



2003

Measures of Citizenship:
The North Carolina Civic Index

About the Civic Education Consortium

The North Carolina Civic Education Consortium is a nonpartisan, state-wide partnership of more than 190 organizations, including schools, universities, state and local government agencies, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and youth.

The Civic Education Consortium was founded in 1997 in the School of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Consortium grew out of concern by public leaders that North Carolina was in danger of developing a generation of citizens unprepared to lead their communities.

The Consortium's mission is to unite diverse partners to revitalize civic education and engagement for North Carolinians ages 5 to 18. The Consortium envisions a future in which all North Carolina children and youth are enthusiastically involved citizens endowed with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to participate fully in democratic life. As part of that vision, the Consortium believes that children and youth should:

- realize that individual participation is a critical factor in community success;
- consider and respect others when deliberating, negotiating, organizing, and advocating for their own positions on public concerns; and
- understand how government, business, and nonprofits work together to create strong communities.

About the Civic Index

A volunteer work group of the Civic Education Consortium developed the North Carolina Civic Index in response to a lack of comprehensive and meaningful measures of civic engagement. The existing measures are limited and offer little insight into the preparation of youth to become engaged citizens.

For this reason, the Consortium chose to gather relevant data through a statewide telephone survey. Nearly 800 non-voting age youth, ages 13–17, were asked about their civic skills, behavior, knowledge, attitudes, and opportunities. To establish a benchmark for civic education and engagement, the Consortium also surveyed 800 adults on the same issues. Information gathered from the telephone surveys was coupled with existing measures, such as voter turnout, charitable giving, and diversity in public office, to create the first-ever statewide assessment of civic education and engagement. The Carnegie Corporation of New York provided funding for the youth component of the North Carolina Civic Index, while the Smith Richardson Foundation provided funding for the adult component.

For more information about the Civic Education Consortium or the Civic Index, please visit www.civics.org or contact:

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About the Survey Methodology

The Survey Research Center at the University of Georgia conducted the North Carolina youth and adult civic index surveys between January and March 2003. The Center interviewed youth and adults by telephone using random digital dial (RDD) probability samples.

The Center interviewed a total of 771 youth, ages 13–17, from a probability sample of 9,796 households. The cooperation rate (AAPOR COOP 3) was 44%. A total of 804 adult residents were interviewed from a probability sample of 4,765 households, with a cooperation rate of 43%.

Samples of this size are subject to a sampling margin of error of no greater than +/- 3.5% at the 95% confidence interval. In addition to sampling error, other sources of error can potentially influence the results of sample surveys, including error associated with non-response, question wording, and interviewer error.

For additional details on the methodology used in this study, visit www.civics.org.

Dear North Carolinians:

The North Carolina Civic Education Consortium is proud to present the results of the 2003 Civic Index, the first state-level benchmark of youth and adult civic engagement in the nation. In reviewing the results, we heard this message loud and clear: **today's young people have the potential to become a truly great civic generation.**

We see many positive signs that contradict the perception of young people as apathetic and disengaged. For example:

- Like youth around the nation, ours are more **involved in community service** activities than previous generations of teenagers.
- They have a broad **appreciation of diversity** and interact more with different ethnic groups. They value listening to others and giving them a voice.
- They have high levels of **confidence in all types of organizations**, especially government.
- They are quite **confident in their civic engagement skills**, such as speaking out in public, and scored higher than adults on a few knowledge measures.
- Finally, every day, we see many examples of **young people rising to the challenge** and making a difference in civic life when given the chance.

Young people are awaiting our challenge, which now rests in our hands as parents, friends, policymakers, school leaders, teachers, and community leaders. Specific recommendations are shown on page 10, but there are two broad recommendations that merit special attention:

- We must help young people **turn their complacency about the current political and election systems into constructive action.** Just as we must help students see that democracy is, by definition, messy and prone to disagreement, we also have to admit that young people, and many adults, have valid concerns about “politics as usual.” The political system could certainly be improved, but such reforms will not happen if young people continue to opt out of voting and other political activities.
- We must send a clear message that it is **just as important for North Carolina to prepare young people for effective civic participation as it is to prepare them for work.** These two roles are not mutually exclusive in a democratic society and free-market economy. This means that we cannot afford to sacrifice one for the other.

