

# The Role of Controversy in the Civic Mission of Schools

Shawn Healy

Resident Scholar

McCormick Foundation Civics Program

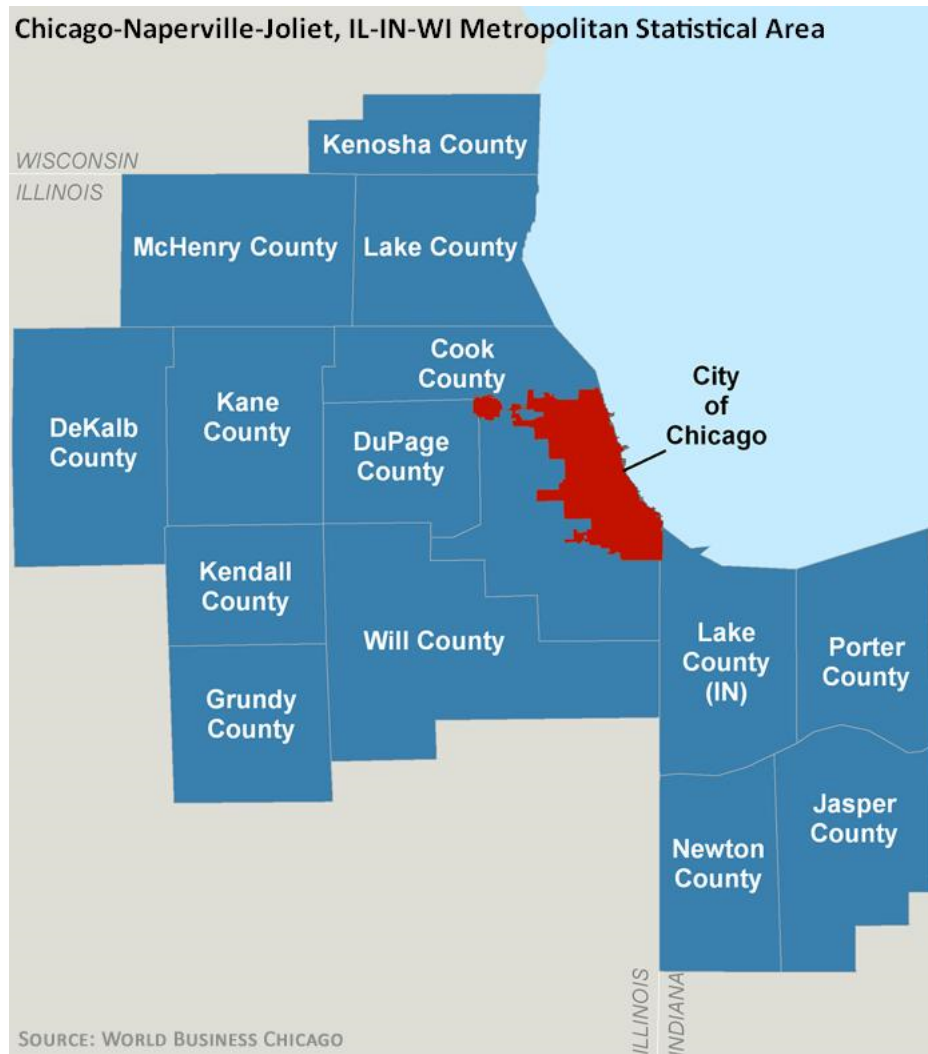
# Overview: The Role of Controversy in the Civic Mission of Schools

1. Our civic health
2. The state of civic education
3. Promising approaches to citizen development
4. Teaching with controversy: Empirical grounding
5. Sustained, systematic schoolwide commitments to civic learning

# Our Civic Health: The Chicago and Illinois Civic Health Indices



# Our Civic Health: Chicagoland Defined



# Measures of Civic Health:

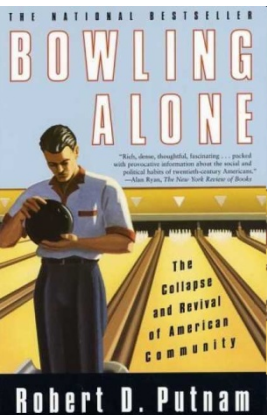
## Civic engagement and social capital

- Civic engagement:

1. Voting
2. Volunteering
3. Working with neighbors to fix a problem in the community
4. Expression of political voice
5. Financial contributions to community organizations

- Social capital:

