

# Roots of Engaged Citizenship Project

## Examining Political Behaviors

Fall 2016

## A Note from the Lead Researchers

Hello! We hope your schools are running smoothly and your students are thriving. Below you will find our fall newsletter. It is important for us to send regular updates to you – our school partners – to share what we are learning about youth civic engagement from students in your schools.

### Raising Future Voters

Given that it is election season, we are sharing some of our research on political behaviors. Elections offer a way for citizens to have a direct voice in politics, and individual votes can really matter. When young people get involved in elections, they are likely to establish habits that keep them voting long into the future. Youth can become interested, informed, and engaged in politics well before they are eligible to vote. Schools are one of the most important places for young people to learn about politics and the political process. Becoming politically engaged is important for youth from all political parties and beliefs. In fact, democracy works best when diverse views are represented.

### Our Findings

Our findings highlight age differences in political behaviors showing that several political behaviors increase steadily across high school. We have also identified several school-based strategies that can be used to support students in becoming politically engaged. These strategies can be enacted after election season passes.

### New Federal Funding

The National Science Foundation ([www.nsf.gov](http://www.nsf.gov)) has awarded our research team a grant so that we can complete this important work with you and your students. This means there are two more waves of data collection to go: Spring 2017 and Spring 2018. We're excited to continue partnering with you and will be reaching out to discuss next steps!

As always, please call or email us with comments, questions, and feedback. **THANK YOU** for your continued support of our work.



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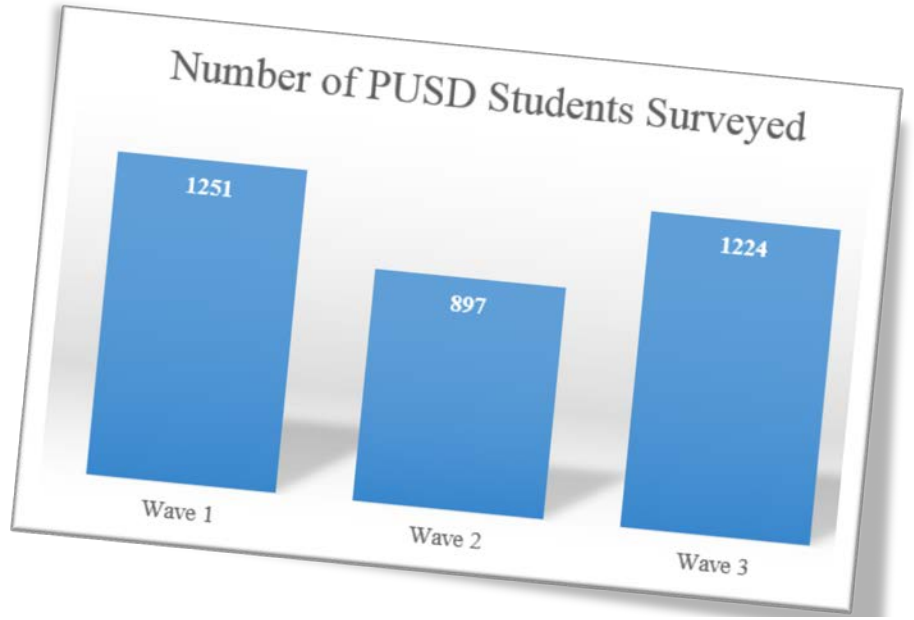
# PUSD Students We Surveyed

The Roots Study is entering its 4<sup>th</sup> year! Here is a look at how many students we have surveyed in your district the past three years. We are proud of the turnout, which is largely thanks to your hard work. We prioritize surveying the same students over time, and we also get some new students each year.

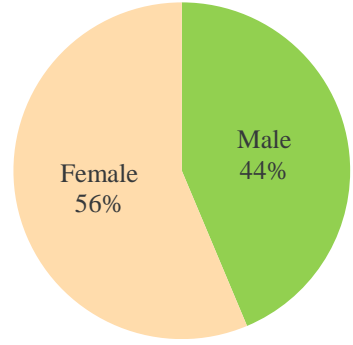
We retained 33% of students from Wave 1 to Wave 2. At Wave 3, our return rate jumped to 51%. We anticipate even higher rates of return this year!

We work with 8 schools in the Pomona Unified School District. Here is a brief overview of the types of students that we have surveyed.

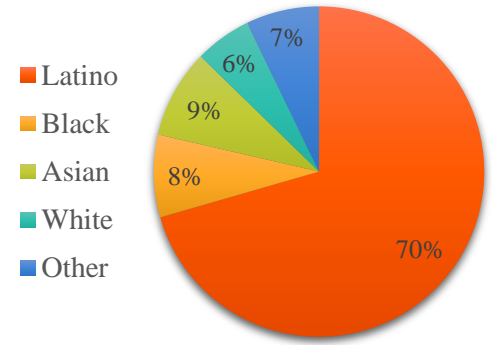
- Slightly more females than males.
- Mostly Latino students, and a relatively equal mix of other racial/ethnic groups.
- A mix of elementary, middle, and high school students, with more students in high school.



