Developing Citizens: The Impact of Civic Learning Opportunities on Students' Commitment to Civic Participation

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Abstract

This study of 4,057 students from 52 high schools in Chicago finds that a set of specific civic learning opportunities fosters notable improvements in students' commitments to civic participation.. The study controls for demographic factors, pre-existing civic commitments, and academic test scores. Prior large scale studies that found limited impact from school-based civic education often did not focus on the content and style of the curriculum and instruction. Discussing civic and political issues with one's parents, extracurricular activities other than sports, and living in a civically responsive neighborhood also appear to meaningfully support this goal. Other school characteristics appear less influential.

Although the preparation of citizens is a stated goal of many schools' mission statements and a primary concern of many citizens, knowledge of whether and how schools actually fulfill the democratic aims of education remains quite limited (Galston, 2001; Rose & Gallup, 2000). Can high schools promote the kinds of civic commitments that would help to sustain a democratic society? In particular, can educators in classrooms help support the development of commitments to civic participation among low-income students and students of color? This study of public high school students in Chicago speaks directly to these questions.

Historically, the democratic aims of education have been a primary rationale for public schooling. This focus faded in recent decades – spurred, in part, by doubts raised in the 60's and 70's that what happened in high schools influenced student civic and political commitments (most notably, Langton & Jennings, 1968) and, more recently, by growing pressure to focus on reading and math in order to raise test scores. 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 was the part of the curriculum that was most frequently cited as the place where these reductions occurred.

The Need for Increased and More Equitable Levels of Civic Participation

Some reformers, scholars, and foundation leaders are now looking for ways to reassert the democratic purposes of schooling (Gibson & Levine, 2003). Those promoting democratic priorities want schools to develop the skills and commitments students need in order to be concerned for the well being of others. They also want schools to teach students how government works and how they can work with others on solutions to community problems. This focus reflects concern for the health of American democracy. Numerous studies have found that levels of civic engagement in the United States are lower than desirable, particularly among youth (Galston, 2001; Macedo, et al., 2005; Putnam, 2000). Indeed, as a panel of experts convened by the American Political Science Association recently found, "Citizens participate in public affairs less frequently, with less knowledge, and enthusiasm, in fewer venues, and less equitably than is healthy for a vibrant democratic polity" (Macedo, et al. 2005, p 1).

Although it currently receives less attention than data regarding low levels of civic and political participation, data regarding the inequitable nature of civic participation and influence is also troubling. Low-income and less-educated citizens, as well as recent immigrants and those less proficient in English, are often under represented in the political process and have far less voice. The votes of elected officials align with the preferences of higher income citizens to a far greater degree than with the rest of the population (APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, 2004; Stepick & Stepick, 2002).

Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) found, for example, that family income was a strong predictor of political voice. Bartels (2005) found that the policy preferences of constituents at the 75th percentile of the income distribution were almost three times as influential on the votes of U.S. Senators as the policy preferences of those at the 25th percentile. Indeed, the policy preferences of those in "the bottom third of the income distribution had no apparent statistical effect on their senators' roll call votes" (Bartels, p.1).

Clearly, educational institutions are limited in their ability to offset the many ways social status and income can expand some individuals' political voice. However, studies indicate that the greater influence these individuals wield is not simply driven by their money or status, but by their greater participation at meetings, on boards, and in communication with officials (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996). If less advantaged citizens increased their engagement in the civic and political arena, their priorities would be more likely to get attention (Verba, 2003). Indeed, given the fundamental importance of ensuring all citizens equal voice in a democracy, it is important to deepen our understanding of whether providing particular kinds of learning opportunities to relatively low-income students in urban public schools can help promote higher and more equitable levels of civic and political engagement.

Can Schools Promote Civic Outcomes?

Recent studies that testify to schools' potential to advance civic and political development along with indications that schools are not doing all that they can to promote the democratic purposes of education have furthered interest in civic education. 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. 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 civic outcomes such as interest in politics the ability to apply knowledge accurately, and a range of civic and political commitments (Torney-Purta, 2002; Torney-Purta, Amadeo, & Richardson, 2007). These findings have been reinforced by a number of well controlled studies of particular curricular initiatives (Kahne, Chi, & Middaugh, 2006; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2004; Metz & Youniss, 2005). Findings are not universally positive, however. Some studies that control for prior commitments find significant effects only for "high quality" service learning, for example (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005; Melchior, 1998).

The importance of these positive findings regarding the impact of curricular opportunities on students' civic commitments is reinforced by studies demonstrating that adolescents who express greater commitment to civic and political engagement are more civically and politically engaged as adults than adolescents who express less of a commitment to act (Ajzen, 2001;

Fishbein, Ajzen, and Hinkle, 1980; Oesterle, Johnson & Mortimer, 2004; Theiss-Morse, 1993).

A Gap in Current Large Scale Studies of Civic Education

Most studies that link classroom practices to civic commitments are relatively small scale in nature, focus on very specialized curricula, and therefore are not easily generalized. Large scale surveys of high school students demonstrate that students who report having particular experiences (debating issues in class, being taught civic skills, undertaking service learning) are more likely to also report being committed to and involved in various forms of civic and political engagement (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002; also see Gibson & Levine, 2003; Torney-Purta, 2002; Verba, et al., 1995). However, the lack of random assignment to these opportunities, the use of retrospective accounts of educational experiences, and the lack of controls for prior civic commitments and for a range of potentially relevant academic, demographic, family, and community characteristics significantly limit the ability of these larger surveys to demonstrate causal relationships. Some longitudinal data sets such as the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) can be quite helpful in this regard (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007), but these surveys do not ask about many of the classroom opportunities that civic educators believe are most important.