1. Group membership
2. Private sociability
3. Discussion of current events and access to information

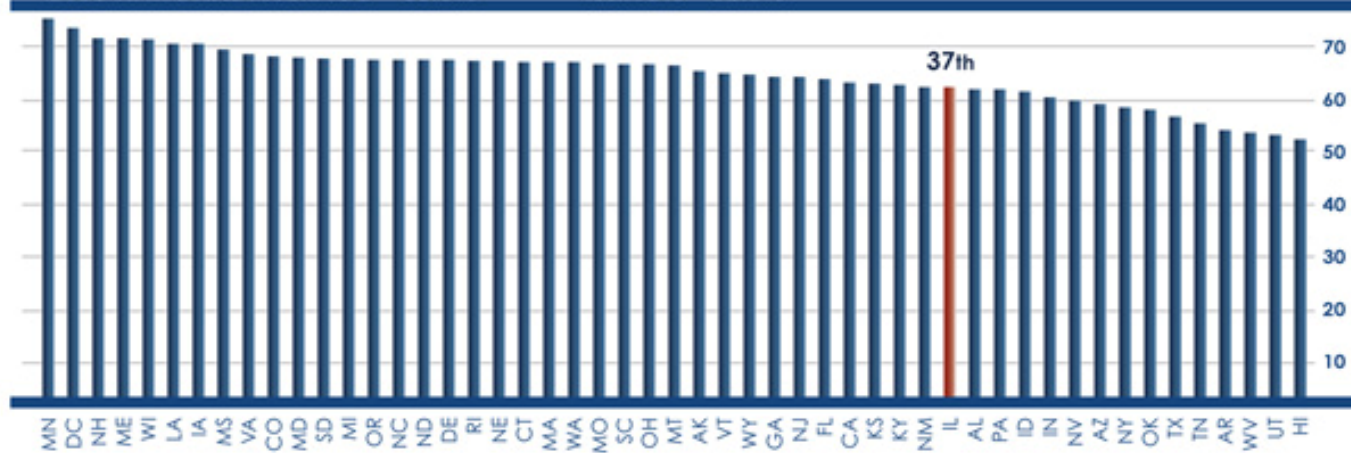


# Civic Engagement: Voting (Illinois)

**FIGURE 4: VOTER TURNOUT**

2008 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 63.6%

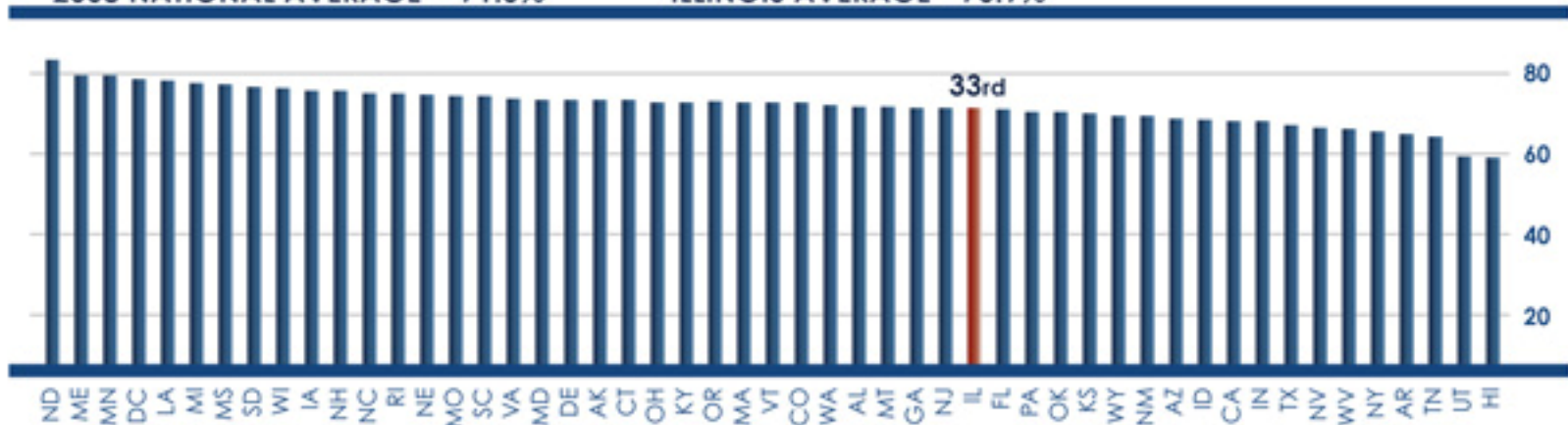
ILLINOIS - 62.6%



**FIGURE 1: VOTER REGISTRATION**

2008 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 71.0%

ILLINOIS AVERAGE - 70.9%



# Civic Engagement: Voting (Chicago)

- Voter turnout actually declined from 2004 to 2008 (65.5% to 62.1), and where we once outpaced national turnout, we lagged behind the rest of the state and nation (62.6% and 63.6)

- City residents voted more frequently than suburbanites

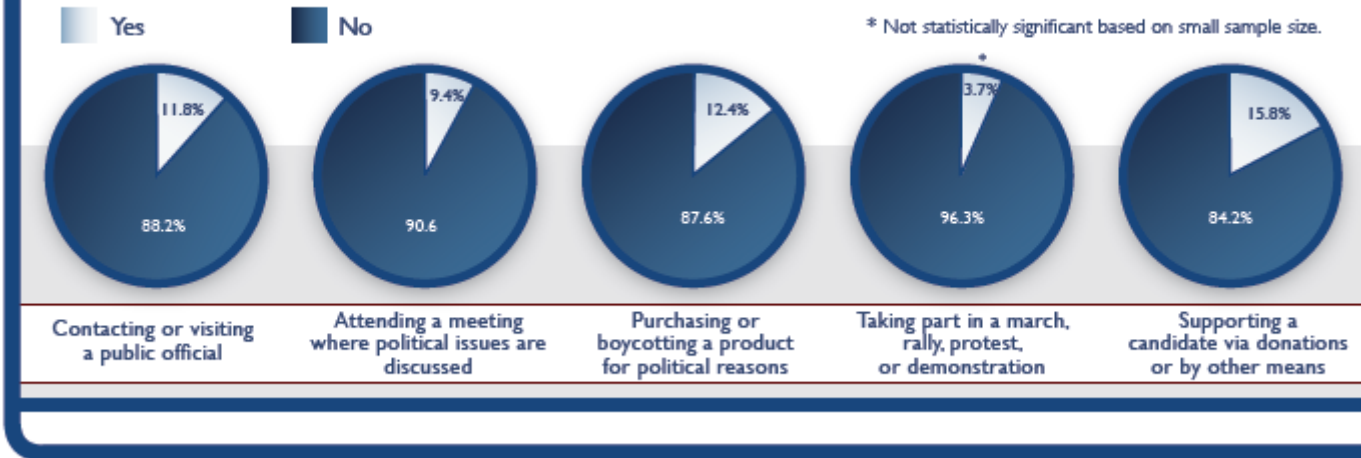
- Less than half of Millennials voted (49.9%)