We hope that you will join the Civic Education Consortium in taking aim at the barriers to effective civic education, because it is crucial to our democratic foundations, our core freedoms, and the development of strong communities. An engaged, informed citizenry is one of the most precious gifts we can leave our children, our state, and our nation.

Debra J. Henzey
Executive Director

Key Findings

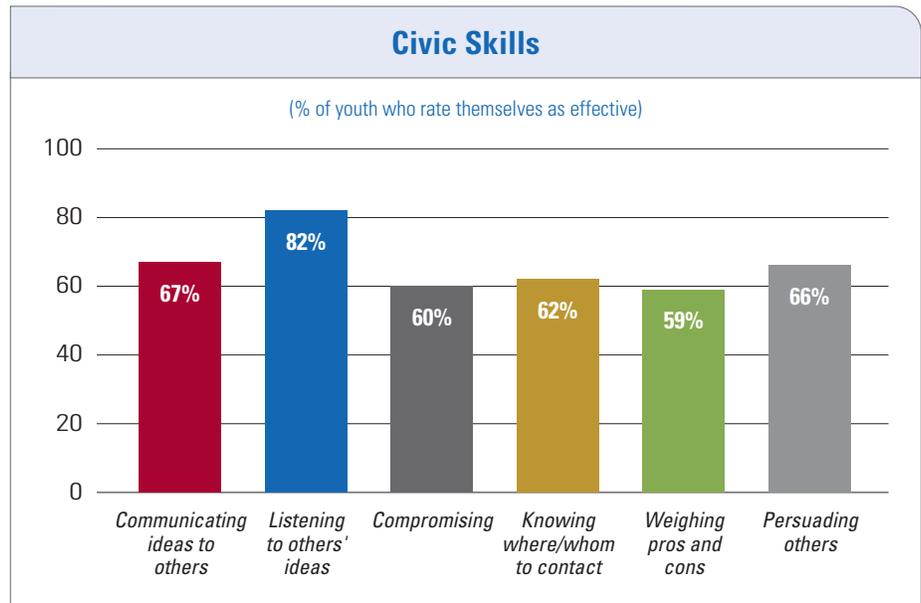
North Carolina youth have a high level of confidence in their civic engagement skills, but their levels of political involvement and knowledge of government are low.

North Carolina youth appear to have a great deal of confidence in their civic engagement skills. Substantial majorities of youth report being extremely or somewhat effective at each of the civic engagement skills asked about in the Civic Index.

The greatest percentage feel confident in their abilities to write a letter expressing opinions, listen to others' ideas, and comment at public meetings. Fewer feel confident about knowing whom to contact to get things done, their ability to compromise, and their ability to weigh pros and cons. Even so, the lowest confidence rating among youth was 59%.

Less than 10% of North Carolina youth can correctly name both of their United States senators.

When asked about their level of knowledge, more than 71% of youth report that classes have taught them a lot or a fair amount about government or community involvement. However, their responses to knowledge questions suggest otherwise. While a majority of youth correctly answered seven of nine political knowledge questions, only 9% are able to name both of North Carolina's United States senators. Only 31% correctly report that the General Assembly, or legislature, is responsible for making state laws.



North Carolina youth generally have lower levels of civic knowledge and are less involved in political activities than their voting-age counterparts. Almost one-third (31%) of adult respondents correctly named both U.S. senators, and 37% correctly noted that the General Assembly is responsible for making laws. However, young people outshine adults in knowing that the first ten amendments to the U.S.

Constitution are the Bill of Rights, knowing the legal voting age, and knowing which levels of government issue passports and set school bus schedules.

For young North Carolinians, a high level of confidence in their abilities does not necessarily translate into knowledge, and neither does it translate into political involvement. Only 26% of youth report ever contacting a public official, and only 20% report having written a letter to a newspaper. Less than a third (32%) say they have signed an e-mail petition. Almost half (49%), however, report refusing to buy a product due to company practice, which may indicate an emerging youth trend.

Youth involvement in political activities is low, but their level of volunteerism is high.

While North Carolina youth are relatively uninvolved in politics, 73% say they have volunteered for some type of community service in the past year. This discrepancy between community service and political involvement mirrors North Carolina's adult population, which ranks high nationally in charitable giving but low in political involvement.¹ In the past year, nearly nine out of ten of the state's adults engaged in giving and 64% engaged in service activities.