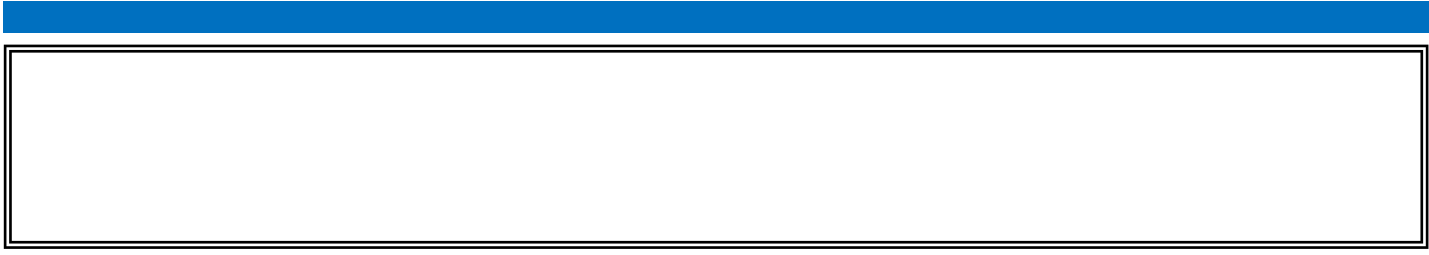
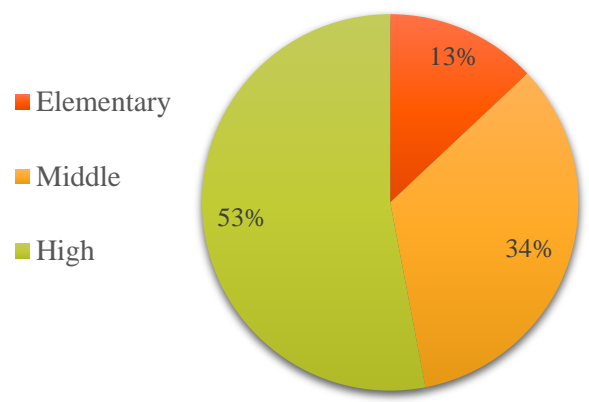
### Student Gender



### Student Ethnicity



### Student Grade Level



# Young People's Political Behaviors Change with Age



## Defining Political Behaviors

We measured various political behaviors that are accessible and possible for youth of diverse ages.

### **FOLLOWING THE NEWS**

How frequently youth pay attention to politics and current events in the news.

### **SHARING OPINIONS**

How often youth share opinions about political issues with others.

### **VOTING INTENTIONS**

To what extent youth plan to vote in national elections when they are able.

### **HIGH-INVESTMENT POLITICAL BEHAVIORS**

Actual or planned actions that take considerable time and effort such as participating in a rally or protest, contacting government officials about important issues, volunteering for political campaigns, and attending community meetings. [Only measured on middle and high school surveys.]

**Across all four types of political behaviors, higher scores indicate more engagement in these activities or more plans to do these behaviors in the future.**

## Key Findings for PUSD

**All types of political behaviors decline in middle school.** This finding is similar to other research showing dips in social responsibility and helping behavior in middle school. Middle schools can be a difficult transition for some students, and civic engagement often takes a backseat to other priorities.

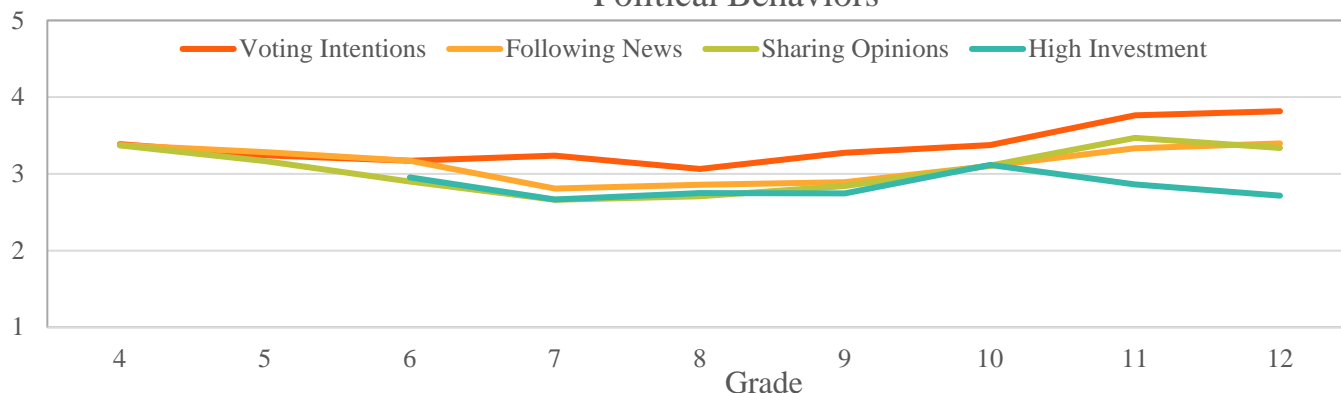
### **Some political behaviors increase across high school.**

