Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In our study of high school civic opportunities, we found that a student's race and academic track, and a school's average socioeconomic status (SES) determines the availability of the school-based civic learning opportunities that promote voting and broader forms of civic engagement. High school students attending higher SES schools, those who are college-bound, and white students get more of these opportunities than low-income students, those not heading to college, and students of color. The study is based on surveys of more than 2,500 California juniors and seniors over a two-year period (2005-2007) as well as on analysis of a nationally representative data set of more 2,811 9th graders. Students were surveyed about how their high school civic learning experiences aligned with civic education best practices. This summary details those findings and suggests ways policymakers and educators can respond.

RESEARCH SAMPLE
The study employed data from the IEA Civic Education Study -- a nationally representative sample consisting of 2,811 ninth graders at 124 schools throughout the country. The California sample includes 2,366 twelfth grade students from 12 schools and 371 seniors from six high schools in the class of 2006. This data was collected in partnership with the Constitutional Rights Foundation as part of the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools.

CURRENT POLITICAL INEQUALITY
Equal access to high school civic learning opportunities becomes more pressing when we consider that low-income citizens, those who are less educated, and citizens of color are under-represented in the political process. Based on a review of relevant research, the American Political Science Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy (2004) reported: "The privileged participate more than others and are increasingly well organized to press their demands on government… Citizens with low or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government, while the advantaged roar wit the clarity and consistency that policymakers readily head."
For example, Larry Bartels' found that the policy preferences of "constituents in the upper third of the income distribution received about 50% more weight than those in the middle third…while the views of constituents in the bottom third of the income distribution received no weight at all in the voting decisions of their senators" (2005, 5). Citizens in the bottom third of the income distribution had no identifiable political influence, when it came to the votes of their senators.

Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) found higher income families were:
* four times as likely to be part of campaign work
* three times as likely to do informal community work
* twice as likely to contact elected officials
* twice as likely to protest
* six times as likely to sit on a board.

In addition to inequality based on socioeconomic status, there are political inequalities linked to a citizen's race and/or ethnicity. A recent study by the non-partisan Public Policy Institute of California reported, "Those who are white, older, affluent, homeowners, and highly educated have a

disproportionate say in California politics and representation in the civic life of the state" (Ramakrishnan & Baldasarre, 2004). Although California is only 44% white (US Census Bureau, 2007), whites made up 67% of registered voters in 2005 (DiCamillo, 2006). The fact that these political inequalities are still so deeply entrenched makes the question of equal access to civic learning opportunities in public schools all the more urgent.

CIVIC EDUCATION BEST PRACTICES
Research indicates that the following practices foster desired civic outcomes. The study's survey was designed to measure student experiences of these best practices.
- discuss current events
- study issues about which the student cares
- have discussions of social and political topics in an open classroom climate
- study government, history and related social sciences
- interact with civic role models
- participate in after-school activities
- learn about community problems and ways to respond
- work on service learning project
- engage in simulations

RESEARCH/ANALYSIS FOUNDATION
- Study 1 – Examines the role race and ethnicity play in determining what high school civic opportunities a student will have. The study is based on survey data from 2,366 California high school seniors. Findings included:
  - o African American students reported having fewer civic-oriented government classes, current event discussions, and experiences in an open classroom climate than white students.
  - o Asian students reported higher participation in after-school activities, but less experiences in an open classroom climate.
  - o Latino students reported fewer opportunities to participate in community service, simulations, and open classroom climates than white students.


Figure 1: Civic Opportunities and Post-Secondary Education Plans
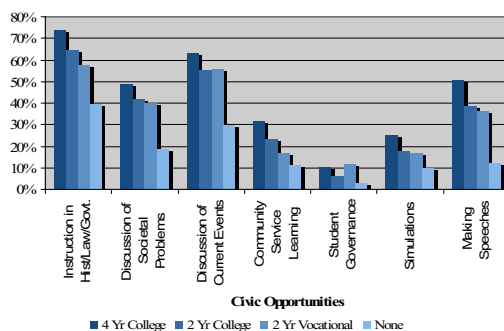
• Study 2 – Examines the difference between civic opportunities provided to students in AP government classes versus College Prep government classes in California. The study is based on

survey data from 371 California seniors.

Students in AP classes were significantly more likely to report experiences of all but one of the civic opportunities measured than students in College Prep classes. For example, 80% of AP students reported participating in simulations. 51% of College Prep students reported participating in simulations.
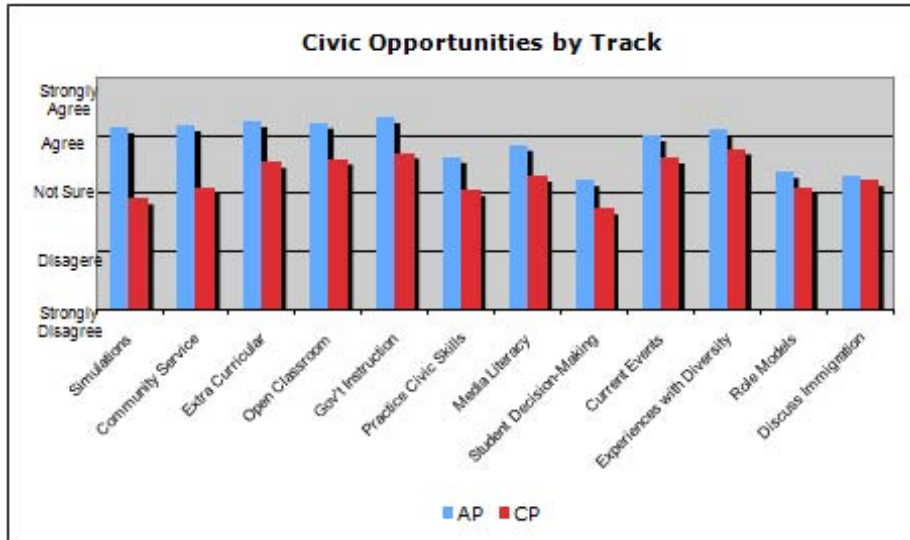
- Study 3 – Examines the IEA Civic Education Study of civic learning opportunities and is based on a nationally representative set of classrooms from 124 different schools throughout the country. Finding included that students in classes with higher average SES levels were:
    - 2.03 times more likely than students in classrooms with average scores on our SES indicator to report studying how laws are made
    - 1.89 times more likely to report participating in service activities
    - 1.42 times more likely to report having experiences with debates or panel discussions in their social studies classes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS
One clear and consistent set of relationships was observed in all three studies: Students who are more academically successful or white and those with parents of higher socioeconomic status receive more classroom-based civic learning opportunities.