Nationally, young people are becoming more involved in community service and volunteering, yet they remain disengaged from political involvement. The proportion

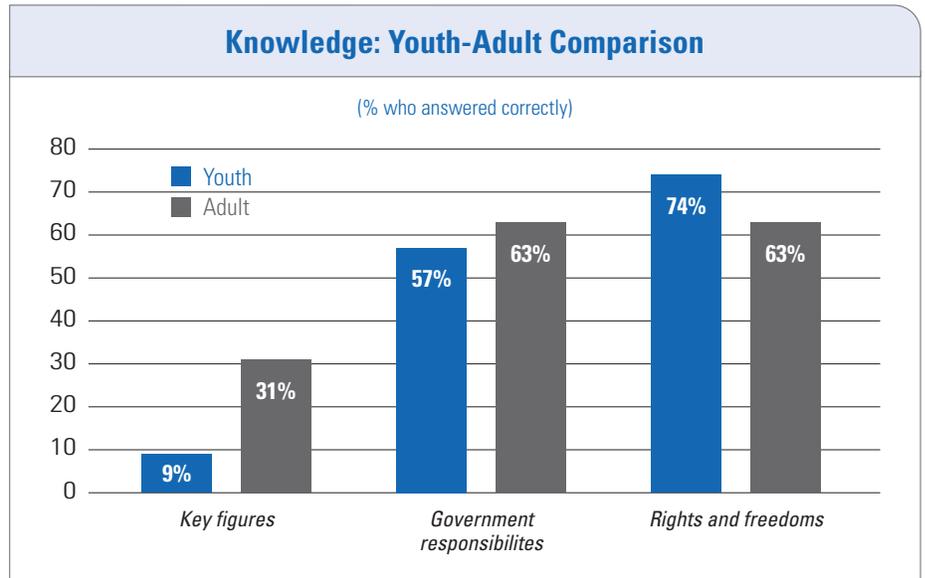
Almost half of NC youth (49%) report boycotting a product due to company practice.

of U.S. college freshmen who have volunteered has risen steadily from two-thirds in 1989 to 81% in 2000, according to *The Civic Mission of Schools*.² Almost half of U.S. high schools now offer service opportunities, compared to almost none a generation ago.³

In North Carolina, more than half (54%) of all youth who say they have volunteered indicate that the experience was arranged by their schools, and 35% say it contributed to their grades. However, it appears that youth are not making a connection between their volunteer service and community problem solving. While 73% of North Carolina youth report volunteering in the past 12 months, only 26% report working in their communities to solve a problem during that time.

North Carolina youth also have high rates of participation in school clubs (77%), but 20% say their schools have no student government, which limits their opportunities to practice or witness political engagement. Similarly, only 26% say that they have met or talked with a public official through school, an indication that their classes are not typically providing these opportunities.

The high level of volunteerism and school-sponsored service among North Carolina youth could bode well for the state's philanthropic



future. A 2003 report from Youth Service America and Independent Sector says two-thirds of today's adult volunteers initiated this habit as young people and that young volunteers are more likely to contribute to charities and to their communities when they get older.⁴

Household income is the most consistent indicator of civic knowledge and engagement; race is a secondary factor.

The Civic Index shows that income, by far, is the most consistent predictor of civic engagement among youth and adults. Students from homes with high annual incomes (\$75,000 and above) generally show the highest level of civic knowledge.

But those with household incomes in the lowest bracket (less than \$20,000) actually demonstrate more knowledge than those in middle-income households (\$20,000-\$74,999), rating higher on five of nine questions. High income appears to be positively associated with greater confidence in civic participation skills, more frequent interaction with people of a different race or culture, and greater likelihood of being involved in community and political activities. This is true for both youth and adults.

Sixty-eight percent of youth with household incomes above \$75,000 feel that they are effective at weighing pros and cons, while just 49% of youth from the lowest income bracket believe they are effective.

North Carolina youth are significantly less likely than adults to correctly identify city and county government duties.



Youth with high levels of household income are more likely to volunteer, including participation in school-related service activities, and are much more likely to be involved in school clubs, including those that focus on political and social issues. For example, 91% of high-income youth report being involved in organized groups or clubs, while just 65% of youth from households with incomes below \$20,000 report the same.

