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Civics Standards to Practice: The Impact of Required Pedagogy on Student Outcomes

By

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## Abstract

Civics Standards to Practice: The Impact of Required Pedagogy on Student Outcomes

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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There is a growing body of evidence indicating that civics instruction in school classrooms is important to consider when exploring pathways to increase youths' civic attitudes and behaviors. In the present dissertation, I examined students' self-reported experiences receiving state-mandated civics instruction throughout middle school years and the correlations between students' perceived experiences of various pedagogical approaches and student' civic attitudes and behaviors. In addition, outside classroom school factors, namely school climate and extracurricular engagement, were measured as potential predictors for increased civic attitudes and behaviors. The data used in this study were drawn from a 2023 study by the Center for Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University. Participants in this study consisted of 443 adolescents (Grade 8) residing in the state of Illinois and separated into White and non-White subsamples. Separate hierarchical regressions were performed with data from the White and non-White subsamples. Only service learning meaningfully contributed to civic participation in the White and non-White subsamples. School climate meaningfully contributed to civic efficacy and civic responsibility in the White subsample and civic responsibility and voting in the non-White subsample. Further, extracurricular engagement only meaningfully contributed to civic participation in the non-White subsample. The findings of the present dissertation are both consistent and inconsistent with previous research demonstrating school factors' influence on civic attitudes and behaviors. Nonetheless, this dissertation underscored the role of schools in fostering young people to be participants in democracy. The results of the study can help future researchers and other educational stakeholders prioritize the creation of opportunities for students to participate in civic life inside and outside of the classroom.

## **Civics Standards to Practice: The Impact of Required Pedagogy on Student Outcomes**

The 2020 presidential election occurred during a raging pandemic, a fierce fight for racial justice, and a country more stressed than ever before (American Psychological Association, 2020). Although the stakes were high, one thing remained clear: Young people across America made their voices heard at the ballot box at a record-breaking rate and paved the way for Donald Trump's defeat (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE], 2020). Approximately 50% of young, eligible voters (ages 18–29) voted in the 2020 general election, compared to 39% in the 2016 general election (CIRCLE, 2020). The youth voter turnout was particularly important in the 2020 election, as the outcome in “battleground states”—or states that generally have similar levels of support among voters from each major political party (i.e., Democrat and Republican) and could be won by a swing in votes (e.g., Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona)—was largely attributed to their votes. In addition to voting in elections, a 2022 post-election survey completed by CIRCLE indicated that a majority of young people (ages 18–29) view politics and community involvement as important to their personal identity (Booth et al., 2023).

Although the aforementioned statistics may appear to be promising, the fact that approximately half of voting-eligible young people did not cast their ballots is alarming and problematic for democracy in the United States (Esser & Vreese, 2007). Wattenberg and colleagues (2015) found major declines in recent political engagement (2010–2017) compared to earlier cohorts. Not only have voters over the age of 60 generally turned out to vote for presidential elections at three times the rate of Americans between the ages of 18–29, but the United States also has one of the lowest rates of youth political engagement in the world (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014). Further, fewer than half of young people surveyed by CIRCLE in 2022 reported signing a petition or joining a boycott, and only approximately 14% reported participating in a march or demonstration. However, it is important to note that research suggests that this may be due to youth feeling ill-informed and underqualified to participate in political life (Booth et al., 2023). Booth and colleagues (2023) suggested that if young people were given opportunities, they would be more likely to engage in politics. Moreover, the 2020 general election in the United States highlighted the impact that youth voter turnout can have on a national election. If young people are given the proper tools and opportunities, they can strengthen the United States democracy (CIRCLE, 2020).

Young people's engagement with politics may be influenced by the experiences they have within their local community (CIRCLE, 2019). However, young people are not receiving enough opportunities to engage with their communities and the larger political world (Coley & Sum, 2012; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Syvertsen, 2011). The consequences of limited opportunities for community or political engagement are reflected in the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment, an exam that is mandated by the United States Congress and administered to students throughout the country to measure knowledge and skills that are critical for being able to participate in democracy (NAEP, 2022). In 2022, the most recent results of the NAEP assessment, civics scores declined for the first time since the assessment was first given in 1998. Approximately 30% of the students who were tested scored “below basic,” meaning they have not met the suggested grade level competency of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for adequate engagement in democracy. Further, only 20% of students obtained a score of “Proficient,” or exhibited competence over subject-matter knowledge,

application of that knowledge to real world situations, and analytical skills related to the subject matter.