The general conclusion is that schools appear to be exacerbating inequality by not providing equal civic preparation to students in most need of civic skills and resources.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Professional Development and Curricular Support
All teachers are capable of implementing simulations, leading thoughtful and respectful discussions of current events, engaging students in service learning, and teaching students civic content such as how a bill becomes a law. In order for educators to employ these civic learning opportunities effectively,

however, they will need professional development and curricular support.

2. New Initiatives Focused on Universal and/or Low SES Populations
In addition to broadening curricular priorities to include desired civic learning opportunities, it is important to focus on making these best practices universal, where possible, and on bringing these opportunities to Low SES populations. It is also important to ensure that extracurricular and voluntary activities not target only those students who already have interest and aptitude.

3. Undertake Assessments that can inform and direct both policy and practice
Assess the degree to which all groups of students are receiving desired civic learning opportunities. Data such as this can be used to reflect on and develop related practice.

If Congress passed a law saying that those who earned less than $35,000 a year no longer had the right to vote or influence who gets elected to the United States Senate, most of us would be outraged. With such a law, some would ask, "Can we still call ourselves a democracy?" Unfortunately, according to recent research by Larry Bartels of Princeton University, such a law might not make a big difference. Indeed, after reading Bartels' findings, one might be tempted to ask: "Did we pass this law already?"

Bartels examined the way senators from all 50 states voted on key issues. He also looked at polling data from those states and assessed how well the preferences of these citizens predicted the votes of their senators on such high profile issues as government spending, abortion, and civil rights laws. He found that the policy preferences of "constituents in the upper third of the income distribution received about 50% more weight than those in the middle third…while the views of constituents in the bottom third of the income distribution received no weight at all in the voting decisions of their senators" (2005, 5). In short, when it came to the votes of their US Senators, citizens in the bottom third of the income distribution had no identifiable political influence. These findings are reinforced in Gillens' (2005) separate study of the link between citizen policy preferences and actual policy outcomes from 1992-1998. He found that the relationship between policy preferences and policy outcomes were twice as strong for the most wealthy (90th percentile) compared to middle income (50th percentile) and more than twice as strong compared to lower income citizens (10th percentile).

Indeed, when it comes to political representation, inequality has been well documented. As the American Political Science Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy (2004) reported:

> *The privileged participate more than others and are increasingly well organized to press their demands on government. Public officials, in turn, are much more responsive to the privileged than to average citizens and the least affluent. Citizens with low or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government, while the advantaged roar with the clarity and consistency that policymakers readily heed.*

Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) found, for example, that family income was a strong predictor of voice in the political process. They found that 86% of those whose families were in the top 10% of the income distribution voted in presidential elections, while 52% of those in the lowest 20% of the income distribution voted. These higher income families were also:

- four times as likely to be part of campaign work
- three times as likely to do informal community work
- twice as likely to contact elected officials
- twice as likely to protest
- six times as likely to sit on a board.

They were also fully nine times more likely to make campaign contributions -- and one would assume the size of their contributions were far larger as well (p. 190).

These inequalities are not only associated with income. As a recent study by the non-partisan *Public Policy Institute of California* documents, "Those who are white, older, affluent, homeowners, and highly educated have a disproportionate say in California politics and representation in the civic life of the state" (Ramakrishnan & Baldasarre, 2004). Although California is only 44% white (US Census Bureau, 2007), whites made up 67% of registered voters in 2005 (DiCamillo, 2006). This is only one example of how significant inequality exists when it comes to political voice and broader civic participation. Moreover, these inequalities are not random. Factors such as race and class are structuring unequal political participation and influence. What can be done?

There are no simple answers to this complex problem. The elements of civic and political voice in a democracy are multi-dimensional, including everything from voting to participation in protests, community action organizations, and political campaigns. In addition to the right to participate, we must

also be concerned with the capacity for effective engagement, as well as individual and group perception of inclusion in the political process (See Verba, 2003 for a review of these issues). Moreover, the factors that structure political inequality are numerous and deeply rooted in economic, educational, and social inequalities. Given that political equality is fundamental to a democracy, it is incumbent on us, as educators, to ask: What can schools do to help?

For the past two years we have been studying this question by surveying high school seniors throughout the state of California with support of the Constitutional Rights Foundation as part of Educating for Democracy: The California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools. In a series of surveys we ask students about both their exposure to specific school-based civic learning opportunities and, more generally, about their civic commitments and capacities. We have also examined a nationally representative data set focused on exposure to civic learning opportunities and outcomes. What we have found is troubling. Far from drawing on civic education as a potential tool for ameliorating civic and political inequality, schools, in some important respects, are making matters worse. In a nutshell, we found that the very individuals who have the least influence on political processes – the voices schools most need to inform and support in order to promote democratic equality – often get fewer, school-based opportunities to develop their civic capacities and commitments than other students. Given the evidence that these opportunities help promote effective civic engagement, these disparities in educational opportunities likely contribute to larger civic and political inequality.

In this paper, we discuss these findings and their significance. We conclude by discussing strategies policymakers, educators, foundation leaders, and others might employ to mount an effective response. We begin by discussing two related literatures. First, we examine studies of effective civic education practices in order to identify a set of learning opportunities on which to focus. Then, to lay the foundation for the presentation of our study, we briefly review the extensive literature on curricular inequality and tracking, and the very limited literature on curricular inequality related to civic learning opportunities. We then detail our findings from three related studies of the distribution of civic learning opportunities. We conclude by discussing directions policymakers and funders may wish to consider as they craft a response.

CIVIC LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Before working to provide equal civic learning opportunities or even studying whether such inequalities exist, we must ask whether civic learning opportunities make a difference. If they do not, why bother equalizing them? In fact, for many years scholars questioned whether civic learning opportunities were consequential. Studies failed to find that high school civics courses, for example, had a significant impact on student civic and political outcomes (Langton and Jennings, 1968). Over the course of the past decade, however, more promising findings have surfaced. Specifically, Niemi and Junn's (1998) analysis of data from the *National Assessment of Educational Progress* revealed that some educational practices can increase students' civic and political knowledge, and Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter (1996) have shown that such knowledge improves the quantity and quality of civic participation. In addition, large scale studies such as the *International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's* (IEA) *Civic Education Study* of 14-year-olds in 28 countries found that certain curricular features were associated with such civic outcomes as interest in politics, the ability to apply knowledge accurately, and a range of civic and political commitments including youth willingness to vote (Torney-Purta, 2002; Torney-Purta, Amadeo, and Richardson, 2007). These largely correlational findings have been reinforced by a number of smaller but well controlled studies of particular curricular initiatives (Metz and Youniss, 2005; McDevitt and Kiousis, 2004; Kahne, Chi, and Middaugh, 2006).   There are also well controlled longitudinal studies of participation with extracurricular activities which indicate that such

activities support future civic engagement (for example, Smith 1999; McFarland and Thomas, 2006). In addition, we recently completed a study that found that classroom-based civic learning opportunities had a meaningful impact on Chicago high school students' commitment to civic participation and desire to vote. The impact of these opportunities was sizeable even after controlling for prior civic commitments, demographic and academic factors, the degree to which youth talk with their parents about politics, and the levels of social capital in the student communities (Kahne and Sporte, Forthcoming).

