

The LEADE Initiative

The Leveraging Equity and Access in Democratic Education (LEADE) initiative provides educational decision makers with research-based tools for assessing equity and access in civic education in order to improve civic learning opportunities in and out of schools for all students.



Democratic Purposes of Schooling

In recent decades, the economic purposes of education in the United States have garnered more and more attention, often at the expense of civic preparation and the holistic development of young people. As a consequence, when it comes to fulfilling the democratic purposes of schooling, we are falling far short. Indeed, large numbers of students today are not receiving the civic education necessary to support informed and active participation in civic and political life. Moreover, inadequate provision of civic learning opportunities is especially common in schools serving low-income communities, communities of color, and immigrant communities. The neglect of this priority, especially at a time of widespread dissatisfaction with the functioning of our democracy, is quite troubling.

Equity & Access in Civic Learning

Indeed, large numbers of students today are not receiving the civic education necessary to support informed and active participation in civic and political life.¹ Moreover, inadequate provision of civic learning opportunities is especially common in schools serving low-income communities, communities of color, and immigrant communities.² The neglect of this priority, especially at a time of widespread dissatisfaction with the functioning of our democracy, is quite troubling. The American Political Science Association has noted deep inequalities across lines of race and social class in patterns of civic and political participation.³ And many community members do not feel that political institutions are responsive to their concerns or do not treat them fairly. Moreover, a recent study analyzing thousands of proposals to change national policy found that when the preferences of low- or middle-income Americans diverged from those of the affluent, these groups had almost *no impact* on policy outcomes.⁴

Fortunately, studies have found that a variety of civic learning opportunities, delivered both in and out of school, can foster greater and more informed civic and political engagement.⁵ These opportunities include lessons on the principles of American democracy, class discussions of relevant social issues, extracurricular activities that promote community service, school governance structures that engage youth as equal participants, and community-based youth

¹ Gould, Jonathan, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Peter Levine, Ted McConnell, and David B. Smith, eds. *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*. Philadelphia: Lenore Annenberg Institute for Civics of the Annenberg Public Policy Center and the Civic Mission of Schools: Philadelphia, 2011.

² Kahne, Joseph, and Ellen Middaugh. "Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School." *Circle Working Paper 59, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)*, 2008.

³ APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy. "American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality." *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 04 (2004): 651-89.

⁴ Gilens, Martin. "Under the Influence." *Boston Review*, July 2012. <http://bostonreview.net/forum/lead-essay-under-influence-martin-gilens>.

⁵ Kahne, Joseph E., and Susan E. Sporte. "Developing Citizens: The Impact of Civic Learning Opportunities on Students' Commitment to Civic Participation." *American Educational Research Journal* 45, no. 3 (2008).

organizations focused on social change. There is ample evidence that such opportunities are also related to a range of capacities needed for the holistic development of young people -- empathy, communication across difference, inquiry, and investigation.

Unfortunately, these research studies also find that too few resources have been focused on promoting equity and access in civic education. On average, white students, middle-class students, and students in higher-track classes experience more classroom-based, after-school and informal civic learning opportunities, and are much more likely to be engaged in extracurricular groups that support civic development.⁶

For example, Kahne and Middaugh surveyed more than 2,300 high school students in California and found that African American and Latino students were less likely than white students to report receiving civic learning opportunities such as current event discussions, civic simulations, and an open classroom climate.⁷ Similarly, when Rogers and Terriquez conducted a statewide survey in 2014, they found that California high school students attending elite private schools and public school students from middle-class families were more likely than their peers to participate in clubs or groups that try to make a difference in their school, community, or broader society.⁸

Inequitable Access to Civic Learning by SES

High SES 9th graders compared to
Average SES 9th graders are:

2x more likely
to discuss how
laws are made

1.9x more likely
to report participating in
service activities

1.4x more likely
to take part in a debate or
panel discussion

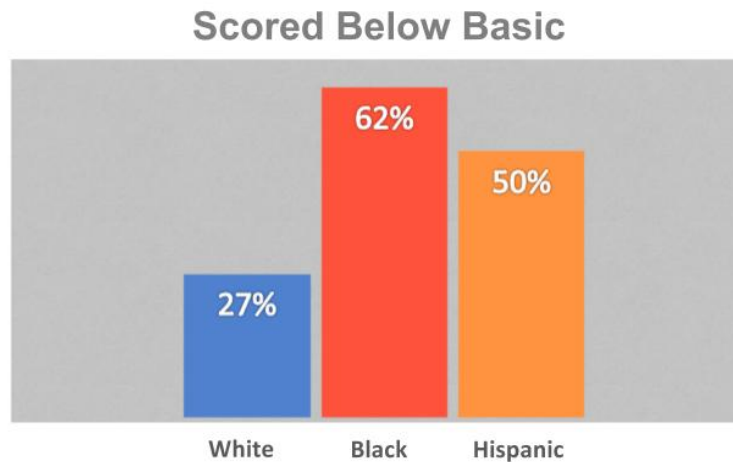
⁶ Kawashima-Ginsberg, Kei. "Do Discussion, Debate, and Simulations Boost NAEP Civics Performance?" *Circle Fact Sheet, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)*. 2013. Kahne, Joseph, and Ellen Middaugh. "Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School."

⁷ Kahne and Middaugh. "Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School."

⁸ Rogers, John, and Terriquez, Veronica. "After-school Civic Learning Opportunities for California Youth." UCLA IDEA, Los Angeles. 2017.

In addition, on average, low income, African-American, Hispanic, and rural students lag behind their peers on tests of civic knowledge, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civic Assessment, and have less optimistic views of their civic potential than their more privileged counterparts.⁹

Inequality Related to NAEP Civic Health Index



Responding on the Local Level

While national and statewide data highlight significant shortcomings with respect to equity and access in civic learning, we lack adequate mechanisms for attending to these priorities in districts, schools, and communities. In response, the Leveraging Equity and Access in Democratic Education (LEADE) initiative is creating an indicator system of civic learning opportunities and outcomes. Such a system will establish a set of evidence-based tools for assessing equity and access in civic education so that educators and members of civic organizations can work together to improve civic learning opportunities for all students. By providing evidence for informed deliberation, LEADE not only measures civic education, it also encourages a more inclusive and participatory public engaged in public education.

⁹ National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), The Nation's Report Card: Civics 2010 (Washington: DC, NCES, 2011), NCES 2011466, via <http://nces.ed.gov/>.