

THE DATA

# How involved are youth?

Organized out-of-school time activities are important developmental opportunities for youth. These activities create a space where young people can build relationships with adults and peers and practice social and emotional skills. Research shows that organized activities – especially when they are high-quality – equip youth with skills that can be applied to other areas of life. Organized activity participation has been linked to academic success, psychological well-being, and the development of key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills like teamwork, initiative, and responsibility.

Analysis of our data from 2,475 youth in Grades 4-12 attending 16 schools in California, Minnesota, and West Virginia show youth are getting involved.

## Intensity

The intensity – or number of hours of organized activity participation in the average week – increased between elementary and middle school.

Elementary-aged youth averaged 3.3 hours of activities each week, while middle school (7.5 hours) and high school (7.3) reported more activity involvement.

## Activity Type

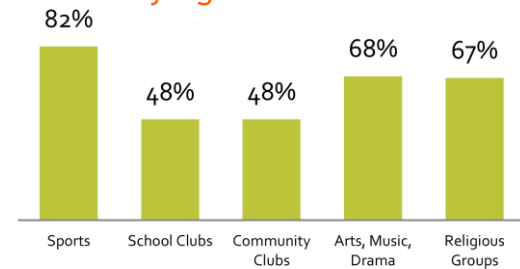
The types of activities followed a similar pattern across the three school levels, with sports activities having the highest participation rates and community clubs the lowest. School club participation remained lower in elementary and middle school, but jumped significantly in high school.

While elementary-aged students spend fewer hours participating in organized activities, they appear to be involved in a wider range of activities – as illustrated by the high percentages across activity types. This likely reflects both the lower time commitment required of these activities in the younger grades and these young people’s interest in exploring a range of activities.

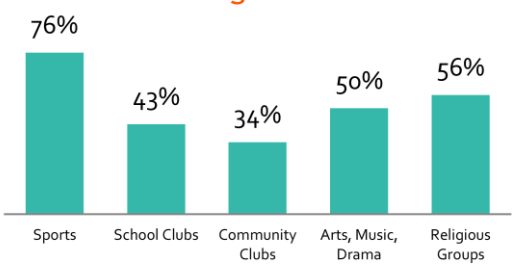
## Barriers to Participation

When asked, high school youth identified several barriers to participating in organized activities (see next page) including: (a) competing commitments with family, school, and work; (b) lack of opportunity; and, (c) disinterest.

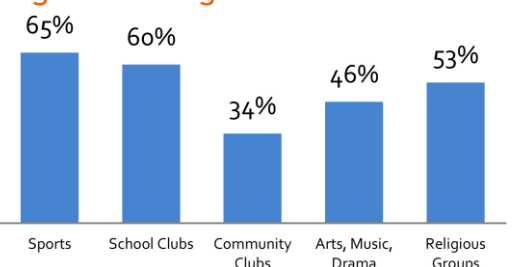
### Elementary-Aged Youth



### Middle School-Aged Youth



### High School-Aged Youth



PROJECT UPDATES



Visit Our Website

Our project website – [www.civicroots.org](http://www.civicroots.org) – is updated regularly with the latest project news and research findings. The site also includes study resources for parents.



Spring 2016 Data Collection

Our project team will contact you in the next several weeks to discuss Spring 2016 data collection, and to tell you more about study findings.

FAST FACTS: PARTICIPATION BARRIERS

23%

Youth report they do not have the resources – like money or transportation – to participate.

34%

Youth report they do not have time to participate because of responsibilities at home, like housework, caring for a sibling, or helping family.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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*We examined the association between organized activity participation and several types of civic engagement.*

# Organized Activities as Training Grounds for Civic Engagement

We define civic engagement as the positive ways that adolescents contribute to their schools, families, and neighborhoods. A broad range of behaviors qualify as civic engagement, including volunteering, political behaviors, and environmental conservation. Values and skills are also markers of how engaged in community and society youth are or plan to be. High school youth who spent more hours in organized activities also reported more civic engagement of many types.

## Developmental Experiences

Importantly, our findings point to HOW organized activities promote civic engagement among young people. We identified three key developmental experiences that happen in organized activities that function to create more engaged citizens:

**Supportive relationships:** When coaches, teachers, and activity leaders listen to youth, care about them and challenge them to reach their potential.

**Self-discovery:** When in activities, youth find something that sparks their interests and passion, they learn applicable skills, and learn more about who they are and what is important to them.

**Political discussions:** When adults in organized activities discuss political issues, problems facing the community, and times when people are treated unfairly.

## Social Responsibility

Our analyses revealed a strong association between participating in sports, community clubs, arts, and religious activities and higher levels of social responsibility. This association was accounted for largely by young people’s experience of self-discovery in these activity contexts.

## Civic Skills

All three developmental experiences appear to play varying roles in promoting young people’s civic skills (e.g., organize a meeting, share opinions with a group) across activities. Interestingly, the political discussions that happen in community clubs, arts, and religious activities are uniquely influential in developing civic skills and higher-order political behaviors like interests in volunteering for a political campaign.

## Implications

Our results show the value of organized activities as training grounds for civic engagement AND point to three essential ingredients of high quality organized activities. Schools and communities could use this information to reflect on available organized activities and the extent to which these experiences are possible. More concerted efforts by coaches, teachers, and activity leaders to strengthen supportive relationships, facilitate self-discovery, and discuss relevant political issues could strengthen the power of organized activities to promote positive youth development over time.