In short, specific evidence supporting what constitutes "Best Practice" is now emerging, highlighting strategies that include students:

- discussing current events
- studying issues about which the student cares
- experiencing an open climate for classroom discussions of social and political topics
- studying government, history and related social sciences
- providing opportunities to interact with civic role models
- engaging in after-school activities
- learning about community problems and ways to respond
- working on service learning project
- engaging in simulations

(See Billig, 2000; Niemi and Junn, 1998; Smith, 1999; Kahne and Westheimer, 2003; Kahne, Chi, and Middaugh, 2006, Torney-Purta, et al, 2001; Torney-Purta, 2002; Torney-Purta, Amadeo, and Richardson, 2007; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Kahne and Sporte, Forthcoming; and Gibson and Levine, 2003 for a recent review).

CURRICULAR INEQUALITY

The release of Jeannie Oakes' seminal work *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* focused attention on the fact that students placed in lower tracks generally experience lessened "expectations for achievement, access to subject matter and critical learning opportunities, instructional strategies, and resources (including teachers)." Studies have also found that students of low socio-economic status and African-American and Latino students are disproportionately placed in lower tracks (Oakes, 2005, p. 225).

While the research on tracking is extensive, little of it focuses on social studies instruction or on civic outcomes. As discussed above, those writing about civic and democratic education have instead tended to identify what constitutes high quality curriculum and to focus on increasing the civic learning opportunities provided by schools. Differences in civic learning outcomes, what Meira Levinson (2007) has labeled "The Civic Achievement Gap," have been well documented (also see, Hart and Atkins, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007; Levinson, 2007; Torney-Purta, J. Barber, C. and Wilkenfeld, 2006) – especially gaps related to civic knowledge and skills. Little attention, however, has been focused on whether equal civic learning opportunities are provided.

There are a few recent studies that focus on community service and service learning. A study by the Corporation for National and Community Service (Spring, Dietz, and Grimm, 2007) found that youth from disadvantaged backgrounds were much less likely to report participation in school-based service or service learning than other students (31% vs. 40%.) This result parallels findings by Atkins and Hart (2003), and Condon (2007).   Examining the National Household Educational Survey of 1999, Condon (2007) also found that youth with better educated parents and higher household incomes were more likely to attend a school with a student government, to have given a speech in class, and to have debated in class. Highlighting a related theme, Daniel McFarland and Carlos Starmanns (2004) examined 278 school constitutions and found that the quality of opportunity afforded students was greater in well

Figure 1: Civic Opportunities and Post-Secondary Education Plans
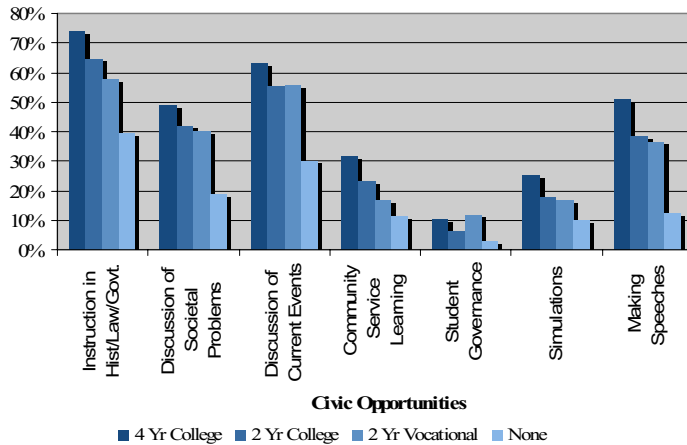
funded schools than in less well funded schools – potentially resulting in unequal opportunities for political socialization. And, of course, these inequalities are reinforced by broader social inequalities related to civic learning opportunities. Drawing on 448 face-to-face interviews with African Americans in Detroit, Cohen and Dawson (1993) show, for example, that African American residents who live in areas with high concentrations of poverty (>30%) are significantly less likely both to belong to civic groups, including churches and community groups, and to have contact with political officials than African American residents who live in areas with either low or moderate levels of poverty (0-30%).

Thus, the general educational literature on tracking as well as the limited data that has been collected related to civic learning opportunities in schools gives us reason to believe that differences in civic learning opportunities may well exist. We have not, however, been able to find much systematic analysis of representative samples of students regarding the broad range of school-based civic learning opportunities that educators associate with best practice. In the discussion that follows, we respond to this need. Specifically, we examine three data sets and explore the distribution of civic learning opportunities in related but distinct ways. We discuss each study separately – highlighting the sample, the analysis and the questions the analysis addresses. We then review these findings, discuss some of their implications, and potential responses.

Before proceeding, we want to highlight one limitation to our approach. In an effort to focus on forms of inequality that can be clearly identified and universally applied, we are focusing on a widely accepted set of desired civic learning opportunities. While studies of civic learning opportunities have demonstrated the efficacy of these opportunities among differing student populations, research also indicates that there may be important variation within the United States related to the ways students from differing economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds experience civic education and discussions of democratic institutions. For instance, our recent qualitative study of high school students in different social contexts in California suggests that youth from high income, majority white communities are more likely to view political engagement as effective but less likely to view these activities as necessary or important compared to their counterparts from a primarily working-class, Latino community (Middaugh & Kahne, 2007). These differences in perception are likely important influences on how students perceive and make use of opportunities for civic education provided by the schools. Indeed, Rubin (2007) found, in her qualitative study of middle and high school students in New Jersey, that those from privileged, homogeneous environments were more likely to experience the ideals expressed in civic texts as congruous with their daily experiences compared to the urban youth of color in her study. Thus, though the civic learning opportunities we describe and assess are likely desirable from the standpoint

of promoting civic commitments and capacities, there is reason to believe that they are experienced differently by youth from different backgrounds. A more nuanced examination of the significance of these factors in relation to the impact of such opportunities on civic outcomes is clearly warranted.