- Voter turnout among registered voters exceeded national average at 90%

# Civic Engagement:

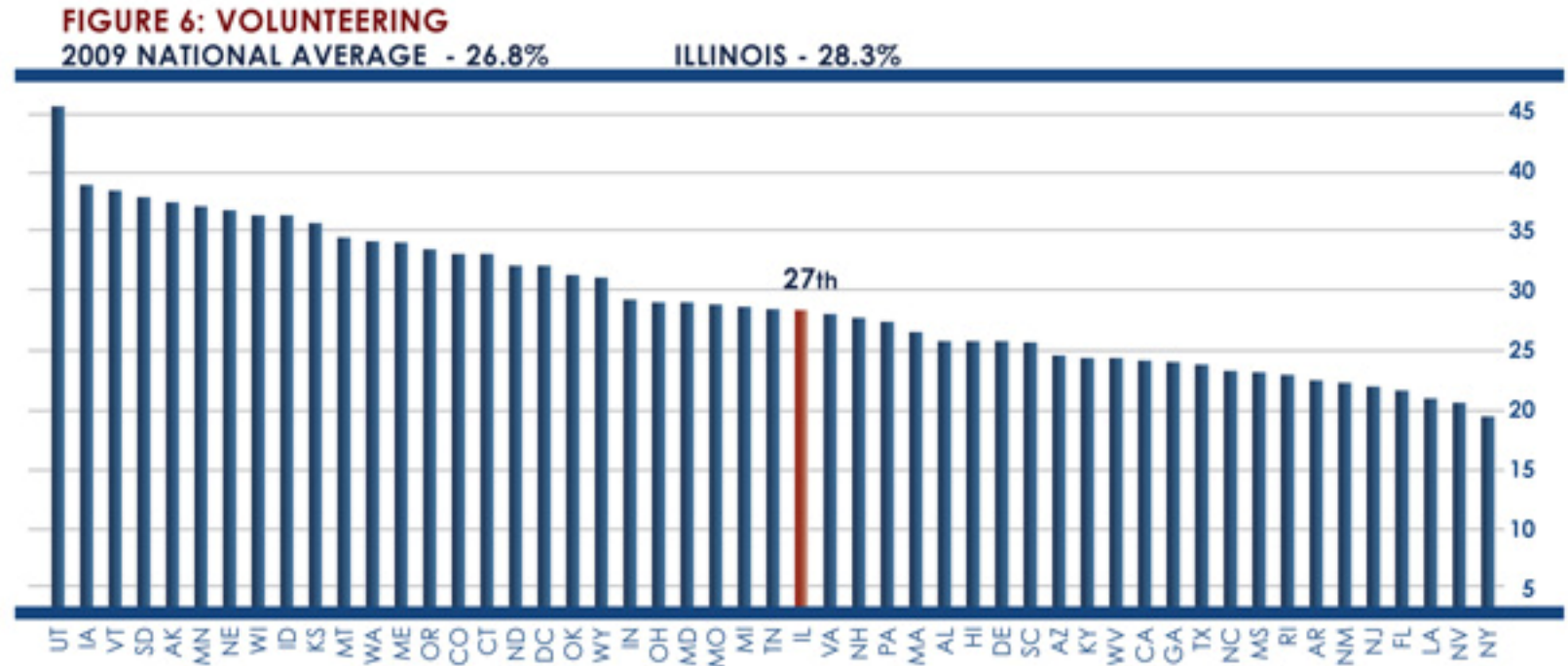
## Non-Political Participation (Chicago)

**FIGURE 1: FORMS OF NON-ELECTORAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**





# Civic Engagement: Volunteering (Illinois)



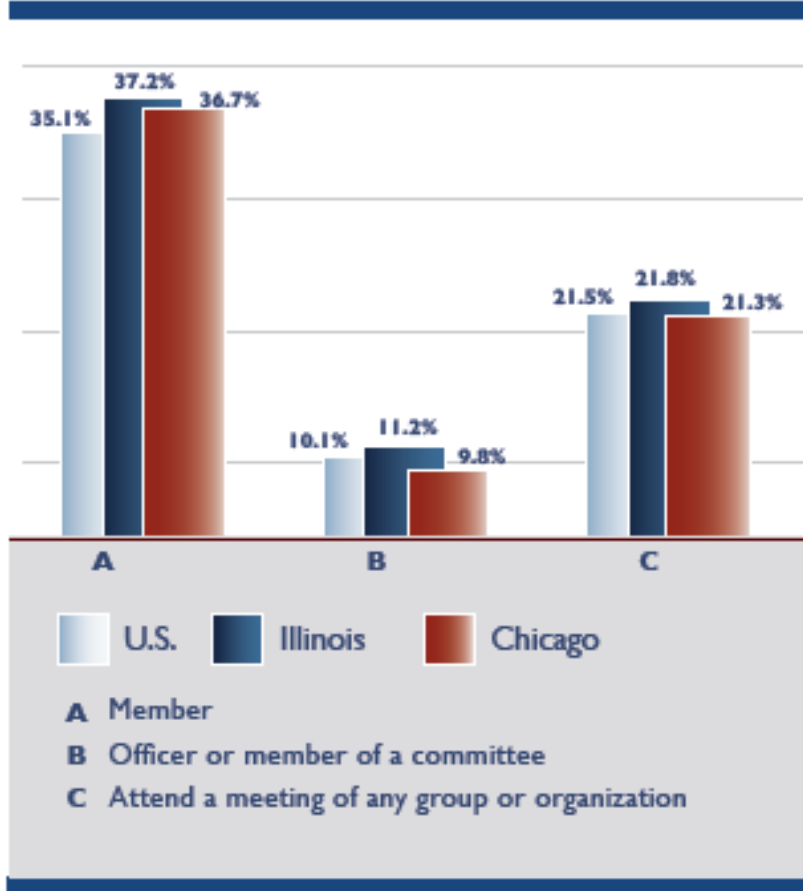
# Civic Engagement: Volunteering (Chicago)



- Chicago's volunteer rate ranks 38<sup>th</sup> among the 51 largest cities in the country
- Chicago volunteers averaged 28 hours per resident annually, ranking 45<sup>th</sup> of 51

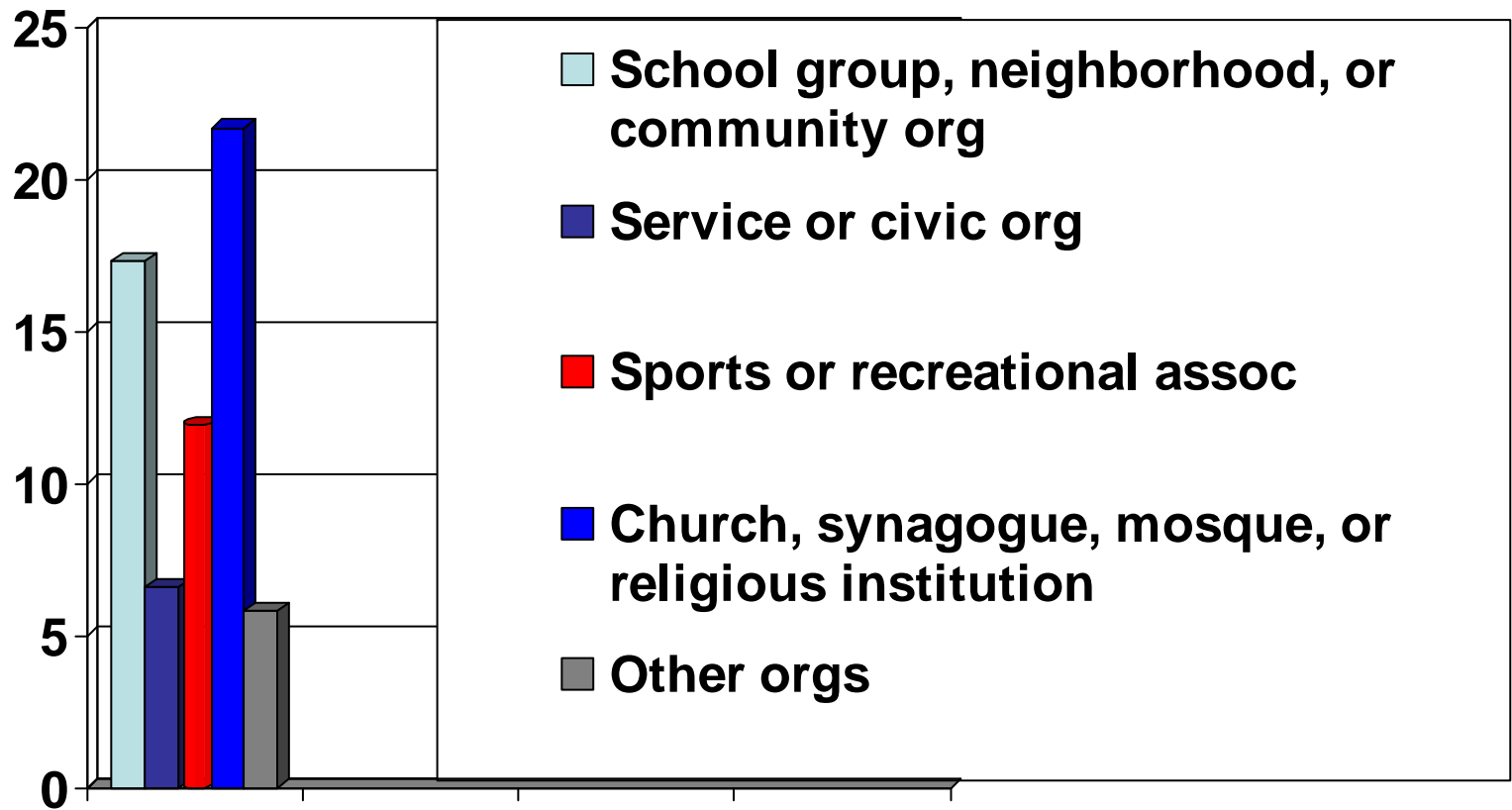
# Social Capital: Group Membership (Chicago)

