



Snapshots

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Data Briefs on Civics in the Classroom

The Partnership for Civic Learning/ www.loufrey.org/pcl

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Student Civic Values: Does Classroom Experience Make a Difference?

- *A classroom climate that promotes more open discussion affects more than what students know about civics and government; it also affects the development of students' civic values.*
- *Most student respondents appear to have a classroom climate that allows them to express their opinions and encourages discussion.*
- *Having a say in what happens in the classroom is particularly important in promoting the development of civic values.*
- *The absence of a classroom climate that promotes open dialogue has a more noted negative effect on the development of civic values among students who are racial minorities and those who are less affluent.*
- *Overall, giving students a greater say in what happens in the classroom and a platform to express their opinions has a powerful effects on the development of civic values, including seeing the importance of speaking up for fairness, equality, and liberty.*

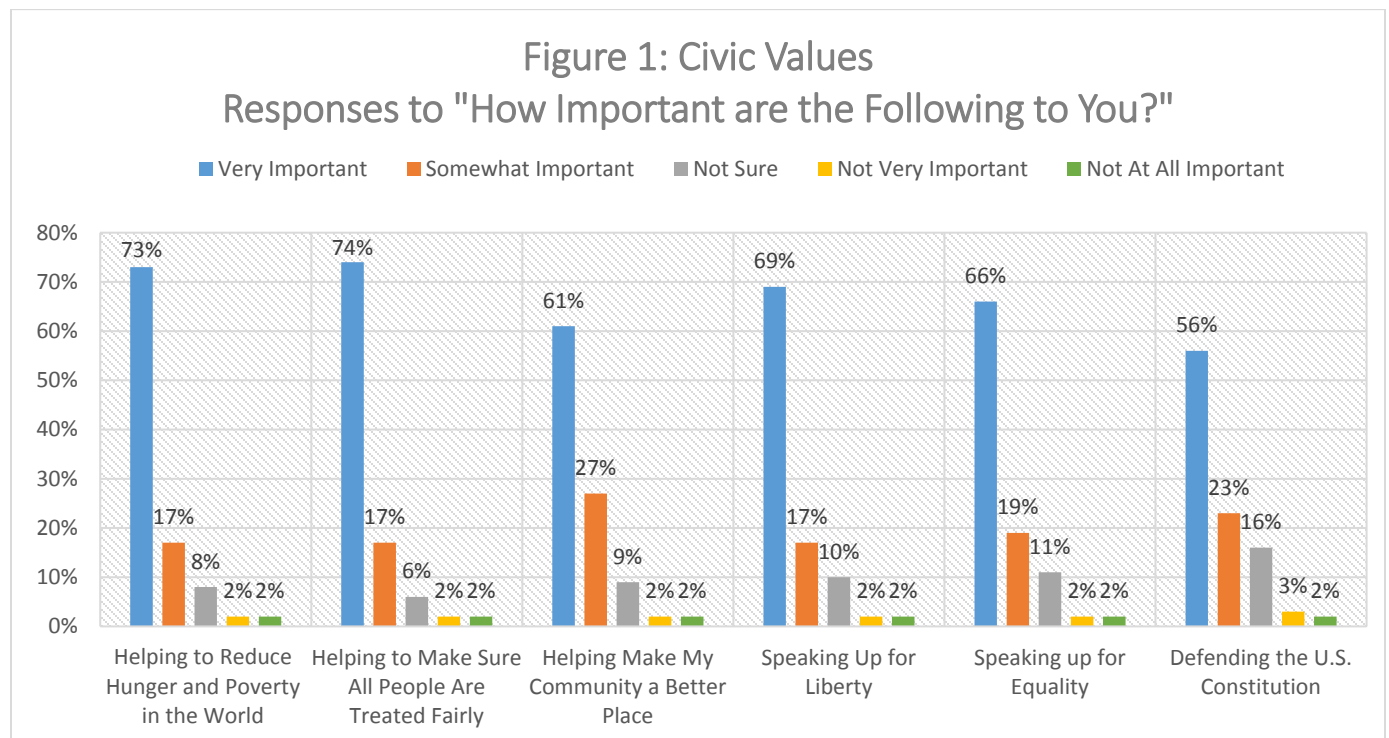
This Snapshot is one in a series highlighting results from the spring 2015 Civic Attitude and Engagement Survey. The Survey, conducted in May on behalf of the Partnership for Civic Learning, is based on the responses of more than 7,000 seventh grade students who were just completing a full year of civics instruction. Districts participating in the Survey included Miami-Dade, Clay and St. Lucie. More information on the survey may be found in the "About the Survey" at the end of this Snapshot.