ACCESS TO HIGH IMPACT SCHOOL-BASED CIVIC LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

We have identified the civic learning opportunities that effectively develop civic commitments and capacities. We have also determined that there is a lack of evidence regarding the equality of access certain groups have to these opportunities. We, therefore, want to examine whether desired school-based civic learning opportunities are equally distributed. In this section we detail findings from three studies that provide distinct evidence that speaks directly to these issues. The first study draws on survey data from high school seniors in California. It looks at the range of civic learning opportunities given students while in high school and then examines whether access to these opportunities was related to a student's racial and ethnic identity. In an effort to assess whether students on different academic trajectories received similar civic learning opportunities, we examined whether a student's post high school plans (4-yr college, 2-yr college, no college) were related to their exposure to civic learning opportunities while in high school.

The second study also examined students from a diverse set of California high schools. In addition, it was designed to enable assessment of whether the opportunities students received in AP government courses differed from those they received in "College Prep" government classes. The US Government course - the curricular requirement that most directly aligns with the preparation of citizens - is required of all students in California. AP and College Prep are two options1.

Both studies examined the experiences of students in relation to individual characteristics and school experiences. To strengthen our understanding of these relationships, we also wanted to know if the demographics of the classroom or, potentially, school was related to the volume of civic learning opportunities students received. To address this issue, we draw on data from the IEA Civic Education Study. Because this study provides demographic data and information on classroom civic learning opportunities from entire classrooms of students from 124 different schools throughout the country, we can examine the degree to which the demographic composition of classrooms may be related to a student's access to civic learning opportunities. These three studies, testing related dynamics in three different ways, all come to the same conclusion. Academically and socio-economically privileged students, those who, on average, will have greater civic and political voice, also receive far more extensive access to the kinds of civic learning opportunities that educators have found to promote civic participation. The differences are sizeable. Below, we discuss findings from each of these studies and then discuss related implications.

Study 1

Our first analysis of the equality of access to civic opportunities comes from our study of 2,366 California high school students. In this study we examined how frequently students experienced the kinds of opportunities that supported the development of committed, informed, and effective citizens. Students were drawn from 12 schools selected from across the state in order to create a sample that was diverse in race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, and school achievement (See Appendix A for a description of the sample). We asked students to rate how frequently they had experienced a variety of high school-based opportunities identified as best practice in the 2003 *Civic Mission of Schools Report* (Gibson & Levine, 2003) and other studies in the civic education literature (See, for example, Billig, 2000; Niemi and Junn, 1998; Smith, 1999; Kahne and Westheimer, 2003; Kahne, Chi, and Middaugh, 2006, Torney-Purta, et al, 2001; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Kahne and Sporte, Forthcoming). We conducted a

multiple linear regression and controlled for GPA, mother's education, and gender. The findings suggest that student access to these opportunities is uneven. Some opportunities are more common and some students are more likely to have experiences with those opportunities than others.

In Table 1, even with other controls in place, we see that students who identified as African Americans were significantly (p<.05) less likely than white students to report having civically oriented government courses2, discussions of social problems and current events, and experiencing an open classroom climate. They were also less likely than white students to report experiences with decision-making and simulations of civic processes, though these relationships were approaching significant (p<.10). Students who identified as Asian, Filipino or Pacific Islander reported more participation in after-school activities and more decision-making in school than white students, but less open discussion in the classroom (p<.05). Latino students reported fewer opportunities for service, experiences with an open classroom climate, and experiences with role plays and simulations than did white students (p<05).

Table 1: Relationship of demographic variables to experiences with civic opportunities[3].

	Instruction in Government	Discuss Social Problems & Current Events	Community Service/ Service-Learning	Extra-Curricular Activities	Student Voice/ Decision-making	Open Classroom Climate	Simulations of Civic Processes	Opportunities to Practice Civic Skills
African American	-.079***	-.083***	-.007	.022	-.044*	-.104***	-.037+	-.001
Asian	-.016	-.043+	.004	.088***	.053*	-.103***	-.007	-.004
Latino	-.012	-.006	-.080**	-.015	.018	-.055*	-.059*	-.048
Other	-.046*	-.024	-.017	-.058**	-.033	-.053*	-.019	-.075*
GPA	.001	-.002	.082***	.128***	.006	.021	-.016	.119***
Mother Education	-.070**	-.040+	.044+	.073**	-.011	.012	.079***	.072*
Female	.076***	.105***	.115***	.167***	.040+	.104***	.027	.177***
Post HS Plans	.146***	.172***	.113***	.180***	.069**	.132***	.127***	.144***

*p≤.05;   **p≤.01; ***p≤.001; +≤.10; All reported values above are standardized betas (β).*

We also found that high school seniors who did not expect to take part in any form of post-secondary education reported significantly fewer opportunities to develop civic and political capacities and commitments than those with post-secondary plans. Indeed, the quantity of opportunities provided students was strongly related to the amount of post-secondary education a student expected to receive. This held for all the opportunities measured (p<.05) (See Figure 1 and Table 1). For example, 25 percent of students who were planning to attend a four-year college reported that they had frequently been part of simulations in their classrooms; only 17 percent of students who planned on vocational education after high school could say the same. Only 10 percent of those with no post-secondary plans reported having such opportunities frequently in their classrooms. Moreover, since the survey was given towards the end of students' senior year, it does not include most high school dropouts. Students who dropped out

before the 12th grade (in many schools a sizeable percentage) got no high school US government course at all since it is typically offered during students' senior year. As a result, this group received far fewer civic learning opportunities during high school. Moreover, those dropping out are disproportionately low-income students of color. Thus, the civic opportunities gap that this study shows already exists would likely be even greater if students who dropped out of high school were part of our sample.

Study 2

In the following year (2005-06 school year), we surveyed 898 seniors from across the state of California. In six of the ten schools (371 students), we were able to clearly identify the track of the US Government course. Of these, 293 (79%) were identified as enrolled in a college preparatory (College Prep) US Government course and 78 (21%) were identified as enrolled in and Advanced Placement (AP) US Government course (see Appendix B for sample description).