**FIGURE 3: GROUP MEMBERSHIP**



# Social Capital:

## Forms of Group Participation (Chicago)

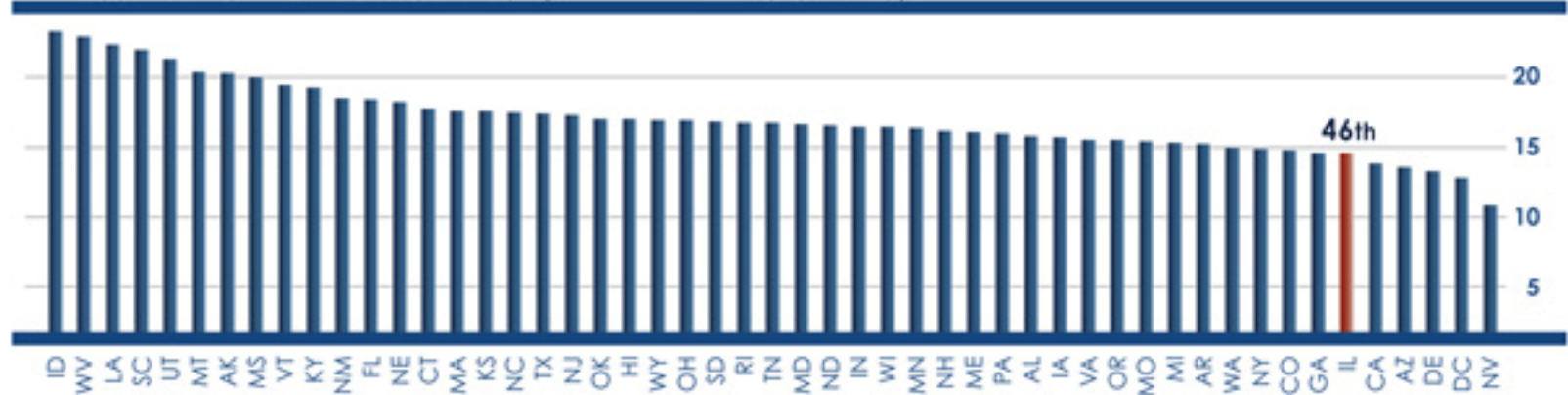


# Social Capital: Connectedness (IL)

**FIGURE 12: EXCHANGE FAVORS WITH NEIGHBORS**

2009 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 16.2%

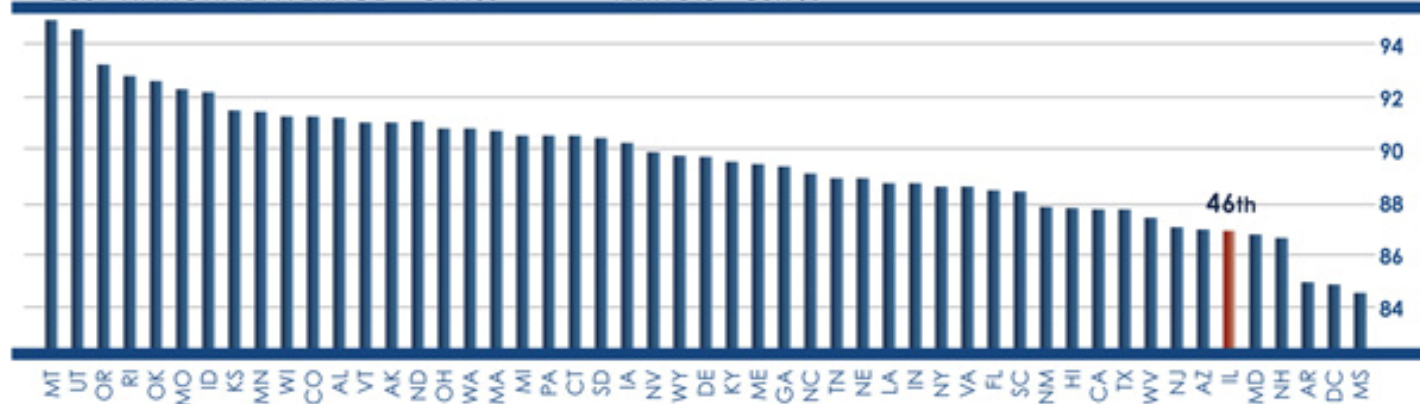
ILLINOIS - 14.5%



**FIGURE 13: EAT DINNER WITH FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS**

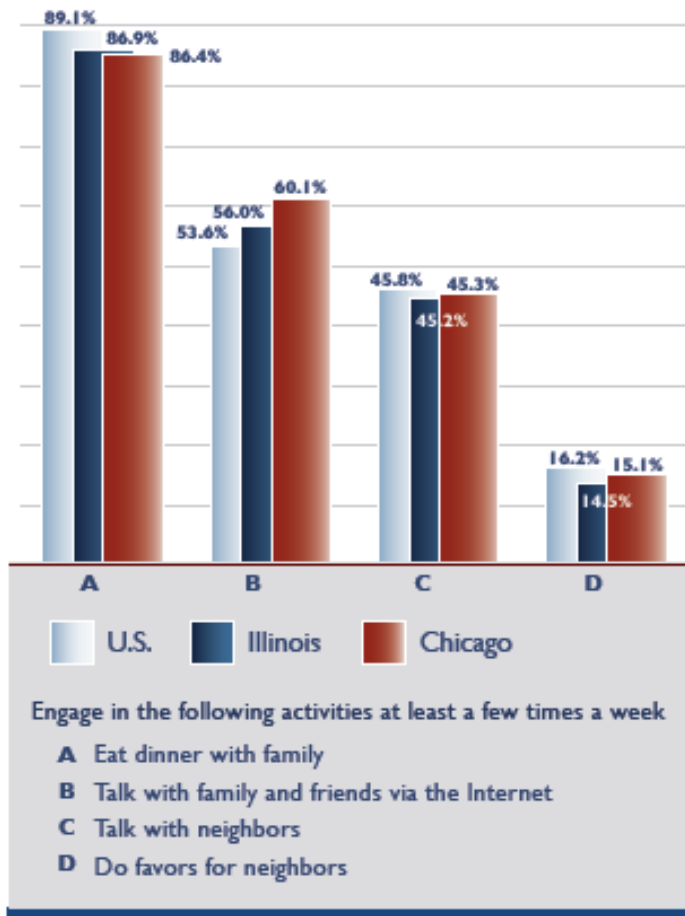
2009 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 89.1%