Finally, few empirical studies focus directly on the ways schools can and do influence the development of the civic and political commitments of low-income students and students of color. One study found that the gap in civic knowledge and expected participation between Latino adolescents and non-Latino students could be narrowed considerably by providing them with a more open classroom climate and more time devoted to political topics and discussion of democratic ideals (Torney-Purta, Barber & Wikenfeld, 2007). Similarly, Youniss and Yates' (1997) largely qualitative study of African American youth attending a Catholic school in Washington, DC demonstrates the ways that service learning experiences linked to meaningful classroom opportunities for reflection and analysis can spur the development of students' civic identity. These studies, while valuable, are subject to the same concerns as those noted above.

Conceptual Frame: Commitments to Civic Participation Among Adolescents

Robust participation in the life of the community (following community issues, working on community problems, collective engagement with government agencies) is a fundamentally important component of life in a democratic society (Barber, 1984; Boyte & Kari, 1996; Dewey, 1916). Our emphasis on these community-based forms of participation rather than on more formal forms of political participation (working on campaigns, voting) also stems from indications that younger students are less likely to participate in formal political action and that it is important to include the broader civic

and political aspects of adolescents' activities and beliefs (Flanagan & Gallay, 1995). Moreover, in most school settings, an emphasis on direct political engagement would be quite controversial. In addition, there is evidence that young people, and perhaps young people of color in particular, are more drawn to community-based forms of participation than to participation in traditional politics (Junn, 1999; Long, 2002; Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002).

Finally, it makes sense to study factors that may influence the development of commitments to civic participation during late adolescence because late adolescence is a critical period for development of sociopolitical orientations (e.g., Erikson, 1968). As Yates and Youniss (1998) explain, adolescence is a time when youth are thinking about and trying to anticipate their lives as adults. They are working to understand who they are and how they will relate to the broader society (also see, Atkins & Hart, 2003).

Below we highlight factors that research has shown to be the best predictors of the development of young people's commitments to civic participation.

Classroom Civic Learning Opportunities

As noted earlier, scholars find strong associations between curricular approaches such as the provision of an open classroom climate, engagement in service learning, and the use of simulations on the one hand and students' civic commitments and capacities on the other (for example, Campbell, 2005; Hart et al., 2007; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; see Gibson & Levine, 2003 for a review).

In understanding why these opportunities may foster civic outcomes, our work has been heavily influenced by Youniss and Yates' (1997) conceptualization of factors that promote the development of a civic identity. They identify three kinds of opportunities that can spur such development: opportunities for agency and industry, for social relatedness, and for the development of political-moral understandings (also see Watts, Armstrong, Cartman, & Geussous) . Their study of youth doing work in soup kitchens as part of a course shows how integrating community service and, by extension, other civic learning opportunities into the curriculum can provide opportunities for Agency (as students respond to social problems), Social Relatedness (as students join with others to respond to a societal need) and Political-Moral Understanding (as students reflect on and discuss the relationship between what is and what should be).

School-based Supports for Students' Academic and Social Development

We also examine whether students experience a strong sense of belonging to or membership in their school community, whether teachers provide caring and personalized support, whether peers are supportive of academic achievement, and whether parents encourage and support academic achievement. Currently, these attributes are most often viewed as a means of

supporting scholastic goals such as academic performance, and dropout rates (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Wentzel, 1997; Zirkel, forthcoming; also see Juvonen, 2006 for a broad review). If these social and academic supports turn out to substantially support civic outcomes, then a special focus on civic learning opportunities may not be needed. Indeed, theorists like John Dewey (1900) and reformers such as Deborah Meier (1995, 2002) link experiencing a sense of belonging to a caring and supportive school community with the development of commitments and capacities for democratic ways of living. Systematic empirical studies have also found such contexts to promote pro-social behaviors such as helping, caring, and cooperating (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Watson, Battistich, & Solomon,1997; Wentzel, 1997,1998). Perhaps most directly, Flanagan, Cumsille, Sukhdeep, and Gallay (2007) find a positive relationship between school and community climates and civic commitments.

Extracurricular Activities

High school students' participation in extracurricular experiences has been linked through high quality longitudinal studies to later civic and political engagement (McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Otto, 1976; Smith, 1999). Youth organizational membership is believed to socialize young people to value and pursue social ties while fostering exposure to organizational norms and relevant political and social skills that make maintenance of these ties more likely (Youniss & Yates, 1997).

Demographic Variables and Academic Capacities

Educational attainment and socioeconomic status are strongly related to greater civic engagement (Nie et al., 1996; Verba et al., 1995). In addition, gender, ethnic identity, and race are related to both civic commitments and to forms of engagement (Burns, Schlozman & Verba, 2001; Marcelo, Lopez & Kirby, 2007a), though the nature of these relationships are not uniform for younger citizens (ages 15-25). In fact, the associations between race, ethnicity and gender vary depending on the particular civic outcome in question – girls, for example, are generally more likely to volunteer than boys, but less likely to be involved in electoral activities. White-American and African-American 18-24 year olds are substantially more likely to vote than Asian-Americans and Latinos, while Asian youth are the most likely to volunteer and Latinos (at least in recent surveys) are the most likely to be involved in protests (CIRCLE, 2007; Marcelo et al., 2007b). Although we do not necessarily expect uniform relationships between demographic characteristics and civic outcomes, we will consider and control for these factors.