We used independent samples t-tests to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in the average level of opportunities experienced by students in College Prep vs. AP government classes. In Table 2 and Figure 2, we see that students in AP classes were significantly more likely to report experiences of all but one of the civic opportunities we measured. The largest differences between College Prep and AP classes were found in experiences with simulations of civic processes (e.g. mock trials, mock elections), community service, and open classroom climate. For example, 80% of students in the AP sample agreed that they had participated in simulations compared to 51% of College Prep students. Similarly 80% of students in the AP sample agreed that in their classes, students are encouraged to make up their own minds about political or social issues, and to discuss issues about which students have different opinions compared to 57% of College Prep students.

Table 2: Comparison of Civic Opportunities report by California high school seniors in Advanced Placement vs. College Preparatory US Government Classes (n=371)

Civic Opportunities	Mean Difference[4] (AP - CP)	Significance
CMS[5]6: Simulations	1.22	.000
CMS3: Community Service	1.08	.000
CMS4: Extra Curricular Activities	0.71	.000
CMS5: Open Classroom	0.63	.000
CMS1: Instruction in Government	0.62	.000
Opportunities to Practice Civic Skills	0.56	.000
Media Literacy	0.52	.000
CMS5: Student Decision-Making	0.49	.003
CMS2: Debate and Discussion of Current Events	0.38	.000
Experiences with Diversity	0.32	.002
Experiences with Role Models	0.27	.042
Discuss Immigration	0.08	NS

Because of the potential that our findings were being driven by school-level differences between schools

Figure 2: Comparison of Civic Opportunities report by California high school seniors in Advanced Placement vs. College Preparatory US Government Classes (n=371)
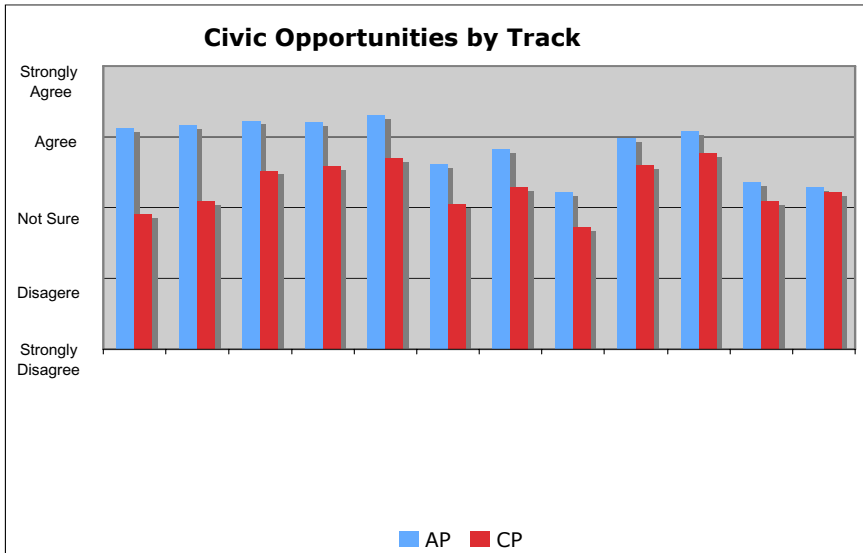
that had AP students and schools that did not, we also examined differences between AP and College Prep students' civic opportunities within the one school that had sufficient numbers of each to allow a comparison. In this school, as in the sample as a whole, AP students reported greater exposure to a number of civic opportunities than their counterparts in College Prep courses. Also, as was the case with the entire sample, the largest differences were in reported experiences with simulations, community service and an open classroom climate. For example, 38% of College Prep students agreed they had experiences with simulations compared 80% of AP students. Similarly, 43% of College Prep students reported experiences with community service compared with 81% of AP students.

Within this particular school, there was no difference by track of student experiences with meeting and learning about civic role models or with student decision-making. In contrast to the sample as a whole, College Prep students in this school were more likely to report having discussions about immigration (an important current event at the time of data collection) than their AP counterparts.

Study 3

In our California samples, we focused solely on the characteristics of individual students because we did not have a sufficient number of schools to determine whether the demographic features of classrooms or school-level variables bore a statistically significant relationship to students' experiences with civic opportunities. Fortunately, our final analysis of equality of opportunity draws on the public-release data provided by the IEA Civic Education Study (CES) which includes a national sample of 2,811 ninth grade high school students from 124 schools across the nation (1 classroom per school was surveyed) (see Toney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, and Schulz, 2001; Baldi, et al., 2001; . http://www.wam.umd.edu/~iea for details on the IEA study) In the CES student survey, we were able to identify items that correspond to the six recommended civic opportunities in the Civic Mission of Schools Report (Gibson & Levine, 2003) and one additional civic opportunity (detailed in Table 3). We used multilevel modeling (described in Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2005) to examine the influence of both individual and classroom-level socioeconomic status6 on students' reported experiences with a variety

of civic opportunities. Multilevel modeling enables us to assess the relationship between civic learning opportunities and both individual socio-economic status and the average SES of all students from the classroom.

As presented in Table 3, both individual and school-level SES was related to how likely students were to report experiences with a number of civic opportunities. For example, students in classes with higher average SES levels (one standard deviation above the mean on parents' education) were:

- 2.03 times more likely than students in classrooms with average scores on our SES indicator to report studying how laws are made
- 1.89 times more likely to report participating in service activities
- 1.42 times more likely to report having experiences with debates or panel discussions in their social studies classes.

At the same time, variation within individual schools also plays a role in how likely students are to report civic opportunities. As expected, this is particularly true for voluntary opportunities that are more likely to take place as extracurricular activities, such as community service or participation in clubs. For example, students with an SES score a standard deviation higher than their class average were more than twice as likely to report experiences with volunteer work to help the community as were students with SES at their class average.

Table 3: Relationship between individual and classroom-level SES and student-reported experiences with civic opportunities.