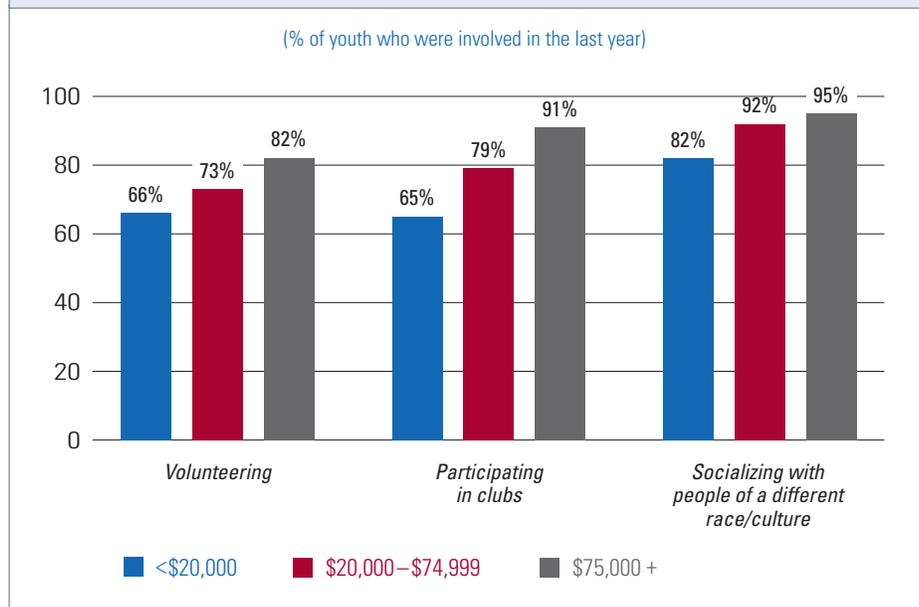
High income is also positively associated with trust in institutions, as youth in high-income households report significantly more confidence in government, small businesses, the military, and nonprofit groups. High-income youth are more likely (66%) to say they might work for a nonprofit or community service organization than are those youth with household incomes under \$20,000 (44%) or between \$20,000 and \$74,999 (42%).

Youth in the lowest income bracket generally report less political involvement, such as contacting public officials or having an interest in voting, and they report less volunteerism. Just 32% of low-income youth report having worked with others to solve a community problem, as compared to more than 54% of high-income youth.

Low-income youth are less likely to find civic role models at home than higher-income youth. For example, nearly 90% of high-income youth report having a parent who volunteers, as compared to only 55% of low-income youth. Similarly, just 56% of low-income youth report talking about politics at home, compared to more than 75% of high-income youth.

Higher income appears to be positively associated with greater levels of civic knowledge, greater confidence in civic participation skills, higher rates of volunteerism, and greater likelihood of being involved in community and political activities—for both youth and adults.

Community Involvement by Income



More than twice as many high-income youth have met or talked with a government official as compared to low-income youth. Low-income youth report fewer civic engagement activities through school and feel they have learned less about government and community issues from their classes.

Race also has some impact on civic knowledge and engagement. For instance, white youth were more likely to correctly answer most knowledge questions and generally expressed higher levels of confidence in most institutions, especially government and nonprofits.

The racial civics gap is also evident in the lack of diversity found in elected and appointed positions across the state. White males still hold a disproportionate share of these positions, although 25% of the state's population is nonwhite and more than 50% is female. Some

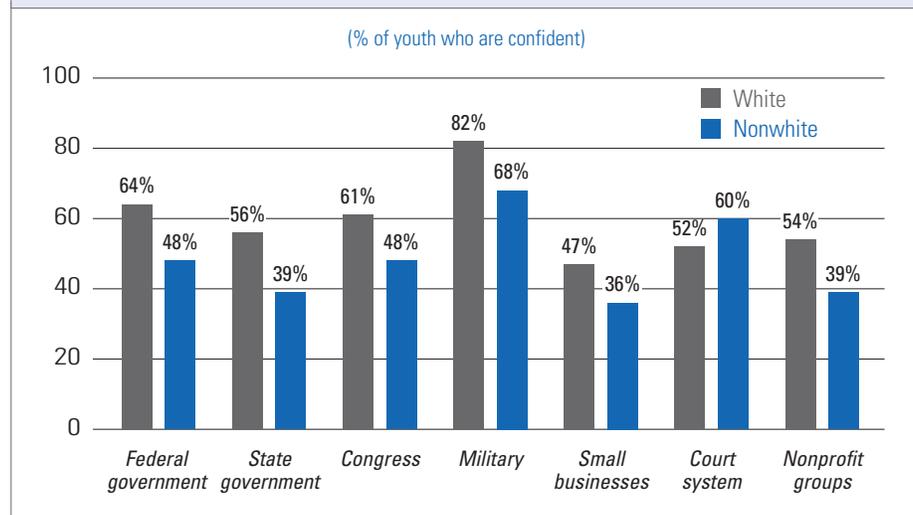
Youth in high-income households are more likely to report confidence in all levels of government.