Neighborhood and Family Civic Context

Neighborhood and family civic contexts play a significant role in the development of civic orientations. Young people growing up in families and

communities that are civically active and financially better off tend to end up more active themselves (Jennings, Stoker & Bowers, 2001; Nie et al.,1996; Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977). Discussion between parents and youth revolving around civic and political issues relates to a wide range of civic outcomes (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin & Keeter, 2003; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). And a great deal of research has focused on the role social capital plays within communities in fostering norms and social networks that make democracy work more effectively (most notably, Putnam, 1993, 2000).

Research Questions

This study asks: What is the degree to which classroom based curricular experiences that directly target civic goals contribute to the development of commitments to civic participation among a population of largely low-income students of color? Since some may wonder if prior commitments lead students to pursue civically oriented learning opportunities, we also ask: Does the relationship between curricular experience and adolescent civic commitment persist if one controls for prior civic commitments? Finally, we ask: How do classroom based curricular opportunities compare with other factors (demographic characteristics, participation in extracurricular activities, features of students' neighborhoods and families, and qualities of students' school experience) when it comes to promoting students' commitments to civic participation?

Method

Sample Characteristics

Data for this study come from surveys given every two years by the Consortium on Chicago School Research as part of an agreement with the Chicago Public Schools and from CPS administrative records. The survey is part of an ongoing effort to study school contexts and practices and their relationship to varied educational policies and student outcomes. Although the survey includes some measures of classroom opportunities to develop commitments to civic participation, as well as a measure that assesses civic commitments, the prime focus of the survey is on school contexts and curricular practices that are believed to foster academic outcomes such as test scores and graduation rates.

We were mainly interested in survey and demographic data from 2005, although we also wanted to control for students' responses to selected questions in 2003. We selected students who responded to the 2005 survey as juniors and who also responded to the 2003 survey when most of them were freshmen. We only selected students who had values on our main variables of interest, which are described in the section below. Approximately 5% of our pool did not have achievement test scores. Initial analyses indicated that this variable was not linked to our outcome, so we imputed values for those

students at their respective school means so as not to lose the information from all of the other data we had about them.

In addition to selecting students based on their available data, we also selected schools, based in part on whether or not they participated in the 2003 survey. Although all regular high schools are invited to participate in the survey, in each year approximately 35% of schools decline the invitation.

Table 1
Demographic Comparison Between Analytic Sample and all CPS Juniors

	N	African American	Latino	White	Asian	Female	Free lunch	PSAE reading
CPS	22,688	50%	34%	11%	5%	53%	78%	152
Analytic sample	4,057	36%	42%	14%	8%	59%	79%	156

Seventeen schools took the 2005 survey but not the 2003 survey. Each of these schools had fewer than nine students in our student pool. These juniors had attended a different school as freshmen. Because we were examining school level effects along with individual level effects, we did not want to include schools in our sample if the only students representing that school were students who had recently transferred in. This decision removed 73 students from our sample.

Our final analytic sample contained 4057 students representing 52 schools. Our sample has slightly higher test scores and a slightly different demographic mix than the rest of CPS. In particular, African American students are underrepresented. Since our goal is not to make statements about the precise level of civic learning opportunities or outcomes in Chicago, but rather about the ways varied factors shape civic commitments of students in urban contexts, the differences between our analytic sample and Chicago's juniors does not strike us as a significant concern. Details regarding our analytic sample and a comparison to all juniors in the Chicago Public Schools are provided in Table 1.

Survey Measures

Our indicators from the survey are of two types: single items and multiple item measures. Single items were expressed on a four-point scale, ranging in some cases from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" or in other cases from "never" to "often." Such individual items were treated as continuous after initial analyses indicated that they were linearly related to the outcome.

The multi-item measures were created using Rasch analysis (Wright & Masters, 1982). Rasch modeling puts all items on a hierarchical scale based on the likelihood that they were "endorsed" by respondents and puts all respondent scores on the same scale based on the likelihood that the

respondent endorses each item in the suite of items (for an introductory discussion of Rasch modeling, see Bond & Fox, 2001). Rasch measures are scaled in logits; we transformed them to a 10-point scale for ease of explanation.

This approach permits the creation of a latent variable such as "commitment to civic participation" that is conceptually and empirically cohesive. Items are assigned a "difficulty level;" persons are assigned a score indicating their position relative to all other respondents based on the probability of responding in a particular way on each item. After items are selected to meet a conceptual framework, the analysis helps uncover cases where the theory and the empirical data disagree. In that case, the decision to omit or include an item in the measure is based on consideration of the theoretical importance of the item and on the fit statistic. The measures described below that relate to civic commitments and civic learning opportunities were developed specifically for inclusion in the Consortium's 2003 and 2005 survey analyses. The other measures used in this analysis have been part of the Consortium's survey over time. In all cases we anchored the responses of our students in this larger sample, after checking to make sure their measure statistics did not differ significantly. Interested readers may contact the authors for exact details on how these measures were created.