Voting intentions, following the news, and sharing opinions increase throughout high school, but high-investment political behaviors decline in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. High school appears to be a time when young people become more interested and engaged in political behaviors, especially those that are feasible to do in daily life.

**Youth have high intentions to vote.** Intentions to vote were the most highly endorsed type of political behavior. Intentions don't always mean that young people will vote when they turn 18, but they are a good sign that young people are thinking about the political process and wanting to be part of it.

There were no differences in political behaviors for boys and girls.

Political Behaviors





# School and Family Factors that Promote Political Behaviors

We examined four school and family factors that we thought would promote political behavior.

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

Conversations about social issues and current events in classes.

## SCHOOL CLIMATE

How much students feel like they belong at school.

## PARENT MODELING

Students' views of how much their parents are engaged in volunteering and politics.

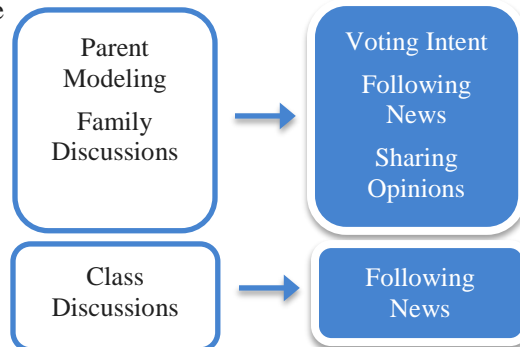
## FAMILY DISCUSSIONS

Conversations about social issues and current events at home.

We focused on Wave 2 and looked at elementary, middle, and high school-aged youth separately. This allowed us to identify strategies that work for each age group.



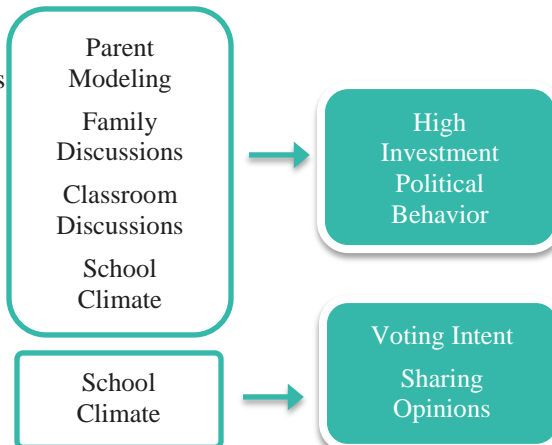
## Results Consistent Across Age Groups



## Elementary School Only



## Middle and High School Only



## Family Consistently Important

Across ages, parent modeling and family discussions have wide-reaching importance for youth political behaviors. When parents engage and discuss social issues, young people appear to benefit by following the news, sharing opinions, and developing intentions to vote.

For older youth, parent modeling and family discussions are also related to high-investment political behaviors.

## Schools Play an Increasing Role

Classroom discussions of social issues can spark interest in following the news across ages. For middle and high school youth, classroom discussions can also spur high investment political behaviors.

When students feel like they belong at school, they seem to increase their interest and engagement in politics. School climate is related to following the news in elementary school, but is related to a broader range of political behaviors in middle and high school.

## Take Home Messages

- Both school and parent strategies play a role in helping young people develop into active citizens.
- **Implication #1:** Schools that can communicate the importance of civic engagement to parents can support their students' political development. Encouraging parent involvement in school and community activities may be a great way to increase parental modeling of civic behavior.
- **Implication #2:** Elementary, middle and high schools that have a positive school climate and classroom civic discussions may be best positioned to promote political behaviors.

## Inspiring Students after the Election

Right after the election is an ideal time to refocus students on the importance of involvement in local government and issues facing their communities. Generation Citizen – a civic education organization – has put together a two-part lesson plan for 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students to help re-inspire young people, teach about local government, and begin the process of creating a stronger democracy for the future. The lesson plans are hot off the press! They will be available starting November 4<sup>th</sup> at

[www.beyondtheballot2016.org](http://www.beyondtheballot2016.org).