Diversity in Elected and Appointed Offices

	NC Population	State House	State Senate	Council of State	Judges	State Boards	UNC Board of Gov.	County Commiss.	City/Town Council	Local School Boards
White	75%	83%	86%	90%	85%	84%	74%	84%	84%	79%
Nonwhite	25%	17%	14%	10%	15%	16%	26%	16%	16%	21%
Male	49%	77%	86%	60%	77%	75%	74%	85%	77%	63%
Female	51%	23%	14%	40%	23%	25%	26%	15%	23%	37%

Confidence in Institutions by Race



positive inroads can be found in the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, several state boards, and local school boards.

Race does not appear to play a role in the level of volunteerism, as nonwhite and white youth report volunteering at similar rates.

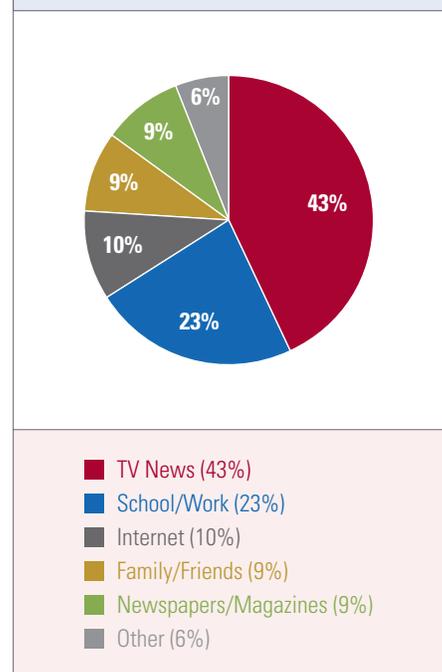
North Carolina youth and adults report a low level of trust in other people's motives; however, youth have a high level of trust in government and institutions.

When asked whether people are generally helpful or if, rather, they are looking out for themselves, only 48% of North Carolina's adults stated that people generally try to be helpful. Youth are even less trusting of other people—63% believe that most people have selfish motives.

By contrast, youth express substantially higher confidence in all levels of government and nonprofit organizations than adults do. Their highest reported confidence is for the military (79%), the federal government (62%), and Congress (57%), while they have the least confidence

Overall, North Carolina youth place a higher value than their adult counterparts on ethnic diversity and report more interaction with other cultures than do adults. Youth in higher grade levels are significantly more likely to report that ethnic diversity is positive, as are youth from higher-income households.

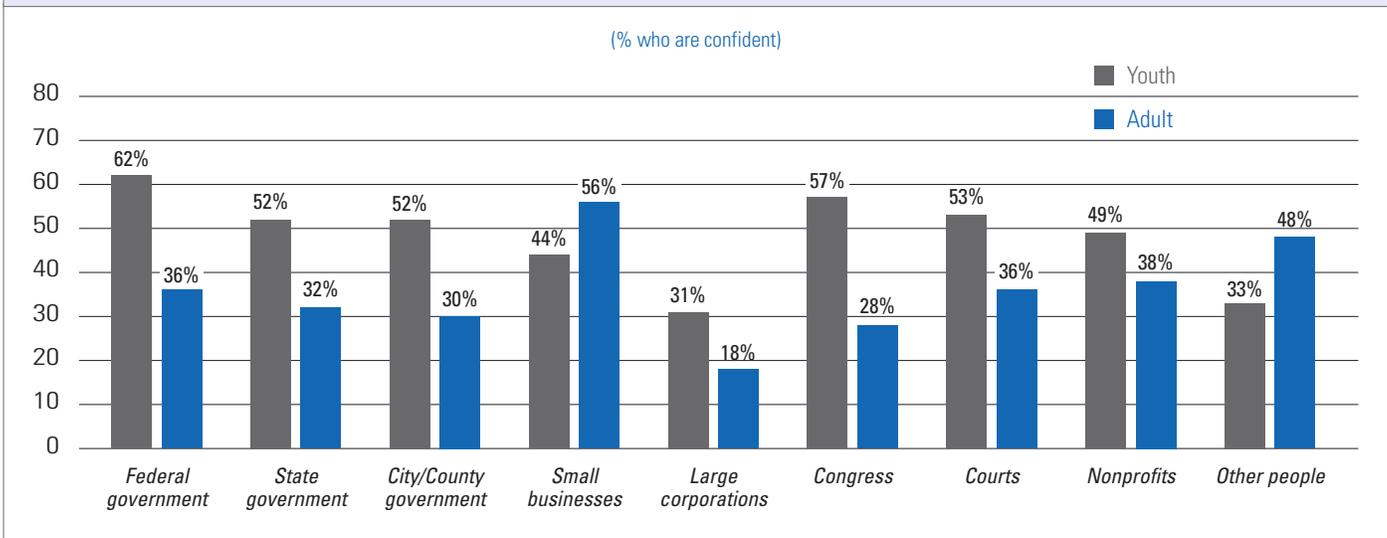
#1 Source of Information about Government