ILLINOIS - 86.9%



# Social Capital: Connectedness (Chicago)

**FIGURE 5: CONNECTEDNESS**

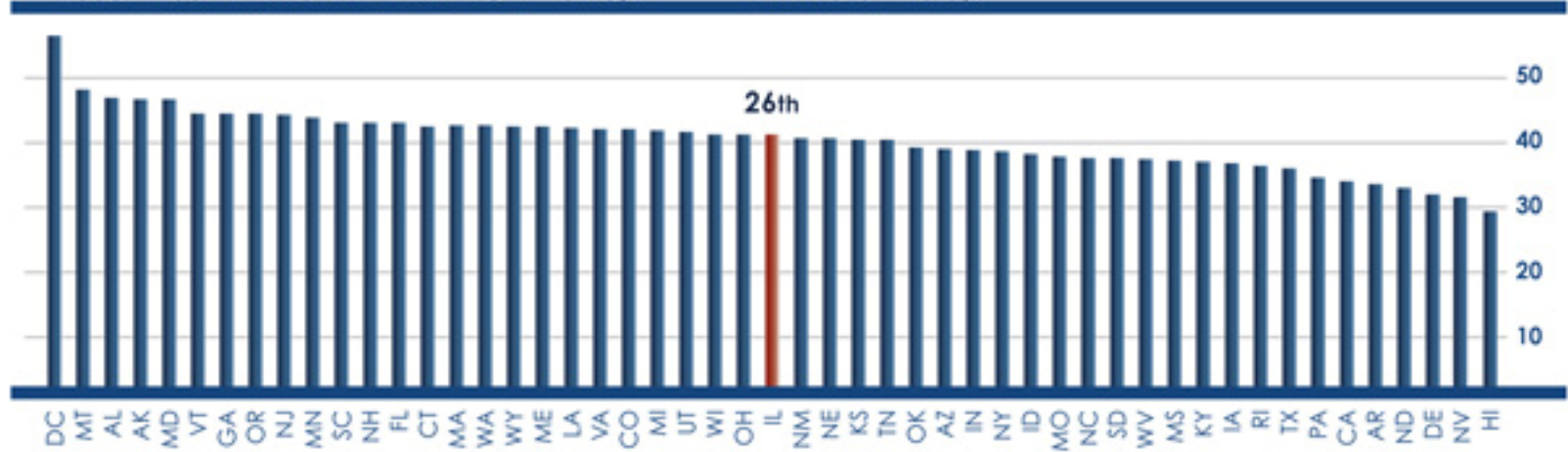


# Social Capital: Discuss Politics (IL)

**FIGURE 17: DISCUSS POLITICS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

2008 - 2009 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 39.3%

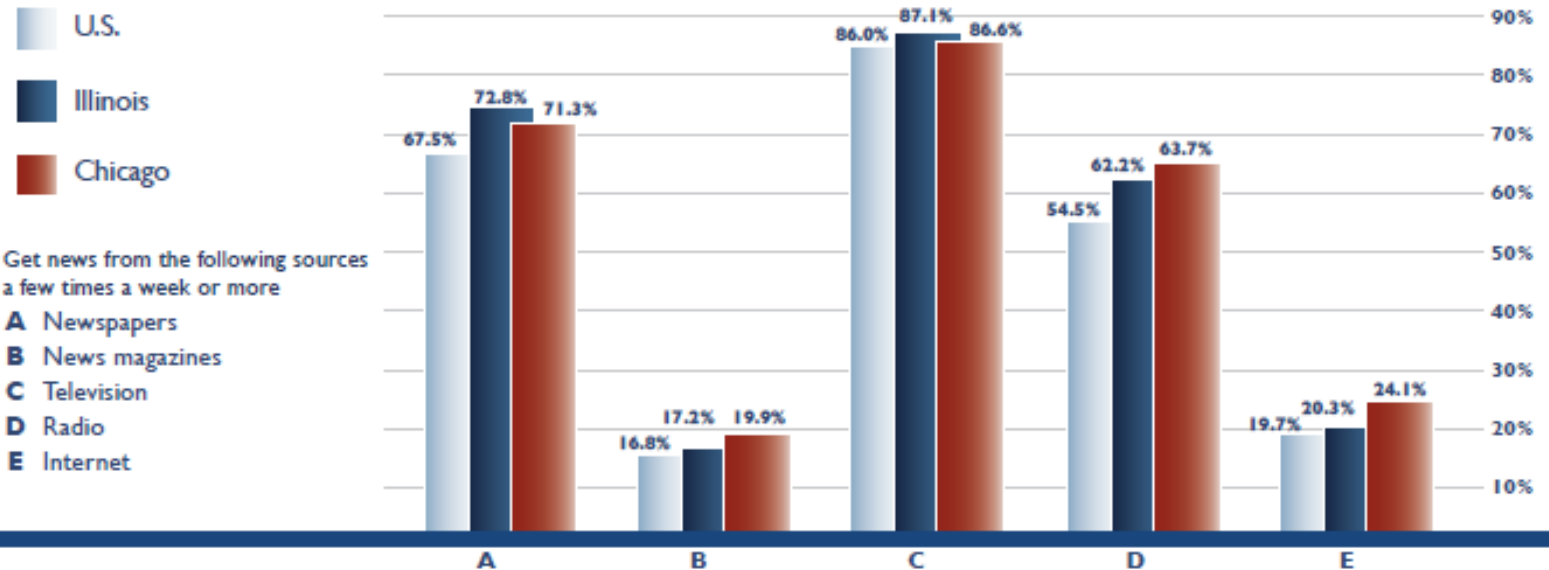
ILLINOIS - 40.6%



# Social Capital:

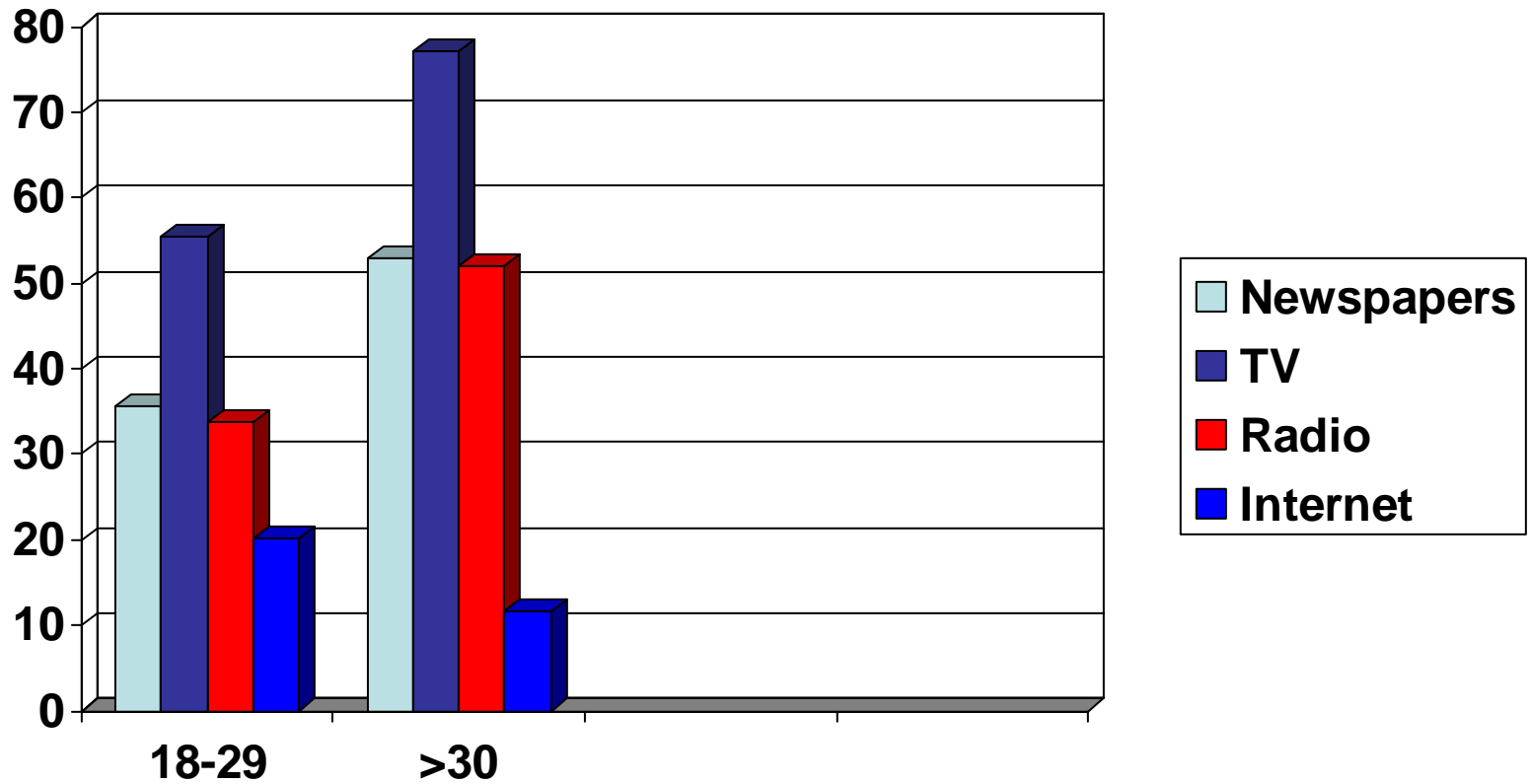
## News Attentiveness (Chicago)

**FIGURE 6: NEWS ATTENTIVENESS**





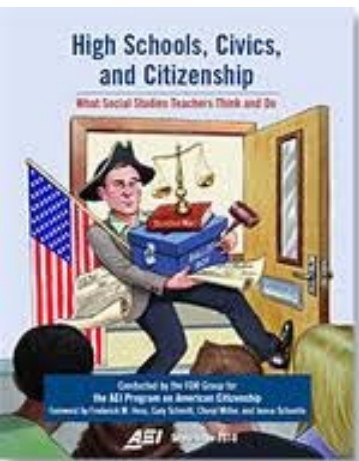
# Social Capital: News Attentiveness-- Millennials (Chicago)



# The State of Civic Education (U.S.)

● According to *High School, Civics, and Citizenship: What Social Studies Teachers Think and Do* (2010):

- In contrast to private schools, public school teachers feel that social studies is losing ground and increasingly neglected; also, uncertainly about precise content of civic education
- Bill of Rights ranked atop most important content knowledge—only 24% are confident that their students understand upon graduation
- Social studies teachers feel marginalized in the testing era—93% want social studies to be tested at the state level
- School environment for teaching social studies more favorable in private schools



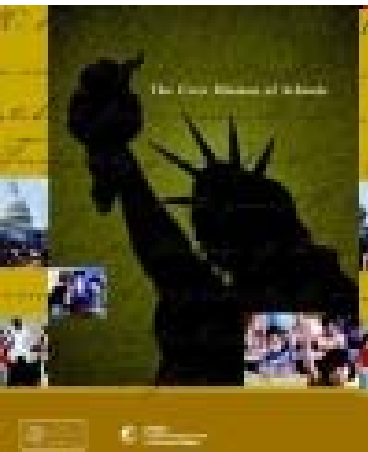
- subject more valued
- schools more focused on learning civic behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge
- student motivation and teacher autonomy more robust
- more confident that students graduate with requisite civic knowledge
- while not beholden to NCLB, private schools do address standards and engage in testing