Details of all indicators, including survey measures and items can be found in Appendix A. The list of items in each measure is provided, as well as its reliability. Furthermore, the mean and frequency distribution of each individual item used as a predictor is also provided.

Outcome Variable

In order to assess students' commitment to civic participation, we employed a five-item measure that was developed by Westheimer and Kahne (2004). This measure aims to provide an indication of relatively robust civic participation. That is, it asks whether students agree that in the next three years they are likely to "Work on a community project that involves a government agency," whether "Being actively involved in community issues is my responsibility," whether "I have good ideas for programs or projects to help solve problems in my community," whether "Being concerned about state and local issues is an important responsibility for everybody" and whether "In the next three years, I expect to be involved in improving my community." This measure has been used in multiple studies and its psychometric properties have been independently assessed (Flanagan, Syvertsen & Stout, 2007). We initially developed the Rasch measure for this analysis in 2003 on a sample of students in grades 8-10. It has an individual level reliability of .73. We anchored our current sample on these values so the measure has the same scoring over time.

Predictor Variables

We used survey responses to provide information related to classroom and school characteristics as well as information related to parent and family contexts. We used CPS administrative records to provide demographic and achievement values.

Classroom civic learning opportunities. First, we developed a measure of classroom based civic learning opportunities including: learning about problems in society, learning about current events, studying issues about which one cares, experiencing an open climate for classroom discussions of social and political topics, hearing from civic role models, learning about ways to improve the community, and working on service learning projects. This measure was based on earlier work by Kahne and Westheimer (2003) and drew on numerous other studies (e.g. Billig, 2000; Kahne et al., 2006; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Smith, 1999; Torney-Purta, et al, 2001; Verba et al., 1995; see Gibson & Levine, 2003 for a recent review).

Most of these curricular opportunities formed a single measure of classroom civic learning opportunities. This measure has a reliability of .74. Our indicator of service learning experiences did not fit within the broader measure of civic learning opportunities, instead tapping into a slightly different construct. For this reason, in the analysis (models 3 and 4) we examine the significance of the overall measure and of the individual item asking students about their service learning participation.

School supports for students' academic and social development. In addition, because we wanted to see whether the provision of opportunities associated with promoting *academic* outcomes might also foster *civic* outcomes, we included a set of indicators related to whether the school and home context provided supports for students' academic and social development. Specifically, we assessed the impact of peer support for academic achievement, whether students developed a sense of belonging or attachment in relation to the school, teacher support, and parental press for academic achievement. All these measures have reliabilities between .80 and .85. See Appendix A for more details.

Extracurricular activities. The third type of school/educational variable was an indicator of extracurricular participation. Students were asked how often they participated in afterschool clubs, sponsored by the school or other organizations, and how often they participated in sports on teams, either in or out of school. We separated out the item that asked directly about sports because several studies have found that participation in sports, unlike other extracurricular activities, is often not related or is inversely related to civic participation (Verba et al., 1995).

Demographic and individual characteristics. As controls for demographic and individual characteristics of the students, we included data on gender, racial and ethnic identification, and achievement test scores in reading, all of which come from district records. Our measure of achievement (PSAE Reading Score) is based on students' eleventh grade score on the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE), administered about a month earlier than the survey.

In addition to the above indicators, we also were interested in measures of socioeconomic status. We considered three indicators: census-based information linking students to social and economic characteristics of their census block; self reports of level of mother's education; and an individual-level variable telling whether students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Because students' reports of their parents' education are often inaccurate (Adelman, 1999, p. 35) we chose not to use it. We decided to use the free and reduced-price lunch variable rather than the census block variable because the lunch variable was tied directly to the individual's family while the census block information was tied to the census block in which the student lived. As a check on this decision, we did the analyses separately using the census-based variables as well and found no substantive difference in our results.

Neighborhood and family civic context. Our measure of neighborhood social capital comes from the Consortium's core battery of items, and has been used since 1997. Consistent with James Coleman's (1988) perspective on the forms of social capital that would matter most for children, it assesses whether adults in the neighborhood are civically engaged and socially networked, and whether they monitor and support young people.

We also included a measure of the role parents and guardians play in shaping students' commitment to civic engagement. To assess the significance of family context, we included a relatively standard item that asked how often each young person discussed current events and politics with their parents or guardians, since the role of discussion between parents and students has been found, consistently, to be related to a range of civic outcomes (Andolina et al., 2003; McIntosh, Hart & Youniss, 2006; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Past commitments. Finally, there is reason to expect that a students' prior commitments to civic participation is related to the commitments reported in eleventh grade. Students with such prior commitments might be more likely to pursue civic opportunities noted above or to recall that they occurred. For this reason, we have included students' score on the commitment to civic participation measure (described above) from the prior administration of the survey which occurred two years earlier in the spring of 2003.