in large corporations (31%) and the news media (24%). Despite low confidence in the news media, adults and youth rank TV news as their number one source of information about government.

Older youth (i.e., 11th and 12th graders) express significantly lower confidence than younger youth in most institutions.

Confidence in Institutions and Other People: Youth-Adult Comparison



Only 50% of eligible North Carolina voters voted in the 2000 elections.

North Carolina youth show a stronger interest in voting than other youth around the nation.⁵ However, if their confidence levels continue to decline as they reach voting age, they may become adults with little desire to vote or participate fully in a democratic society. Ninety-four percent of North Carolina youth say they plan to vote always or sometimes; in reality, North Carolina's youngest voters, 18 to 24-year-olds, traditionally have been less likely to vote than older adults and are the least likely to report being registered to vote.⁶ Less than 53% of North Carolina's 18 to 24-year-olds report being registered to vote compared to more than 80% of adults over age 25.

Parents and family are the greatest influence on youth citizenship development.

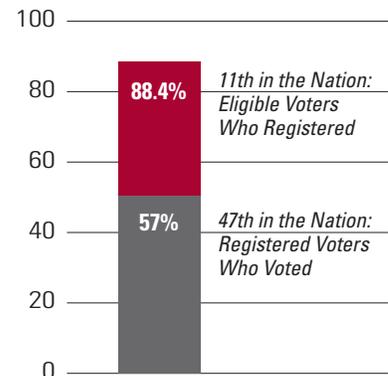
More than 83% of youth say they talk about current events with

family or friends very often or sometimes, and more than 67% report talking about politics at home very often or sometimes.

A substantial majority of youth indicate that parents are their primary role models for citizenship. The positive influence of families on youth citizenship development is pervasive and wide-ranging. Youth who report that someone in their household volunteers also report greater involvement in school clubs and better grade averages.

Youth who talk about politics at home demonstrate substantially higher levels of civic engagement across the board. They also have higher levels of knowledge as specifically related to government duties. These youth are more likely to say that they will vote when they are old enough. They are also more likely to report participating in several forms of political involvement and socializing or working with people from a different race or culture.

NC Voter Registration and Voting

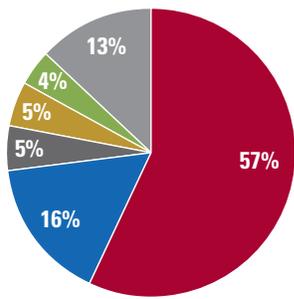


Source: Federal Election Commission⁷

Meaningful classroom dialogue about current events and relevant issues positively influences youth civic knowledge, anticipated voting behavior, political engagement, and volunteerism.

The Civic Index shows that youth who report that they are required to keep up with politics through their classes are substantially more likely