The NAEP statistics are alarming, given researchers' argument that democracy requires a culture that fosters a strong sense of commitment to civic responsibility among all its citizens (Battistoni, 1997; Nishishiba et al., 2005). Therefore, in order to increase civic engagement among youth, it is critical to identify potential factors within communities that influence civic engagement (Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012).

Public schools are the only community-based institutions that can reach almost every young person in the country, thus making schools a potential incubator for increasing youth civic engagement (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011). Schools in the United States play one of the most significant roles in preparing youth for adulthood (Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012) by not only kickstarting their civic knowledge and participation (Osman et al., 2020), but also by empowering youth to feel committed to goals and values in their communities and society at large. Some studies suggest that the information received in secondary school environments supersedes the political information young people receive outside of school; therefore, schools may be the primary environment through which political information is transmitted (Bailey, 1976; Button, 1974; Lambert & Klineberg, 1967; Levinson, 2010).

More recent research has suggested that when pre-voting adolescents are engaged in conversations and experiences that include politics and social issues, their commitment to participating in politics increases (Campbell, 2006; Flanagan, 2013; Franklin, 2004; Green et al., 2003; Osman et al., 2020). Further, research indicates that one's civic values and beliefs starts to form in adolescence and people who form their own values regarding civics during adolescence are more likely to participate in politics during early adulthood and beyond (Malin et al., 2017; Youniss et al., 1997). Thus, a major purpose of the United States' public education institution should be to provide youth the tools to be citizens in a democracy and prepare them to be visionaries for the nation's future through the maintenance of democratic values (Ben-Porath, 2012; Hedges, 2009; National Council for the Social Studies, 2018). Researchers have suggested that civics education may positively contribute to young people's civic behavior (Campbell & Niemi, 2015; Galston, 2001; Levinson, 2012; Martens & Gainous, 2013; Neudorf et al., 2016); however, researchers, scholars, and policy makers have not come to a consensus on exactly how to foster civically engaged youth in schools.

Therefore, the purpose of the present dissertation research is to explore middle school students' self-reported experiences receiving state-mandated civics instruction throughout their middle school years (Grades 6–8) and the correlation between students' perceived experiences of various pedagogical civic approaches and student civic attitudes and behaviors. To this end, in my literature review, I present an overview of civic engagement and civics education. First, I will review a conceptual framework for civic engagement and highlight the disparities that exist regarding civic engagement opportunities for youth. Next, I will review common measurements of civic engagement and how they are used in the literature. Then, I will outline evidence-based pedagogical practices that research has suggested to be high quality civics education instruction. Further, I review school-based practices outside of the classroom that have been deemed important for fostering civic engagement. Next, I review the educational policy regarding civics education generally and then will report on the state being studied in the present research, Illinois.

## **Civic Engagement**

Civic engagement can be defined as an individual's "attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, and skills that are aimed at improving society and is derived from an interest in improving the common good" (Rossi et al., 2016, p. 1041). According to Osman and colleagues (2020), civic engagement encompasses one's cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral interactions with their communities and the broader society. Thus, civic engagement is an umbrella term that broadly includes one's citizenship, political socialization, and political participation in society (Osman et al., 2020).

### **Citizenship**

Citizenship can be defined as one's membership in their state or country that guarantees an individual's civil rights in their political entity (Osman et al., 2020). An individual's citizenship is related to their attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, and skills which they use to impact society (Rossi et al., 2016). The responsibilities of citizens are dependent on an individual's current stage of life and, in the United States, increase once a citizen is 18 years of age or older. Importantly, voting in elections is one of the major responsibilities that begin at the age of 18 (Hart & Atkins, 2011). In order to uphold democracies, it is expected that adolescents learn and be prepared to take on the roles and responsibilities of citizens once they are no longer minors (CIRCLE, 2022).

### **Political Socialization**

Political socialization can be defined as the influence of social institutions on one's citizenship (Osman et al., 2020). A person's political socialization can be promoted or hindered by different institutions, such as school and religious organizations, as well as socializing agents such as parents, teachers, and peers, at different stages across their lifespan (Flanagan, 2004; Osman et al., 2020; Sears & Brown, 2013; Smith, 1999; Watts, 1999). Social contexts, such as an individual's family and peers, contribute to adolescents' development of attitudes and behaviors related to politics. These environmental contexts provide opportunities for open discussion about social issues, challenging the knowledge adolescents are constructing about social issues in other contexts, and allowing adolescents to be cognizant of their future role as citizens in a democratic society (Rossi et al., 2016).