	N		Classroom SES	Individual SES
	(L2, L1)			
Agree or Disagree? In school I have learned to contribute to solving problems in the community.	(126, 1868)	Beta7	ns	ns
CMS1--Knowledge Opportunities				
Over the past year, have you studied the US Constitution?	(126, 1787)	Exp(b)8	1.75**	1.15+
Over the past year, have you studied the US Congress?	(126, 1773)	Exp(b)	1.96**	ns
Over the past year, have you studied the President and Cabinet?	(126, 1737)	Exp(b)	1.90**	ns

Over the past year, have you studied how laws are made?	(127, 1772)	Exp(b)	2.03***	ns
Over the past year, have you studied the court system?	(127, 1751)	Exp(b)	1.50**	1.14*
Over the past year, have you studied political parties, elections, and voting?	(126, 1756)	Exp(b)	1.71**	ns
Over the past year, have you studied state and local government?	(127, 1730)	Exp(b)	1.57**	ns
Over the past year, have you studied other countries' government?	(127, 1705)	Exp(b)	ns	ns
Over the past year, have you studied international organizations?	(126, 1616)	Exp(b)	ns	ns
CMS2				
Do you take part in debates or panel discussions when you study social studies?	(127, 1706)	Exp(b)	1.58**	ns
Do you discuss current events when you study social studies?	(127, 1764)	Exp(b)	ns	ns
CMS3				
Have you participated in a group conducting voluntary activities to help the community?	(127, 1787)	Exp(b)	1.89***	1.34***
Have you participated in a charity collecting money for a social cause?	(127, 1996)	Exp(b)	1.73***	1.29***
CMS4				

Think about the organizations listed above. How often do you attend meetings or activities for any or all these organizations?	(127, 1990)	Beta	.28***	.20***
CMS5				
Open classroom climate scale9.	(127, 1787)	Beta	.16***	.04*
CMS6				
Do you take part in role-playing, mock trials, or dramas when you study social studies.	(127, 1787)	Exp(b)	1.33*	1.18**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

One clear and consistent set of relationships was observed in all three studies: students who are more academically successful and those with parents of higher socioeconomic status receive more classroom-based civic learning opportunities. For quite some time we have known that having well educated parents and being successful in school are related, in adulthood, to greater civic and political participation and influence adulthood. Most studies of this phenomenon have emphasized the ways overall educational attainment, and such family background elements as family income, parents education, and political involvement foster participatory inequality across generations and between groups (See, Verba, Burns, and Schozman, 2003; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry, 1996). This study shows that these already privileged students also receive more classroom-based civic learning opportunities. Schools, rather than helping to equalize the capacity and commitments needed for democratic participation, appear to be exacerbating this inequality by providing more preparation for those who are already likely to attain a disproportionate amount of civic and political voice.

POLICY OPTIONS
It is inevitable that students will have varying opportunities to develop a civic and political voice depending on the teachers they have for civic-related subjects. Schools, however, should not distribute these opportunities on the basis of race or class or academic standing. Unfortunately, both our California and national data indicates that this is occurring. Since a commitment to valuing the equal participation of all individuals is fundamental to a democracy, it is incumbent on policymakers, educators, and funders to respond. The discussion that follows is speculative – meant more as an early effort to consider possibilities than as a fully developed road map for action.

Professional Development and Curricular Support are Needed: We need professional and

curricular development to prepare and support educators to help students thoughtfully engage civic content in a way that aligns with such best practices as introducing students to role models, use of simulations, and service learning. Summarized in the *Civic Mission of Schools* consensus document, The *1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress* found that more students had been asked to memorize material from social studies textbooks than to engage in a range of "best practices," for example, role-playing exercises and mock trials, visits from those who are active in the community, or opportunities to help solve community problems. That study also found, consistent with the findings presented here, that students of color and those from low-education families were the least likely to experience these desired opportunities.

In response, one could imagine a professional development effort at the state or federal level modeled after the *Teaching Traditional American History* grants. This federal program provides local education agencies and groups that have content expertise the funds to develop, document, evaluate, and disseminate innovative and cohesive models of professional development. A similar program, funded at either state or federal levels, could focus on the civic and democratic aims of education. To help redress the inequality that currently exists, proposals that focused on serving high percentages of low SES students could be granted special consideration. In addition, proposals that were universal in focus (for example, by serving all social studies teachers or students) and did not enable students or teachers to "choose" to participate, might receive extra points in the scoring process (we expand on the rationale for and potential of universal approaches in the section below).

Finally, to help ensure systematic attention to issues of quality and equality, the RFP requirements could stipulate that participating schools collect, analyze, and reflect upon survey data by asking:. How does the reform impact the equality of student access to civic learning opportunities and associated civic outcomes? Support for survey administration and analysis from of a state funded entity would also be quite helpful.

Focus New Initiatives on Universal and/or Low SES Populations: Often, civically oriented curricular opportunities and experiences target and attract those who already have the most interest or aptitude. As documented in this paper, much of this inequality of access stems from what happens in classrooms. Unfortunately, research indicates that this inequality is reinforced by what happens in extracurricular and voluntary activities. Indeed, findings from the nationally representative *National Educational Longitudinal Survey* indicates that students with greater interest, those who demonstrate greater academic ability, and those of greater SES are all more likely to participate in service clubs, student government, school newspapers, and yearbook clubs – all opportunities that commonly provide civically oriented leadership opportunities (McNeal, 1998). In addition, schools that are safer and have lower concentrations of students of color tend to provide more opportunities (McNeal, 1999; Feldman and Matjasko, 2005). Finally, and not surprisingly, several studies have found that parent involvement in community activities is a strong predictor of adolescent involvement (see Feldman and Matjasko, 2005 for a review). Thus, as a result of self-selection, many of the after-school extracurricular opportunities that develop civic capacities and commitments go to those who already have more interest and more access to opportunities in classrooms. While these civic development opportunities are desirable in and of themselves, if they are not distributed equally, they exacerbate existing inequality.

We are not arguing that high performing or high SES students should be denied these opportunities. Rather, we are advocating that educators, funders, and policymakers work to identify ways to make such opportunities more universal and common in schools serving students who are currently receiving the fewest opportunities. Furthermore, we suggest that simply providing more opportunities, without specifically reaching out to those who are most likely to need them, is insufficient. Indeed Quiroz, et al, (1996) found that increasing the number of available extracurricular opportunities in a