#1 Influence on Good Citizenship

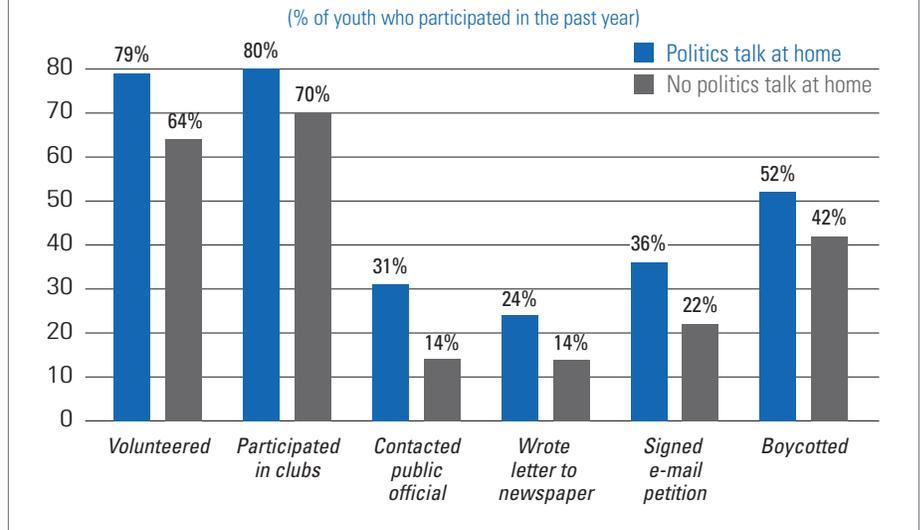


- Parents (57%)
- Teachers (16%)
- TV/Movie/Sports Stars (5%)
- President (5%)
- Religious Leaders (4%)
- Other (13%)

to report higher levels of political and community involvement. Discussions about current events also appear to have a positive impact on knowledge levels and anticipated voting behavior. Similarly, those youth who report that their civics classes connect studies to real-life issues report that they have learned much more about civics from those classes.

Youth who apply civics to real-life issues in school projects are 45% more likely to report learning a great deal about government and community issues from their classes.

Talking about Politics at Home Makes a Difference



However, it appears that too few students are getting these opportunities through school. For example, less than half (49%) report being involved in civics classes that connect studies to real-life issues, and the same number say that they take no classes requiring them to keep up with politics or current events.

Youth who have had a public official visit their classrooms are significantly more likely to have confidence in all levels of government and are

more likely to view government as a career option. Unfortunately, students rarely get this opportunity; almost three-quarters say they have never met or talked with a government official at school.

1. According to United Way of America, in 2001 North Carolina ranked 11th out of 52 (50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C.) in United Way per capita giving. North Carolina's average per capita donation was \$22.75; the national average per capita donation was \$16.05.
2. Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE: The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, *The Civic Mission of Schools* (New York, 2003), 17.
3. Rebecca Skinner and Christopher Chapman, *Service-Learning and Community Service in K-12 Public Schools* (Washington, D.C., 1999).
4. Independent Sector and Youth Service America, *Engaging Youth in Lifelong Service: Findings and Recommendations for Encouraging a Tradition of Voluntary Action Among America's Youth* (Washington, D.C., 2003), 5.
5. Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins, *The Civic and Political Health of a Nation: A Generational Portrait* (Washington, D.C., 2002).
6. Federal Election Commission, *Voter Turnout by Age, Gender and Race 1998*, <<http://www.fec.gov/pages/98demog/98demog.htm>>.
7. Ranking is out of 48 states and Puerto Rico; does not include North Dakota and Wisconsin. Federal Election Commission, *Voter Registration and Turnout 2000*, <www.fec.gov/pages/2000turnout/reg&to00.htm>.



Recommendations

Civic education for our young people should be a high priority for schools, families, and communities. Here are a few ways that North Carolinians can help:

FOR PARENTS & FAMILY

Setting an Example

Parents and family members can help young people become active, informed citizens by discussing political and current events with their children; volunteering time or donating money to meet community needs; and engaging in political activities, such as voting or attending public meetings.

FOR YOUTH PROGRAMS

Linking Service and Citizenship

Most of North Carolina's young people are involved in community service, but these experiences will have a stronger impact on their civic knowledge and school involvement if they more clearly address real community problems and are more clearly connected to civics studies.

Involving Diverse Youth

Schools and community organizations can help close the civics gap among youth from different backgrounds by ensuring that both nonwhite and lower-income youth have access to engaging civics programs. The key is to relate studies to issues that are relevant to all young people.

FOR SCHOOLS

Enhancing Existing Courses

All schools, especially middle and high schools, can have a positive impact on student civic knowledge and involvement by implementing a number of basic strategies. Those that can be particularly effective include active current events discussions; student interactions with public officials; and class activities, such as service-learning, that explore and address real school or community issues.