# The State of Civic Education (Illinois)

- Illinois law requires civic instruction and character education, including the teaching of “American patriotism and the principles of representative government.”
- The implementation of civic education is left to individual school districts.
- According to the *2010 Civic Education in Illinois Faculty Survey*, the results of delegation yield significant variability:
  - While 98% of high school curricula address the powers and limitations of the different branches of government at the federal level, this number falls to 82% for state government, and a mere 51% for local government
  - 81% of social studies classes discuss controversial issues at least weekly
  - 90% provide information about public issues through the newspaper and other media
  - 96% ask open-ended questions to students for which there is no correct answer
  - 62% of students are always allowed to express their opinions in class, and another 35% most of the time
  - 71% of students are always encouraged to respect the opinions of others, and another 26% most of the time

# Promising Approaches to Citizen Development: The Civic Mission of Schools Report

- Six promising approaches outlined by the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools:



1. Formal instruction in US Government, history, law, and democracy using interactive methods and opportunities to apply learning to “real-life” situations.
2. *Discussion of current local, national and international events that students view as important to their lives and controversial political and social issues within political and social context.*
3. Service learning linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.
4. Extracurricular activities that encourage greater involvement and connection to school and community.
5. Authentic voice in school governance.
6. Participation in simulations of government structures and processes.

# Promising Approaches to Citizen Development: Core Indicators of Civic Engagement

## **A. Civic indicators**

1. Community problem solving
2. Regular volunteering for nonelectoral organization
3. Active membership in a group or association
4. Participation in a fundraising run/ walk/ ride
5. Other fundraising for charity

## **B. Political indicators**

1. Regular voting
2. Persuading others
3. Displaying buttons, signs, stickers
4. Campaign contributions
5. Volunteering for candidate or political orgs

## **C. Indicators of public voice**

1. Contacting officials
2. Contacting the print media
3. Contacting the broadcast media
4. Protesting
5. Email petitions
6. Written petitions
7. Boycotting
8. Buycotting
9. Canvassing

## **D. Indicators of cognitive engagement**

1. Following govt and public affairs
2. Talking with family and friends about politics
3. Political knowledge
4. Attention to the news media



# Promising Approaches to Citizen Development: The Illinois Civic Blueprint

● The Civic Blueprint for Illinois High Schools is designed to give educators, policymakers, parents, and all residents of the state:

1. Explanations of promising approaches to high school level civic education.
2. Examples of Illinois high schools, educators, and students using these approaches.
3. Recommendations for implementing these approaches in high schools across Illinois.
4. Resources that support schools and communities in promoting the civic engagement of Illinois high school students.

McCormick Foundation Conference Series

Creating A Civic Blueprint  
for Illinois High Schools



Educating for Democracy

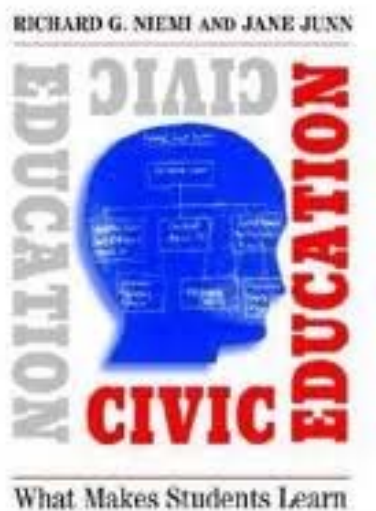
 McCormick  
Foundation

ROBERT R.  
**MCCORMICK**  
FOUNDATION

# Teaching with Controversy: Empirical Grounding

Students who did not take civics courses exhibited less knowledge about all aspects of government than those who did

- It is the amount and recency of civics course work that matters
- Civics courses not only improve student knowledge, but they also improve their reasoning capacities and ability to engage in discussions of civic affairs
- They also increase faith in government responsiveness and political efficacy tied to elections





# Teaching with Controversy: Empirical Grounding

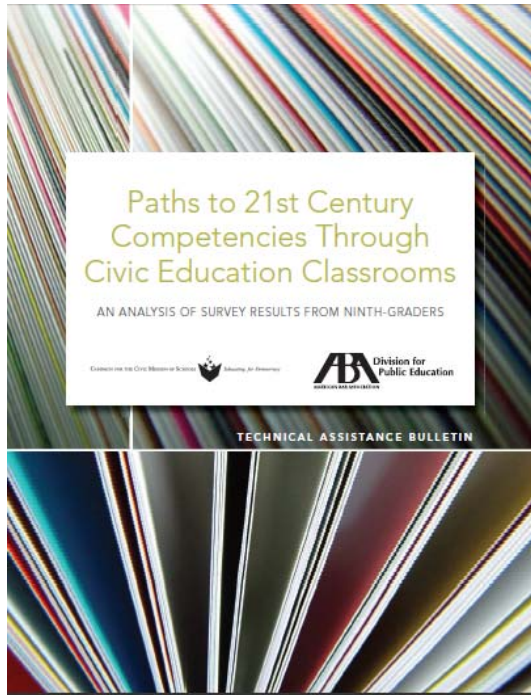
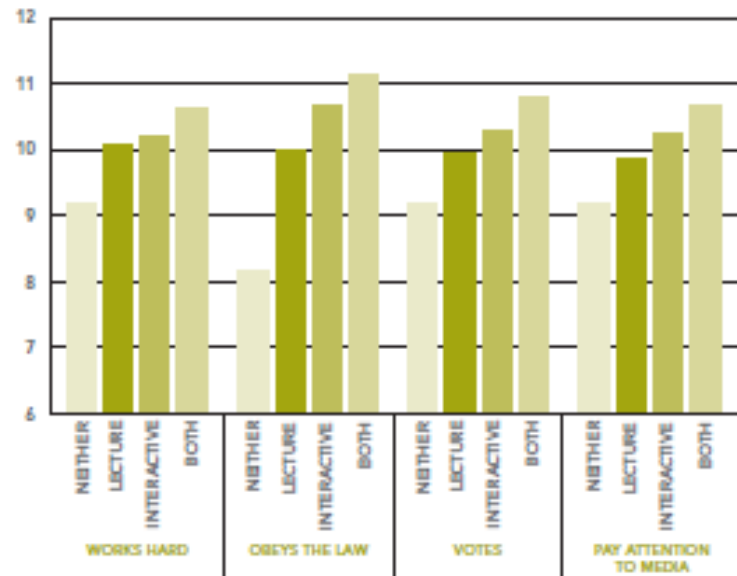
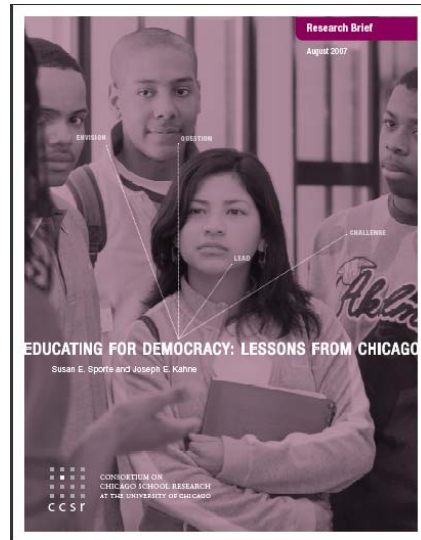