Figure 3: Classroom Civic Opportunities can lead to civic commitments even among

those whose families and neighborhoods do not emphasize civic commitments

Comparison of Participatory Citizenship Scores for Students with Few Family and Neighborhood Civic Learning Opportunities, by Amount of Classroom Civic Opportunities
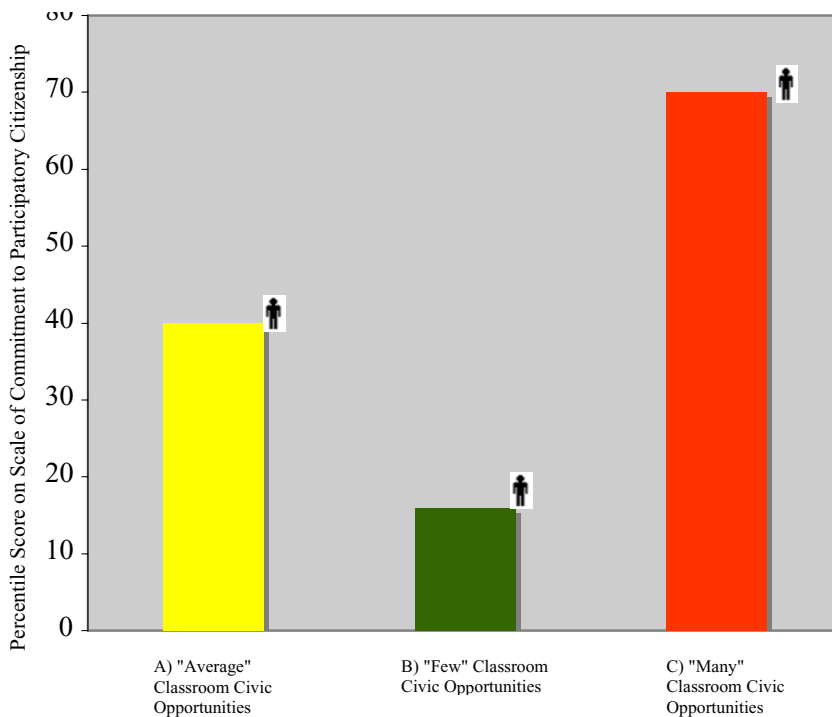
Note: In this figure, classroom civic opportunities are measured as "average"=sample mean, "low"=1 SD below the sample mean, and "high"=1 SD above the sample mean.

school does not necessarily result in more equitable participation. Typically, a core group of students will take on multiple activities, becoming "hyper-networked," while a larger number of students than would be expected, based on available opportunities, will be excluded from extracurricular activities altogether. Thus, when civic opportunities are provided primarily through extracurricular activities, such as speech and debate clubs, mock trial clubs, elective leadership classes, student councils, service clubs, etc., we expect that inequalities will continue to be exacerbated. A more equity focused approach would be to institute structures that engage all students in senior projects and perhaps also freshman projects where they identified and studied a civic or political issue about which they cared. Ideally, students would consider varied ways to respond to the issues they were studying and, where appropriate, might act. Similarly, many extracurricular opportunities might productively be incorporated into classrooms of all levels to ensure equal access. For example, mock trials could be incorporated into the social studies and US Government curriculum.

We know from broader studies that simulations, service learning, and other civic learning opportunities support the development of civic commitments and capacities (McDevitt & Kiousis, 2004; Metz & Youniss, 2005; Torney-Purta, Amadeo, and Richardson, 2007; Kahne and Sporte, Forthcoming; Kahne et al., 2006; see Gibson & Levine, 2003 for a recent review). By better equalizing access to these

opportunities we can do a better job of preparing all students for active citizenship. Indeed, Torney-Purta, Barber, and Wilkenfeld (2007) find that differences between Latino and non-Latino civic outcomes are partially the result of school level differences in the provision of an open classroom climate and time devoted to the study of political topics and democratic ideals.

Avoid an Excessively Narrow Curriculum: Unfortunately, there is evidence that the high stakes tests that focus on math and literacy which are central to *No Child Left Behind* legislation can narrow the curriculum. For example, a recently completed study by the Center on Education Policy (2006) found that 71% of districts reported cutting back time on other subjects to make more space for reading and math instruction. Social studies is the part of the curriculum that was most frequently cited as the place where these reductions occurred. Of course, cutbacks are more likely in schools facing sanctions by NCLB. These pressures likely reinforce the dynamic we observed where such schools provide fewer civic learning opportunities.

Broadening currently valued curricular goals to include civic and democratic content is fundamentally important given the democratic purposes of school. Of course, these goals can be pursued in ways that are fully supportive of core academic skills. Indeed, better linking government and other social studies course curriculum to core academic skills and analytic abilities is desirable from all perspectives. Whether such changes are possible in the absence of changes to the testing environment, however, is uncertain.

Civics Tests? Clearly, high stakes tests are one of the most significant policy levers now available. The well worn logic goes something like this: "What gets tested gets taught." If math, science, and literacy get tested but civics does not, few should be surprised that schools – and schools with low scoring students in particular –focus on math, science, and literacy. There is some evidence that this is happening as a result of *No Child Left Behind* and related legislation (Center on Educational Policy, 2006). One possible response for civics proponents would be to try and scale back or meaningfully alter current testing policies. Alternatively, civics proponents could work to institute civics tests. Though worthy topics for discussion, considering how and why we might alter current testing policies is beyond the scope of this paper. While civics tests, especially when tied to high stakes, are likely to spur greater attention to the civics content that is tested, it is not clear whether or under what circumstances such a policy would lead to improved and more equitable civics instruction. Indeed, in Chicago we found that a required civics test that emphasized factual recall diminished students' exposure to high quality civic learning opportunities. (Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede, 2000).

Rather than fully considering the desirability of varied testing policies, the comments we make are more modest. We highlight three design principals related to tests and other civic assessments that we feel would promote greater quality and equality in access to civic learning opportunities for students. First, it is important to collect systematic data and to ensure that the focus of such data collection includes, but also extends beyond, the acquisition of civic knowledge. The relevance of civic knowledge for a high functioning democracy is clear, but so is the need to develop civic skills, participatory commitments, democratic values, and the capacity for reasoned analysis of policy issues and political discussions (see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Gibson and Levine, 2003).

Second, it is important that this data be used to assess the degree to which all students are accorded similar access to civic learning opportunities. Data collection must extend beyond outcomes to include assessments of the qualities and quantities of civic learning opportunities students receive in schools and other contexts. Indeed, it is quite problematic that many indicator-driven "report cards" dealing with youth civic and political outcomes do not highlight youth learning opportunities at the same time. These indicators, while helpful, fail to focus attention on providing the opportunities that can help respond to the problems that are identified.

Third, it is important that findings from tests or surveys be actively integrated into a reflective process in departments, schools, and districts in order to inform teacher development and professional practice. Given the enormous pressures schools and students currently face, it is important that a testing policy in civics not become an additional unfunded mandate. In order for schools to fully benefit from testing and the data which results, educators will need time to work together and opportunities to learn from other successful teachers and curriculum specialists.

A reason to act:

Schools alone cannot solve this problem. Multiple forms of social, racial and economic inequality influence the political and civic inequality we have identified in this paper. That said, we have some indications that providing civic learning opportunities to low income students could provide a valuable way to respond to broader inequalities. Our longitudinal study in Chicago engaged 4,057 students. We found that the degree to which parents discussed politics and current events and the civic qualities of their neighborhood mattered – but we found that what happened in school could compensate in powerful ways for differences in these contexts.