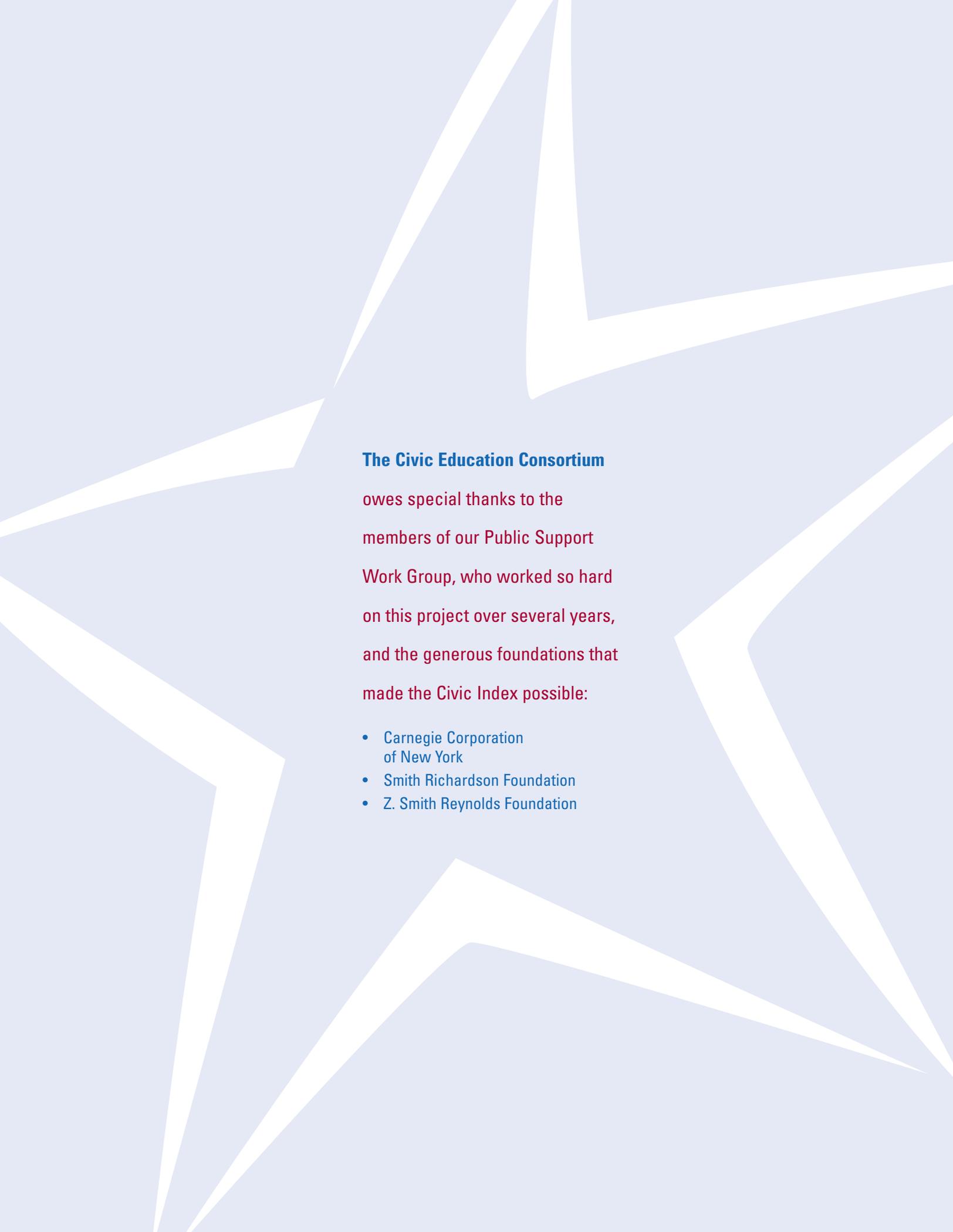
Providing Students with a Voice

National studies have consistently shown that involvement in student government and other leadership programs can be the strongest predictor of lifelong civic participation, especially voting. Schools can support their civic mission by fostering strong student councils that have a meaningful role in school issues. Additionally, schools can involve students through committees, surveys, and other activities that give students multiple opportunities to voice their viewpoints.

FOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Engaging Young People

The positive connection between interaction with public officials and youth confidence in government means that all public officials—elected and appointed—should create opportunities to talk with young people and find effective ways of involving youth in government programs, services, or decision making.



The Civic Education Consortium

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