



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

This election has showcased the power of the American voter. In this spirit, we are sharing some of what the research your students have been participating in shows about their 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. 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) 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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MN Students We Surveyed

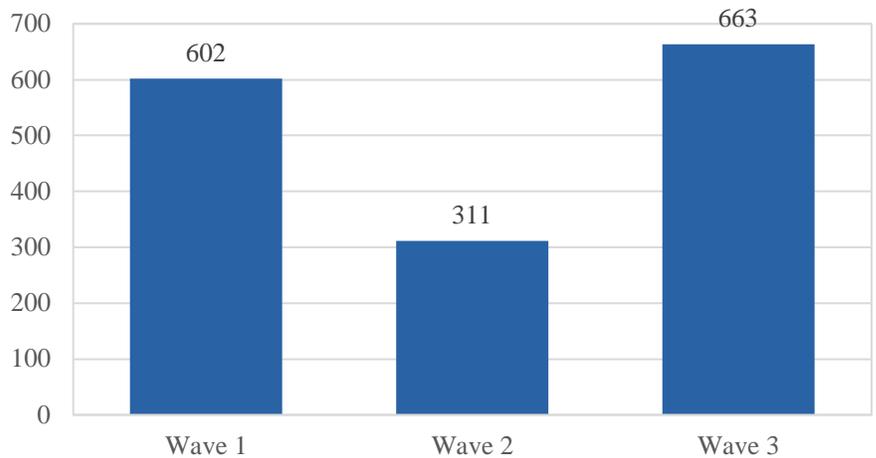
The Roots Study is entering its 4th year! Here is a look at how many students we have surveyed in Minnesota the past three years. We are proud of the turnout, which is largely thanks to your hard work. We prioritize surveying the same students over time, and we also get some new students each year.

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!

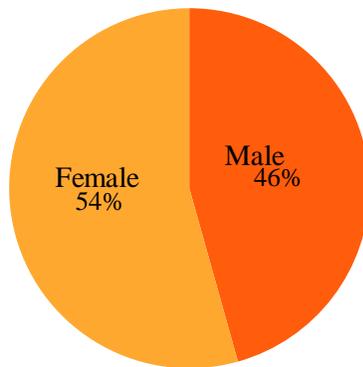
We work with two schools in the Brooklyn Center School District and two schools in the St. Louis Park School District. Here is a brief overview of the types of students that we have surveyed.

- Slightly more females than males.
- A very diverse mix of racial/ethnic groups, including White, Black, Asian, and Latino.
- A relatively even mix of elementary, middle, and high school students.

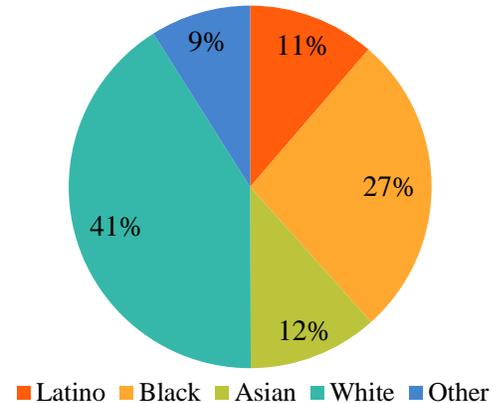
Minnesota Students Surveyed



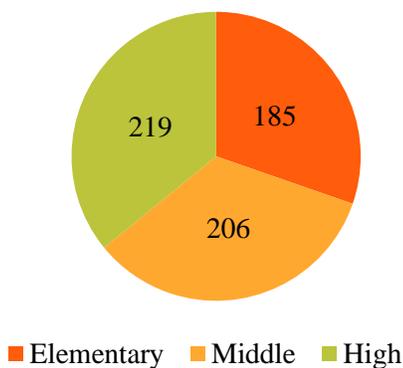
Gender



Race/ Ethnicity



School 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.