Analysis

Student commitment to civic participation is shaped by a number of individual and group experiences as described above. In particular, those students taking the same classes or attending the same school experience the

same general environment, which may also be independently related to the outcome of interest. Therefore, we used Hierarchical Linear Modeling, HLM, (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) to explore the significance of both individual and group characteristics. Ideally we would have nested students within classrooms, since we are interested in the relationship between the learning opportunities that occur in classrooms and students' commitments to civic participation. However, we were unable to do so for a variety of technical and theoretical reasons. First, students likely receive these opportunities in multiple courses/classrooms during a given year (e.g. English, social studies, health etc.). Without knowing which class or classes they were reporting on, we were not able to group students in any meaningful way at the classroom level. Second, even if we had limited the responses to a particular subject, we would have had too few students in most classes to make meaningful cross-classroom comparisons.

Even though we were unable to group students in classrooms, we hypothesized that some schools might focus more on promoting civic development than others. Furthermore, because we assumed that students potentially may have experienced these opportunities in more than one class, it seemed important to see whether there was a school-level effect on commitments to civic participation. We computed the intraclass correlations using the fully unconditional model and discovered that only 2.2% of the variation in students' commitments to civic participation was between schools.

Even with this low variation, we decided that the nesting structure still had advantages. First, we found schools did differ in their provision of civic learning opportunities. In fact, 9% of the variability in civic learning opportunities was between schools. In addition, as will be discussed below, using HLM allows us to adjust for individual-level measurement error. And, as discussed below, even with this low between-school variability in civic commitments, we found statistically significant variability in the opportunities/commitments slope.

Because our outcome is itself a measure, it is subject to measurement error. We used three-level HLM, where Level 1 is a measurement model, Level 2 is the individual student level, and Level 3 is the school. The first level represents variation among the item scores within each student. Ordinarily, errors at Level 1 in a hierarchical model have a constant variance, but in this case, each person-measure can have a different amount of measurement error. To correct for this heteroscedasticity, we multiplied each side of the equation by the inverse of each person's standard error. The Level 2 outcome becomes each student's individual measure score adjusted for measurement error (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

Following are the equation of the models we used. For a complete listing of the variables, see Table 2 and Appendix A.

Table 2
**Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting 11th Graders'
Commitment to Civic Participation**

Predictors	Model 1: Demographic and Academic Characteristics	Model 2: Adds Neighborhood and Family Context	Model 3: Adds Curricular and Extracurricular Opportunities	Model 4: Adds Prior Commitments to Civic Participation
Intercept	5.00***	5.02**	5.02***	5.02***
School level				
Mean civic learning Opportunities			.06 ~	.06~
Mean academic Achievement	.11*	.03	.01	.01
Individual Level				
Demographic and academic characteristics				
PSAE Reading Score	-.01	.02	-.02	-.01
Gender (Female = 1)	.01	.01	-.02	-.03
Latino	-.07	-.02	.00	.00
Asian	-.02	.00	-.02	-.03 ~ (.02)
White	-.04	-.07*	-.04	-.04
Free/reduced lunch	-.07	-.04	-.07	-.09 ~ (-.06)
Neighborhood and family context				
Parents discuss current events and politics		.40***	.19***	.17***(.12)
Neighborhood social capital		.53***	.23***	.20***(.14)
Educational contexts and practices				
Service learning Experiences			.36***	.36***(.26)
Classroom civic learning Opportunities			.62***	.57***(.41)
Peer support for academic Achievement			.09***	.08***(.06)
Sense of belonging			.07~	.07* (.05)
Teacher support			-.03	-.03
Parent press for academic Achievement			-.08**	-.08** (-.06)
Afterschool activities				
School and other clubs			.16***	.14* (.10)
Sports			.02	.02
Prior civic commitments				
Prior commitments to civic participation (from 2003)				.27***(.19)
% Variance Explained	1%	27%	59%	63%

~ = p < .10   * = p < .05   ** = p < .01 *** = p < .001

All Coefficients Standardized. Numbers in parentheses are effect sizes

Level 1:

$$\frac{\text{Civic Commitment}_{jk}}{s_{jk}} = \pi_{jk} \frac{1}{s_{jk}} + e_{jk} \, ,$$

where $e_{jk} \sim N(0,1)$, s_{jk} is the standard error estimated from the Rasch analysis for student j in school k and π_{jk} is the student's "true score."

Level 2:

$\pi_{jk} = \beta_{ok} + \sum_{p=1}^{6} \beta_{pk}$ (student demographic and academic characteristics) + $\sum_{p=7}^{8} \beta_{pk}$ (neighborhood and family context) + β_{9k} (service learning) + β_{10k} (classroom civic learning opportunities) + $\sum_{p=11}^{14} \beta_{pk}$ (school support for academic and social development) + $\sum_{p=15}^{16} \beta_{pk}$ (afterschool activities) + β_{17k} (prior commitments) + r_{jk}

Level 3:

$\beta_{ok} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}$ (school mean civic learning opportunities)$_k$ + γ_{02} (school mean academic achievement)$_k$ + u_{ok}
$\beta_{pk} = \gamma_{po,}$ for p = 1 to 17 (models 1 and 2)
$\beta_{pk} = \gamma_{po,}$ for p = 1 to 9, 11 to 17; $\beta_{10k} = \gamma_{10,0} + u_{10k}$
    (Models 3 and 4);

At the school level we also tried models including the racial composition of the school and the aggregate social status and poverty level of its students based on their census block addresses. Neither the racial composition nor the socio-economic variables ever reached the level of statistical significance, so we removed them from the school level equations.