Civic education is intended to prepare students for their roles as engaged and responsible citizens in a democratic society. Thus, it is intended to provide students with knowledge about the system of government and civic life and to build the skills and civic dispositions associated with

democratic citizenship. The Civics End-of-Course Assessment tests student knowledge, but does not assess civic skills and dispositions. That is the goal of the Civic Attitude and Engagement Survey.

In this Snapshot, we consider the extent to which classroom climate contributes to the development of students' civic values.

Civic Values. To measure civic values, students were asked to respond to a series of questions concerning how important the following were 1) helping to reduce hunger and poverty in the world; 2) helping to make sure all people are treated fairly; 3) helping make my community a better place; 4) speaking up for liberty; 5) speaking up for equality; and 6) defending the U.S. Constitution.



Classroom Climate. The national consensus report on civic education, *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*, offers up evidence supporting the conclusion that classroom climate contributes to the formation of civic values by teaching “the importance of community (both within the school and more broadly), respectful dialogue about controversial issues, creative problem solving, collaboration, teamwork, and the importance of diversity.” In this survey, the measures concerning the encouragement of open discussion include: (1) could disagree with the teacher, if they were respectful; (2) could disagree with each other, if they were respectful; (3) had a voice in what happens; and (4) were encouraged to express opinions.

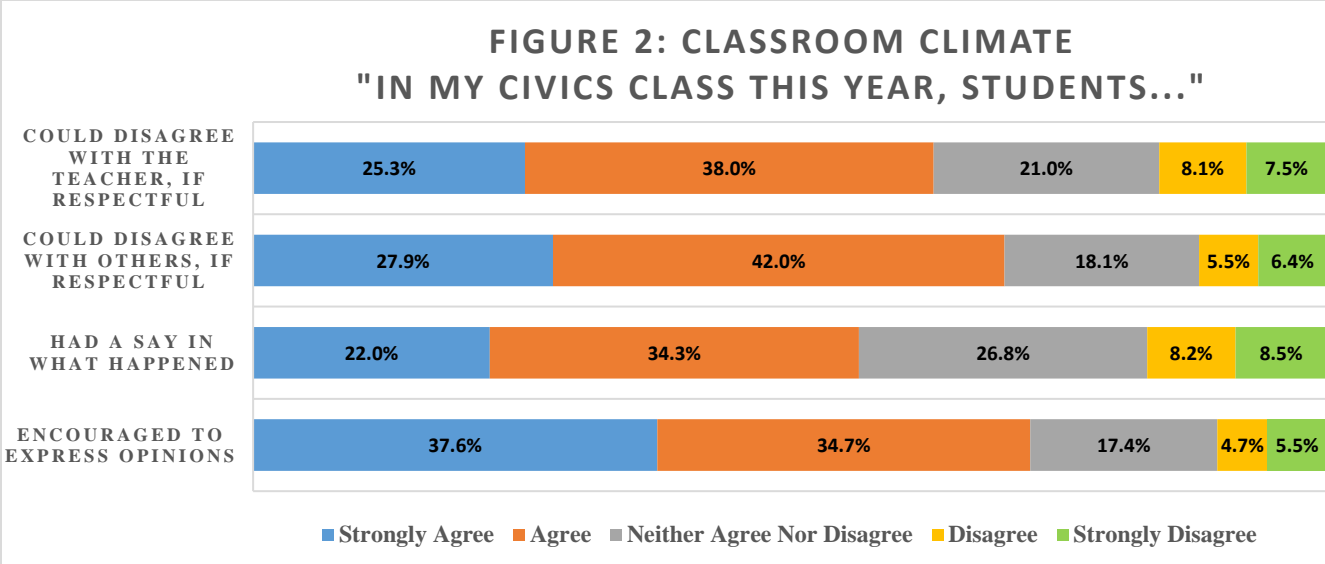
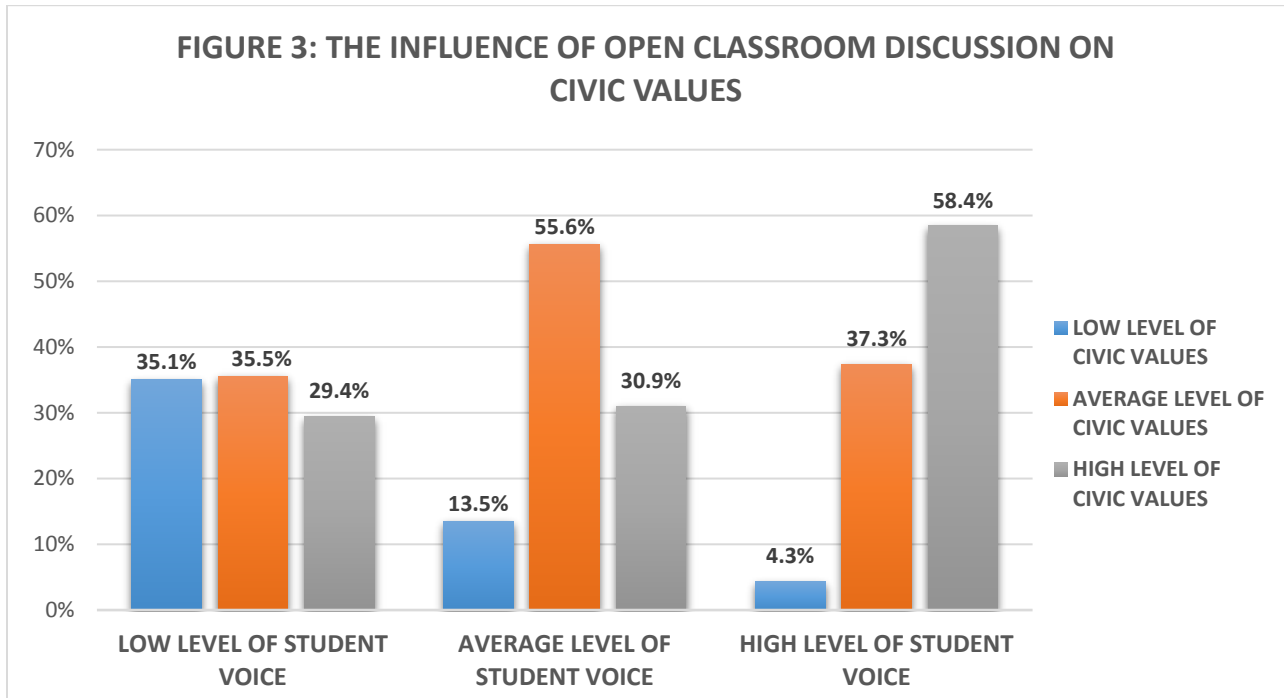