Figure 10. Norms of social responsibility by educational group\*

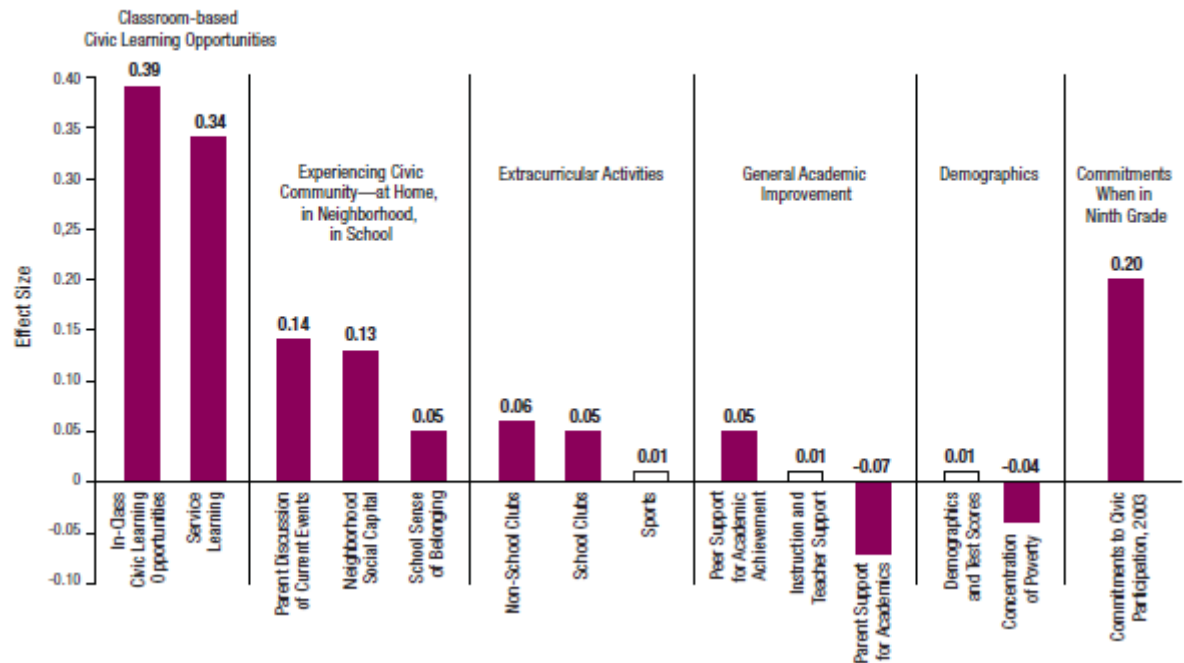




# Teaching with Controversy: Empirical Grounding

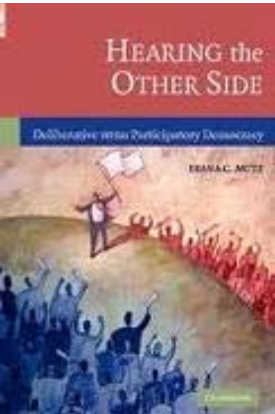


Developing Students' Civic Commitments (Data from 2005)

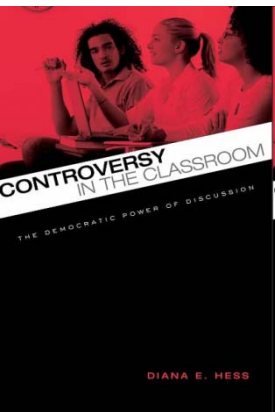


Example: Everyone has a responsibility to be concerned with state and local issues.

# Teaching with Controversy: Empirical Grounding



- “Deliberation and participation...do not go hand in hand. Homogeneous and heterogeneous social contexts serve two different, yet important, purposes in this regard.” (Mutz, 2006)
- Disturbing evidence of a dearth of political discussions among people with dissenting views
- Schools as a transformational site to facilitate such dialogue
- “We have to get young people comfortable with conflict. That’s when they’re more likely to engage politically. If we rely just on families to do this, it isn’t going to happen. Civic education has the potential to tap the openness of young people to arguments on both sides of important issues.” (Hess, 2009)



# Teaching with Controversy: Empirical Grounding

- How ideologically diverse are students, their classes, and their teachers? To what extent to they have coherent political views?
- To what extent to students recognize diversity in their midst?
- What impact do schools have on the likelihood that young people will develop into active, informed citizens?

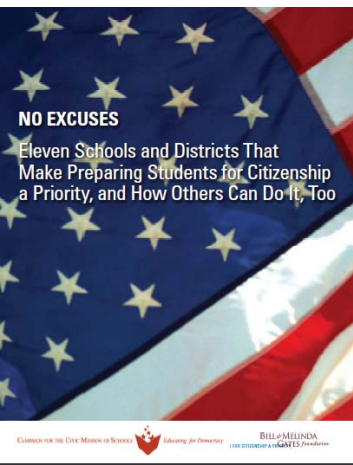


McDevitt



# Sustained, Systematic Schoolwide Commitments to Civic Learning

- Derived from the 2010 No Excuses report, schools with sustainable, systemic approaches to civic learning demonstrate the following :
  1. A vision for civic learning and shared leadership to see it through
  2. A strategically designed curriculum incorporating effective approaches to civic learning
  3. Hiring practices, performance reviews, and professional development that asserts and supports the importance of effective civic learning
  4. Opportunities to involve the community in the school and the school in the community
  5. A school environment that nurtures and models civic dispositions such as personal responsibility, student engagement in decision-making, and mutual respect and tolerance.



# The Role of Controversy in the Civic Mission of Schools

Questions?