In most of our analytic models all individual-level variables were standardized and grand-mean centered. Furthermore, based on the assumption that the relationship between, say, being female and having commitments to civic participation, was the same across all schools in our sample, all Level 2 variables were fixed. However, in the models where we included our measure of classroom civic learning opportunities, we group mean-centered that variable at Level 2 and included each school's mean value

at Level 3. This allowed us to directly estimate the difference in mean civic commitment for schools that differed by one unit in civic learning opportunities by reading the coefficient at Level 3. We allowed the coefficient of classroom civic learning opportunities at Level 2 to vary across schools, assuming that some schools might be better able to implement these curricular practices than other schools. The analysis indicated that there was significant variation between schools in the relationship between civic learning opportunities and students' commitment to civic participation (p=.02).

Results

As discussed above, our study aims to identify the factors that may support the development of commitments to civic participation. We present these findings using four models. Model 1 includes only individual demographic characteristics. Model 2 adds two indicators of family and neighborhood context that are not demographic in nature: an indicator assessing parental discussion of politics and civic issues with youth and an indicator of social capital in the neighborhood. Model 3 adds indicators of educational contexts and practices (those that explicitly target civic development and those that are thought to promote more standard academic outcomes) and afterschool activities. Model 4 includes all the variables in Model 3 and adds a measure of commitments to civic participation taken two years earlier in 2003. This measure is identical to the measure used in 2005 and acts as a control for prior commitments. We also ran a model using each item in our measure of classroom civic learning opportunities as a separate indicator to make sure that no individual item was driving the result. We found that each individual item was significantly related to the outcome, and the size of each separate coefficient was about the same. We do not report on that model here.

We provide the results in Table 2. Because of the different grouping strategies, the intercept has a slightly different interpretation depending on the model. In Models 1 and 2, the intercept is the civic commitment score for a student who is average for the sample on all predictors. For Models 3 and 4, the intercept is the civic commitment for a student who is average for his/her school in civic learning opportunities and average for the system in all other respects. We give the standardized coefficients for each model. For Model 4 we also provide effect sizes. To calculate effect sizes we divided the standardized coefficient by the standard deviation of the outcome, computed by taking the square root of the sum of all variances in the unconditional model.

To interpret the meaning of a score on a Rasch measure such as a student's commitment to civic participation, one needs to look at the expected responses to each item for a person with that measure score. Since this is not transparent from Table 2, we provide a brief explanation. In this particular sample, a student scoring at the mean of commitments to civic participation would score at the intercept of each model. Such a student would agree with the four items that are easiest to endorse: "Being concerned about state and local issues is an important responsibility for everybody," "In the next 3 years I expect to be involved in improving my community," "I have good ideas for programs or

projects that would help solve problems in my community," and "In the next 3 years I expect to work on at least one community project that involves government agency." This student would disagree with, "Being actively involved in community issues is my responsibility." Students with civic commitments one half standard deviation below the mean (at about the 30th percentile in the distribution) would agree with the two easiest items to endorse, and would disagree with the three hardest items. Students with civic commitments one half standard deviation above the mean (at about the 70th percentile in the distribution) would agree with all five items.

Student Demographic and Academic Characteristics

As shown in Model 1 (see Table 2), eleventh graders' demographic characteristics do not appear to be strongly related to their level of civic commitment. In fact, when only student demographics and academic characteristics were included in the model, they explained only 1% of the total variance. In addition, the only indicator that achieved statistical significance was mean achievement at the school level, showing that on average students attending schools with higher mean achievement developed higher commitments to civic participation. However, this relationship disappeared once other variables were included in the model. In Model 2, white students were associated with less of a civic commitment than African-Americans, the omitted category in our analysis, although this difference disappeared when other variables were added in subsequent models. Our measure of student socioeconomic status, whether a student was eligible for free or reduced lunch, reached marginal significance in our final model. Its effect size was quite small.

Neighborhood and Family Context

Our measures of neighborhood and family context were strongly related to students' commitments to civic participation. As predicted, high school juniors' reports of neighborhood social capital were positively related to their overall level of commitment to civic participation. Specifically, high school juniors who reported that their community is one in which adults both care about youth and work to make the community better were more likely to report high levels of commitments to civic participation. This relationship (though diminished in magnitude) remained even after controlling for different school experiences (Model 3) and after additionally controlling for their level of commitments to civic participation as 9th graders (Model 4).

We found that having parents who discussed current events and politics with their children was positively associated with students' level of commitments to civic participation. Again, this positive relationship remained after controlling for school experiences (Model 3) and prior commitments (Model 4).

School Supports for Academic and Social Development

We found that several of these supports did promote desired commitments to civic participation, though the magnitude of these effects was generally modest. Specifically, when students experienced their peers as supportive of academic achievement by, for example, helping each other prepare for tests or do homework or, more generally, by sharing a commitment to doing well in school**,** they were also slightly more likely to express commitments to civic participation. And when students expressed more of a sense of belonging to the school, they reported higher levels of commitments to civic participation. Perceived teacher support was not associated with commitments to civic participation when controlling for the other variables. One exception to this pattern occurred with parental press for academic achievement. We found a small but statistically significant and *negative* relationship between student reports that their parents attended to and supported their focus on academic achievement and their reported levels of commitment to civic participation.