Figure 2 indicates that most students either agreed or strongly agreed that their civics classroom had an environment that encouraged open discussion. In particular, the majority of students (72.3%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were encouraged to express their opinions, which indicates an open and inclusive classroom. Most students also felt that they could express disagreement as long as they were respectful. In fact, 69.9% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they could disagree with each other as long as they were respectful, while 63.3% reported the same in relation to disagreeing with their teacher. A little over half (56.3%) also stated that they had a say in what happened in the classroom.

In terms of the effect size, which measures the extent to which each level of student voice explains a change in students’ development of civic values, the least mentioned opportunity for a student to express their opinion, “had a say in what happened in the classroom,” demonstrated the largest effect on students’ development of civic values (12%). This was followed by “encouraged to express opinions“ (10% effect) and “could disagree with others, if respectful” (7% effect). This suggests that allowing students to have a more active voice in the classroom may be particularly beneficial in improving students’ civic values.

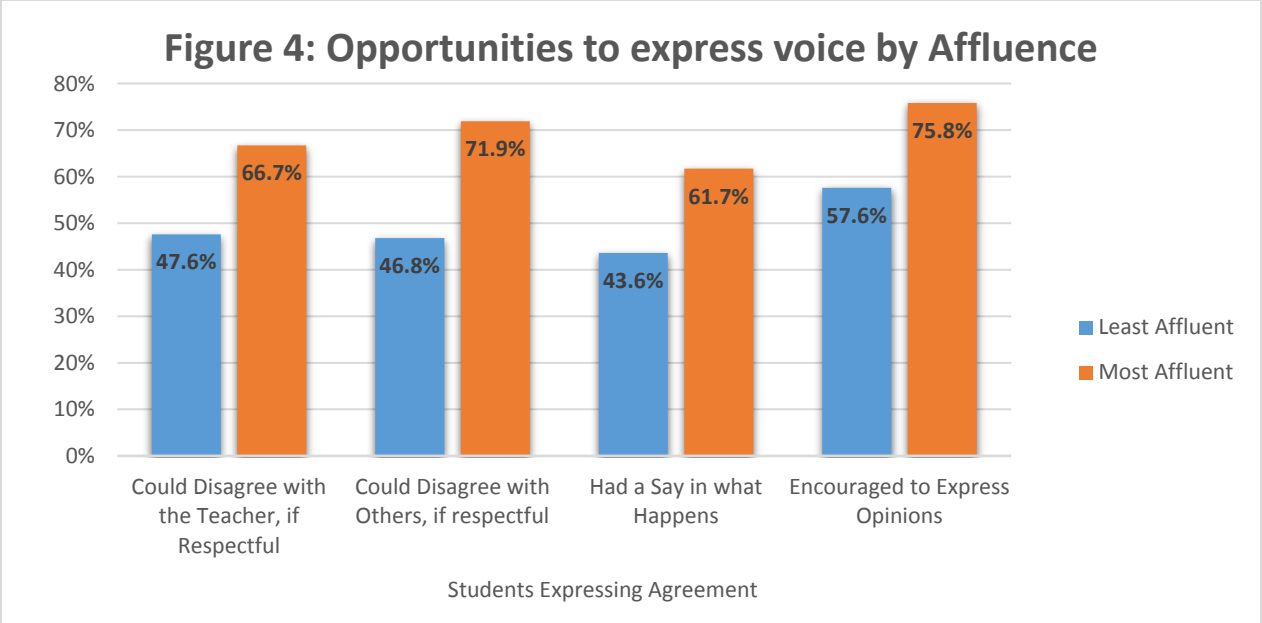
Does classroom climate matter? An analysis of classroom climate and the development of students’ civic values demonstrates that there are significant differences in overall civic values among students who did not have as many opportunities to express their voice, students who had a few opportunities to express their voice, and students who felt that they were free to express their voice in each of the situations related to classroom discussion. Figure 3 shows the change in level of student voice based on the number of instances students agreed that they could express their voice in the classroom. For the purposes of this analysis, the six civic values questions were combined into an index to measure overall civic values (viz., how many values each student reported agreement with). As illustrated in Figure 3, students who had higher levels of student voice were more likely to have a high level of civic values. In fact, the majority of those who had an average or high level of student voice had an average or higher level of civic values.

Furthermore, the majority (58.4%) of those with the highest level of student voice also had the highest level of civic values. On the other hand, over a third of students (35.1%) who were in classroom climates that allowed students a low level of student voice demonstrated low levels of civic values.



In exploring the contributions of classroom climate more closely, students who were racial minorities and did not have as many opportunities to express their opinions in the classroom were more likely to have a low level of civic values (44.8%) than non-minority students (24.8%) who also had a low level of student voice. Yet, the same percentage of minority students and non-minority students (58%) with a high level of student voice reported a high level of civic values.