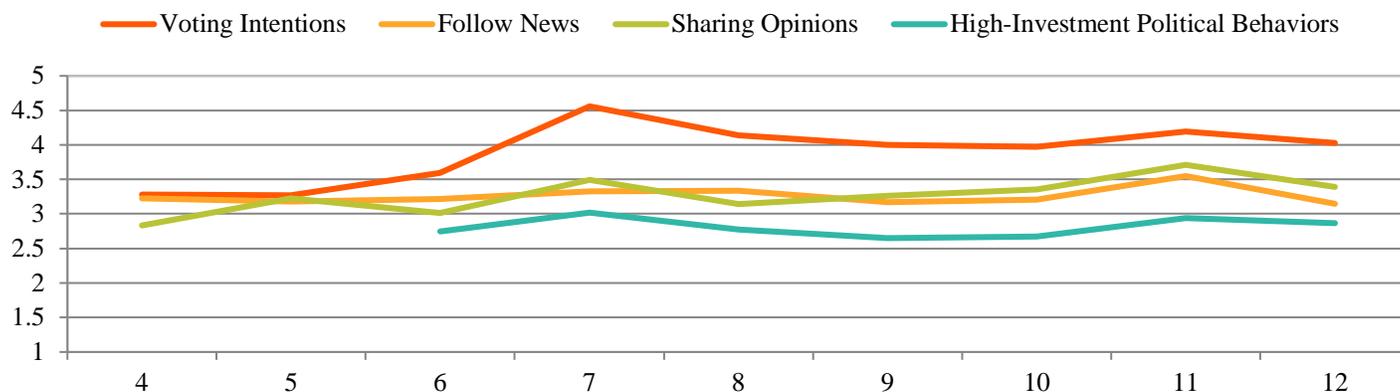
Key Findings

Youth have high intentions to vote. Voting intentions 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 boys' vs. girls' endorsement of these political behaviors.

Older youth are more likely to report they share their political opinions with others. However, the frequency with which this is happening among elementary- and middle school-aged is also relatively high. Existing research shows that engaging young people in sociopolitical discussions – whether it be about politics, community concerns, or social issues – can have a powerful impact on young people as they define their civic identities.

High-investment political behaviors were the least likely to be endorsed across all grades. Yet, we know that these kinds of actions are instrumental to democracy. For many young people, sticking their “neck out” in this way can be uncomfortable. Consider how your school is creating supportive pathways for youth to become engaged in their communities more directly.



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.

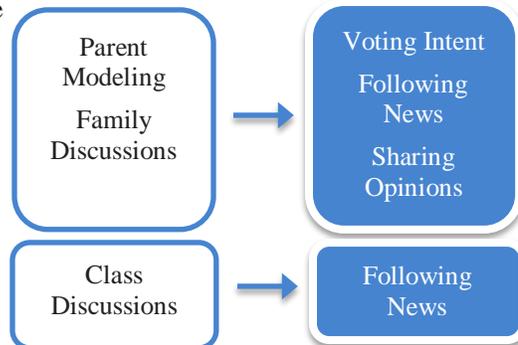
FAMILY DISCUSSIONS

Conversations about social issues and current events at home.

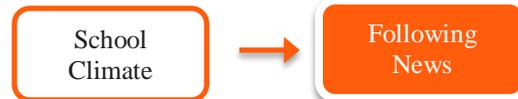
We focused on Wave 2 and looked at elementary, middle, and high school-aged youth separately. This allowed us to identify strategies that work for each age group.



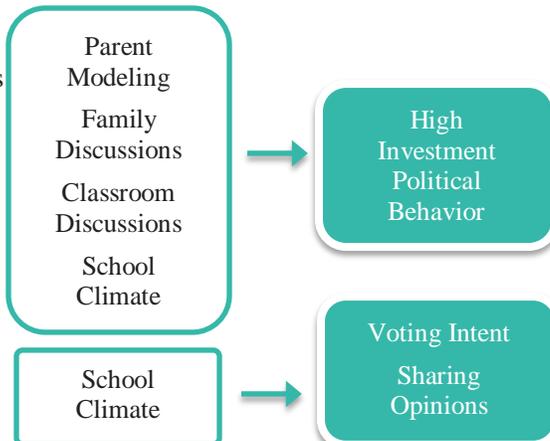
Results Consistent Across Age Groups



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 7th-12th 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 4th at

www.beyondtheballot2016.org.