an historic home that had been badly damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

A survey respondent described a project in Lima, Peru that involves multiple schools, almost 5,500 students, and a range of stakeholders:

> Our NGO (IPEDEHP) has continued promoting Project Citizen at a national level, in partnership with civil society institutions and the support of the Ministry of Education. Due to the crisis of values in our society, we will continue our efforts at implementing PC. Next week we will have a District Fair in Lima, with the support of the Ministry of Education and the Ombudsman National Office. This activity will have the participation of 26 schools, 5,475 students (2,783 girls and 2,692 boys), and 87 teachers. This Fair will be a public activity. We are inviting officials and representative authorities of the community.

The survey results confirm that PC is highly effective in promoting student civic empowerment. Figure 4 presents the percentage of teachers who responded that PC was very effective in conveying civic skills to students. Over 80% of teachers reported that PC was very effective in having students work cooperatively with others, research a problem, and identify issues and problems facing their communities. Based on their experience with the program, over 70% of teachers found that PC was very effective in having students develop a plan of action for addressing a problem, evaluate alternative solutions to a problem, learn about the public policy process, and reflect on their learning experience. Over 60% found the program to be very effective in having students develop dispositions to become involved in community affairs and directly engage in their communities. At least 95% of teachers indicated that PC was at least somewhat effective in each of these categories.

FIGURE 4



Teachers expressed their enthusiasm for PC in terms of its positive impact on their curriculum, especially as it encourages students to develop civic dispositions and skills. They also emphasized that the program's impact goes beyond the classroom to creating improvements in the community. Teachers commented that PC empowers student to make real, substantive change:

- "No project compares with Project Citizen in empowering kids to make a difference in their communities!"
- "Project Citizen is the project that students look forward to each year because as one student said, 'We did this for real!'"
- "Project Citizen is a great program that is needed in many of our schools to get students actively engaged in civics in their community."
- "Project Citizen is the most complex resource to develop and expand students' civic skills."
- "Project Citizen is an amazing opportunity and experience for students and teachers. It allows students to see at a young age that their voice matters."
- "Field work, active citizenship learning through the project, use of ICT, international cooperation of students, organizing an international presentation of the project, which is of utmost importance for equality, democracy, tolerance and youth policy."
- "There is always a solution to a problem by all of the participants creating new ideas and working persistently and not giving up on implementing new decisions."
- "Project Citizen is developing a sense of obligation for the student to be an active citizen by providing knowledge and skills for effective citizenship and providing hands-on experience fostering a sense of competence and efficacy. It also develops an understanding of the importance of civic participation and that's why I gladly use it in my teaching."

CONCLUSION

The Center's programs aim to increase the civic empowerment of young citizens in a number of ways. The programs make use of academic content and instructional practices demonstrated by research to improve youth knowledge, skills, and dispositions for effective and responsible participation in government and civic life. The knowledge of government institutions, political processes, and American history that students acquire from Center programs has contributed to their developing greater civic agency. The active learning dimensions of the curricula provide students with real-world experience engaging with political issues and policy propositions that cultivate civic dispositions and skills.

The WTP and PC curricula have been employed successfully with diverse student populations, including high-need students, English language learners, and special needs students. These curricula are effective beyond the United States, where the Center is located. As evidenced by PC, the programs are adaptable and effective in multiple contexts in various countries throughout the world. Such civic education programs have significant prospects for empowering marginalized populations in the Global North and South to make positive social changes and support sustainable development that upholds the rights of all.

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