Imagine for a moment a student defined as average in the sample with respect to demographics, schooling related to academic achievement, and after-school participation (See Figure 3). Imagine further that this student comes from a family where his/her parents rarely discuss politics or current events and from a neighborhood where there is little civically oriented social capital (i.e. that students do not see evidence that members of their community actively work to address problems in their community). Assume that this student is only in the 16th percentile for both of these variables (one standard deviation below the sample mean). If, in school, the student experienced opportunities to learn about civics (such as service learning, an open classroom climate, exposure to role models, and discussion of problems in the society and ways to respond), that student's commitments to civic participation would be in the 39th percentile (See column A). If, instead of being average, the students received few10 civic learning opportunities in school, that students' commitments to civic participation would be at the 16th percentile (see column B).   If, however, the student experienced many civic opportunities to learn, despite the lack of focus on these issues in the student's neighborhood and home, that same student would be expected to develop civic commitments that would place him/her well above average—the 68th percentile (See column C).

In short, these findings indicate that educators can provide meaningful support for the development of commitments to civic and political participation among the relatively low-income students who attend public schools in Chicago. Policies that work to ensure that students in these contexts receive more equitable access to civic learning opportunities may well make a meaningful difference.

Thomas Jefferson wrote that "the qualifications for self-government are not innate, "but rather are the result of habit and long-training." Neither political equality nor a high functioning democracy is guaranteed by the legal right to vote. The education and preparation of students to be informed and engaged citizens is essential for their empowerment and for the overall health of our democracy. Any democracy, worthy of that designation, must provide these opportunities in an equitable way.

APPENDIX A--STUDY 1 SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The total twelfth grade enrollment for California public schools during the 2004/2005 school-year was 409, 576. Our sample included 2366 twelfth grade students from 12 schools around the state. We evaluated the initial sample on three criteria of representation—1) ethnic distribution, 2) socioeconomic distribution, and 3) school-wide academic performance.

Ethnicity	State Population of 12th Grade Graduates 2004-05 (%)	Survey Sample 2004-0511 (%)
Hispanic	36.5	30.5
White	39.6	24.9
Asian/Pacific Islander/ Filipino	14.1	21
Asian	10.2	
Pacific Islander	.7	
Filipino	3.2	
African American	7.5	7.5
American Indian	.8	6
Other Ethnicity		20

Group	% Students Qualifying for Free/ Reduced Lunch	# of Schools in the Survey Sample
Low SES (bottom third)	45.5-100	3
Moderate SES (middle third)	18.2-45.5	4
High SES (top third)	0-18.1	5

Group	API Rank	# of Schools in CMS Sample
Low Performing	1-3	3
Moderate Performing	4-7	3
High Performing	8-10	6

NOTE: Because this sample differed considerably from the state profile of students, we created a sub-sample that balanced students in terms of school-level academic achievement and school-level SES and that came closer to the ethnic distribution of students across the state. This sub-sample consisted of 1887 students from 10 schools. Among these students 34% were from low SES schools, 32% from moderate SES schools, and 34% from high SES school. Similarly, 35% were from low performing schools, 33% from moderate performing schools, and 33% from high performing schools. The ethnic distribution of this state sample also bore a closer similarity to the ethnic distribution of the state population of 12th grade students. The under-representation of Hispanic students and over-representation

of Asian students was somewhat compensated for. White students remained under-represented, though we suspect this happened in part by confusion over the use of the term "European American" with some white students opting for "other." We repeated our analyses using the balanced sub-sample and found no large differences. All analyses reported here are based on the original sample described in the tables above.

APPENDIX B

Sample: We have been able to identify US Government course information from 371 of the 898 (41%) seniors who completed the survey. Of these, 293 (79%) reported being enrolled in a college preparatory (CP) US Government course and 78 (21%) reported being enrolled in and Advanced Placement (AP) US Government course. These students were drawn from 6 different schools. The distribution by race and ethnicity and by school characteristics are presented below:

Ethnicity	State Population Graduating Seniors12 (%)	Study Sample 12th Grade (N=371) (%)
Hispanic	35.7	17.4
White	39.7	34.5
Asian/Pacific Islander/ Filipino	15	30
Asian	11	25.1
Pacific Islander	.7	1.1
Filipino	3.3	3.8
African American	7.3	8.4
American Indian	.8	4.1
Other/No Response	1.6	5.8

School	Total Responses for School	CP	AP	API	% Free/ Reduced Lunch
School 2	20	0 (0%)	20 (100%)	2	65
School 3	98	98 (100%)	0 (0%)	2	43
School 4	143	107 (75%)	36 (25%)	6	39
School 5	78	68 (87%)	10 (13%)	10	6
School 6	13	1 (8%)	12 (92%)	3	23
School 11	19	19 (100%)	0 (0%)	7	30

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ENDNOTES

1Districts can use a variety of labels for US gov't including "regular" and "honors" as well as "College Prep" and "AP", but these were the two headings that were most prominent and clear for our analysis.

2 Government courses where teachers emphasize the importance of individual citizens staying informed and acting on issues that are relevant to them.

3 The demographic category "Native American" was not included because of the small number of students who chose that item only.

4 Mean differences represent differences between average scores on a 5-point scale of "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". For example, when asked about exposure to simulations, College Prep students on average answered 2.90 indicating answers falling between "Slightly Disagree" and 3-"Not Sure" while AP students on average answered 4.12 indicating answers falling between "Slightly Agree" and "Strongly Agree".

5 CMS refers to the Civic Mission of Schools the title of a report of 6 promising practices in civic education. CMS6 refers to Civic Mission of Schools recommendation #6 -- CMS 6 is the recommendation to engage students in simulations.

6 The indicator used for SES was a standardized average of parents' (mother and father) level of education. In cases where students could not answer for both parents, the value available for either parent was used.   Classroom-level SES represents the average score on this variable for each classroom. Individual SES represents each student's deviation from the classroom mean on this variable.

7 Linear regression coefficient for a continuous outcome (estimated using random-intercept linear regression).

8 Logistic regression coefficient for a dichotomous outcome (estimated using random-intercept logistic regression).

9 Open classroom climate scale includes average of 6 items—Students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues, teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them during class; teachers present several sides of an issue when explaining it in class; students feel free to express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students; students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class; teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions.

10 By "few" we mean one standard deviation below the mean and by "many" we mean one standard deviation above the mean.

11 Numbers add up to more than 100% because participants were allowed to choose more than one ethnicity.

12 California Department of Education, 2007.

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