Similarly, less affluent students were less likely to have a high level of civic values than the more affluent students. In fact, comparing the category of least affluent students to the most affluent students, less affluent students who reported a low level of student voice were more likely to have a lower level of civic values (51.6%) than the most affluent students who also reported a low level of student voice (32.1%). Figure 4 demonstrates that the least affluent students were also less likely than the most affluent students to say that they had a voice across each of the student voice measures. However, when the least affluent students had a high level of student voice, they were more likely to have a high level of civic values (67.7%) than the most affluent students who likewise had a high level of student voice (57.9%).



Thus, while most student respondents appear to have a classroom climate that was conducive to open discussion and freedom of expression in relation to civics education, these results indicate that efforts to empower students by allowing more opportunities to express their opinions in the classroom should result in greater development of civic values. In particular, a classroom climate that encourages open discussion may be an especially important in developing civic values among students who are a member of a racial minority or are less affluent than other students.

About the Survey

In the spring of 2015, the Lou Frey Institute administered The Civic Attitude and Engagement Survey to 7th grade students who were currently enrolled in civics courses in the following Florida school districts: Miami-Dade County, Clay County, and St. Lucie County. 7,436 students in 75 middle schools were surveyed in total; 88% of schools were located in Miami-Dade County, 10.7% in Clay County and 1.3% in St. Lucie County. The survey was composed of 20 items or question blocks. It was intended to provide districts with a tool to measure the extent to which completion of 7th grade civics affects students’ (1) civic proficiencies and readiness for future engagement as informed citizens; (2) commitment to democratic values and rights; (3) knowledge of current events; (4) efficacy/self-confidence about one’s ability to contribute to society; and (5) experience with recommended pedagogies for civics.

About the Florida Partnership for Civic Learning

The Florida Partnership for Civic Learning was formed with the mission to undertake research, evaluation, and development projects intended to support continuous improvement of student civic learning outcomes in K-12 education. Partnership members include the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship (FJCC) at University of Central Florida and University of Florida, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), the Florida Association of Social Studies Supervisors (FASSS), and CIRCLE at Tufts University.