Afterschool Activities

Participation in afterschool extracurricular activities other than sports was related to increased commitments to civic participation. The effect sizes of these opportunities are relatively modest compared to some classroom opportunities that more explicitly target civic and political issues. Participation on either in-school or out-of-school sports teams was not related to increased civic commitments before or after controlling for prior civic commitments.

Classroom Civic Learning Opportunities

The impact of civic learning opportunities and of experiencing service learning was both sizable and substantially larger than any other measure in our study including students' prior commitments to civic participation.

Explaining Variation at the School and Individual Level

As Table 2 shows, as we add predictors, our models explain increasing amounts of the variation in students' commitments to civic participation. Our final model explains 63% of this variation. While only 9% of the variation in classroom civic learning opportunities was at the school level, the schools' level of civic learning opportunities was a marginally significant predictor of students' commitments to civic participation in Models 3 and 4.

Discussion

One of the most important results of this study is that what happens in classrooms can have a significant impact on students' commitments to civic participation. In addition, because the students in this sample are primarily low-income students of color, this study highlights activities that may help offset some of the striking inequalities in political voice that currently characterize our democracy. These results are particularly powerful given that previous civic commitments were controlled in the analyses. In what follows, we discuss these and other findings from the study.

First, we have found that experiences that focus directly on civic and political issues and ways to act (e.g. undertaking service learning projects, following current events, discussing problems in the community and ways to respond, providing students with a classroom in which open dialog around controversial issues is common and where students study topics that matter to them, as well as exposure to civic role models) are a highly efficacious means of fostering commitments to civic participation. In fact, the effect size of both service learning opportunities (.26) and the overall measure of classroom civic learning opportunities (.41) are larger than any other factor in this study. These findings are consistent with recent research by Torney-Purta et al., (2007) and with other studies that have examined the association between varied classroom practices and commitments to civic participation (Gibson & Levine, 2003). Indeed, the primary contribution of this study is demonstrating that these associations are quite sizable even when controlling for prior civic commitments and a range of other neighborhood, school, and family characteristics – something other large scale studies of multiple civic learning opportunities have not done.

The efficacy of these particular civic learning opportunities might be viewed by some as in conflict with findings from early longitudinal studies (most prominently Langton & Jennings, 1968 – also see Cook, 1985 for review) that called into question the ability of schools to influence students' levels of civic participation. These earlier studies found that taking civic education or government courses did not spur desired outcomes. However, since such courses likely vary widely in the degree to which they provide the kind of civic learning opportunities we examine, we do not view these findings as contradictory. Indeed, they speak to the need for policymakers and educators to focus on ensuring that students receive these efficacious practices rather than simply requiring students to enroll in particular courses.

Second, since this study focused on predominantly low-income students and students of color, it is important to highlight that these curricular approaches appear to provide significant benefits for students from groups that generally have less political voice than others (APSA Task Force, 2004; Verba et al., 1995). Indeed, analysis from this sample indicates that classroom civic learning opportunities can more than offset the impact of neighborhood or home contexts that are relatively inattentive to civic and political issues when it comes to the development of commitments to civic participation.

Consider for example, a student who is average with respect to demographics, aspects of schooling related to academic achievement, afterschool participation in extracurricular activities, and civic learning opportunities, but one standard deviation below average when it comes to neighborhood social capital and conversations with parents. This student would be at the 40th percentile in terms of his or her commitment to civic participation. If, on the other hand, this student experienced a level of civic learning opportunities that was one standard deviation above the system average, then, despite the lack of focus on these issues in the students' neighborhood and home, this same student would be at the 70th percentile in commitment to civic participation.

Thus, schools appear able to help lessen the participatory inequality that exists in our civic and political life. Indeed, this finding takes on added importance in light of recent studies finding that the provision of these school-based civic learning opportunities is unequal. For example, a study by Kahne and Middaugh (2008) that draws on a nationally representative survey of high school students and a survey of high school students in California indicates that students of color, those whose academic performance is less strong than others, as well as those who are part of classrooms with relatively more low-income students all receive far fewer classroom based civic learning opportunities. Though we do not know the degree to which equalizing the access of all students to these opportunities might ultimately help resolve some of the civic and political inequalities noted at the outset of this paper, this study of youth in Chicago indicates that such an effort might well help.

Third, while we saw strong evidence that providing explicitly civic learning opportunities was efficacious, we did not see strong evidence that experiencing more general academic and social supports in school fostered civic outcomes. Indeed, focusing on teacher, student, and peer relationships associated with academics and social development appears insufficient as a means of fostering commitments to civic and political engagement. Our study finds, at best, only small effects for some of these measures. We suspect these limited effects are due to the academic focus of these relationships and supports. Specifically, as discussed in our conceptual framework, recent research (Hart, 2005; Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Youniss & Yates, 1997**)** indicates that classroom opportunities with an explicitly civic dimension can develop students' sense of civic agency, social relatedness, and political and moral understandings--key building blocks of a civic identity. In line with this model, since academic and social supports have a less direct relationship to civic and political dimensions of students' identities, they would not be expected to have as great an impact on students' civic commitments.

These findings have significant implications for policy. In particular, it appears that mainstream school reform agendas will be insufficient when it comes to civic development. Practices that directly target civic outcomes will be necessary in order for schools to exert a sizable impact on students' commitments to civic participation. Indeed, it is interesting to note that coming from a family where students said their parents emphasized academic achievement by doing such things as encouraging them to work hard, talking with them about their school work, or talking with them about their

performance in school, is inversely related to students' commitments to civic participation. While we are not clear why this relationship exists, it would be interesting to examine whether and under what circumstances parental emphasis on academic success may crowd out attention to civics.

Fourth, in addition to the sizable impact of school-based civic learning opportunities, we found that students were more likely to express higher levels of commitment to civic participation when they saw examples of neighbors dealing with community problems, when they felt adults looked after children, and when they had a general sense that their neighborhood supported young people. It appears that when youth feel attended to by their community's adults it supports their civic commitments – a finding consistent with other recent work by Flanagan et al., (2007a). In addition, and consistent with research noted earlier (Andolina et al., 2003; McIntosh et al., 2006; Torney-Purta et al., 2001), having parents who discussed current events with them contributed to students' commitment to civic participation. In short, it appears that when students witnessed concern for the community and current events in their home, school, or neighborhood, they were more likely to be committed to civic participation. Moreover, that the experience of civic and civil communities may foster commitments to civic participation among youth provides an additional argument for community development and renewal strategies that aim to engage the public in efforts to improve their neighborhoods and communities (Fung, 2004). These findings also appear consistent with the theory laid out in our conceptual framework. When young people experience their neighborhood as one that monitors and responds to their needs and when they engage in discussions with their parents about current events, it seems reasonable to expect that their sense of agency, of social relatedness, and their sense of political and moral understanding would grow.

Finally, the potential value of extracurricular activities as a means of developing commitments to civic participation has long been noted (McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Otto, 1976; Scott & Willits, 1998; Smith, 1999). Our findings are consistent with these studies in indicating benefits from participation in extracurricular opportunities other than sports. At the same time, participation in extracurricular opportunities is voluntary and, when compared with classroom civic learning opportunities, our data suggest that their impact is more modest. We should note, however, that the relatively smaller size of this effect may be due to a lack of differentiation with respect to the emphasis place on civic issues in varied extracurricular activities. Just as explicit attention to civic issues strengthens a school's impact on commitments to civic participation, we suspect that extracurricular activities focused directly on civic issues and actions would be more consequential than other extracurricular activities when it comes to civic outcomes. McFarland and Thomas' (2006) present study indicates that this is the case.

There are several limitations to the present study. Though the large sample size and ability to control for prior civic commitments are strengths of this data set, other qualities of the data present limitations. For example, as discussed earlier, the fact that all youth in our sample are from the Chicago public

schools limits our ability to examine the ways demographic diversity may matter and thus to generalize our findings beyond large urban environments. In addition, due to space constraints on the survey, three of our measures consist of only one item (our measure of parent civic discussion with youth, of service learning experiences, and of extracurricular sports participation). Relying on a single item is never desirable and likely presents the most significant problem when it comes to our measure of parent civic discussion. Parental contributions likely take other forms as well. Similarly, while this study indicates that participation in extracurricular sports is differently related to civic outcomes than participation in other extracurricular activities, more detailed work focusing on particular opportunities would help us understand why this is the case. In addition, since so many civic learning opportunities are delivered in classrooms, it is a limitation that we cannot undertake a classroom level analysis as part of our HLM. This limitation stems both from the fact that students receive civic learning opportunities in a variety of subjects (e.g. English, social studies, science) and because of technical limits of the data base. Finally, while research indicates that self-reports of commitments to civic participation are solid predictors of future behaviors (Fishbein et al. 1980; Oesterle et al., 2004; Theiss-Morse, 1993), clearly, our reliance on self-report methodology leads to questions of accuracy. These self-reports do not enable identification of the actual forms of civic participation that stem from increased commitments. A follow-up study of participants in this study focusing on their behaviors would be enormously valuable.

Conclusion

In their discussion of high school civic education, Langton and Jennings (1968) write that "there must be a radical restructuring of these courses in order for them to have any appreciable pay-off"(p. 867). More recently, Galston (2001) argued that "researchers cannot afford to overlook the impact of formal civic education and related school-based experiences. (p. 232)" The findings of this study can inform those interested in restructuring high school civic education so as to augment the impact of civic education efforts. The study finds that providing a set of desired classroom civic learning opportunities to youth in urban public schools can very meaningfully support the development of students' commitments to civic participation.

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Appendix A
Indicators Used in this Analysis

Table A1

Outcome Variable from Survey

Indicator	*Type*	*Response Categories*	*List of items*
Commitment to civic participation Prior commitment to civic participation	Measure Rel=.73	*Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree*	*How much do you agree with the following:* Being actively involved in community issues is my responsibility. In the next 3 years, I expect to work on at least one community project that involves a government agency I have good ideas for programs or projects to help solve problems in my community In the next 3 years I expect to be involved in improving my community Being concerned about state and local issues is an important responsibility for everybody

Table A2
Predictor Variables from Administrative Records:
Demographics and Academic Achievement

Indicator	*Type*	*Percent if Dichotomous Mean (SD) if Continuous*
Female	Dichotomous	59%
Latino/a	Dichotomous	42%
Asian	Dichotomous	8%
White	Dichotomous	14%
Free/reduced lunch	Dichotomous	79%
Prairie State Achievement Exam Reading Score	Continuous	156 (15.55)