For example, McIntosh and colleagues (2007) found that there was a positive association between parents who took time to have daily discussions with their adolescent children about current public affairs and adolescent civic behaviors, attitudes, and skills. Civic behaviors were operationalized by community or professional organization membership, religious service attendance, community service performance, voting record, political-based donations, and time-based political activities. Attitudes included an individual's political knowledge, internal political efficacy, and external political efficacy. Civic skills included an individual's public communication and news monitoring. None of the parent background measures, such as ethnicity, income, educational attainment, or employment, significantly predicted civic behaviors or skills in their children. The results of this study suggest that adolescents' socialization may be the strongest parent predictor of adolescents' civic attitudes and behaviors.

Scholars have examined the role of schools, compared to or in conjunction with parent socialization, as a main form of political socialization (Button, 1971; Ehman, 1980; Lambert & Klineberg, 1967; Osman et al., 2020). Some studies suggest that schools may be institutions where students receive more political information than the homes (Button, 1971; Lambert & Klineberg, 1967), which can be especially beneficial for students who do not receive any political socialization from the home (Langton & Jennings, 1968). Historically, research has suggested that the high school years may be the most crucial for receiving political information

from school, since most students become adults or full democratic citizens during or shortly after high school (Ehman, 1980); however, there is a dearth of research regarding the impact of school as a form of political socialization on earlier adolescents. More research must be done to identify at what point in one's development and schooling years is it appropriate and optimal to foster civic knowledge and skills. In the present dissertation research, I aim to investigate the influence of civic instruction on middle school students' outcomes.

### **Civic Participation**

Civic participation refers to a citizen's involvement in their community and/or political system (Melo & Stockemer, 2014; Osman et al., 2020). Civic participation can include activities such as voting, protesting for a social cause, or choosing to affiliate with a political party (Melo & Stockemer, 2014). Research suggests that an individual's participation in the political realm can also change over time (Melo & Stockemer, 2014). In today's technologically savvy world, researchers cannot ignore the influence and opportunity that the internet and social media platforms may have on civic participation among adolescents (Bekker & Vreese, 2011). Internet and social media platforms play a role in digital civic participation and provide novel ways for adolescents to be engaged in their communities and the political world that are both easily accessible and usually low-cost or free of charge.

Examples of digital ways in which adolescents can participate in politics include following blogs or social media accounts that are political, gathering political information on the internet, accessing online news sources, joining and being active in political forums or remote digital community groups, expressing political views via social media, and creating and/or signing electronic petitions for a political cause (Bekker & Vreese, 2011). Although the digital world has been seen to influence adolescent behavior, particularly in politics (Heiss et al., 2019; Quinteller, 2013), research has yet to establish the direction or potential causality of digital political participation and political engagement.

### **Conceptual Framework of Adolescent Civic Engagement**

Osman and colleagues (2020) conceptualized adolescent civic engagement, although focused more on politics, by using three different theoretical dimensions: internal, external, and social. Although the internal, external, and social dimensions are important in early childhood (Flanagan et al., 2010), adolescence is a crucial time for the formation of civic attitudes, beliefs, and value structures (Smetana & Villalobos, 2009). In the following section, I explore adolescent civic engagement as a developmental concept, and outline the internal, external, and social dimensions proposed by Osman and colleagues (2020).

### **Developmental Aspects of Civic Engagement**

Adolescent civic engagement focuses on the biological, psychological, and social developmental progression that takes place throughout adolescence (i.e., ages 11–17) and into emerging adulthood (i.e., ages 18–25; Arnett, 2000; Compas et al., 1995; Lerner & Steinberg, 2009; Osman et al., 2020; Smetana et al., 2006). Adolescent civic engagement is built on the recognition of adolescence being a time of substantial change and transition as well as the placement of the adolescent population in present modern society (Osman et al., 2020). The significant changes that most adolescents face biologically, psychologically, and socially (Compas et al., 1995; Lerner & Steinberg, 2009; Smetana et al., 2006) all play a role in the development of adolescent civic engagement (Osman et al., 2020). For example there are changes in social cognition, which is defined as the way in which an individual's goals, desires, and feelings that influence their understanding of the social environment around them.



Examples of social cognition as defined above include perspective taking and conceptualizing social equity and justice (Kunda, 1999). Additionally, one's moral and prosocial reasoning begin to form during adolescence (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Smetana & Villalobos, 2006; Steinberg, 2005). Adolescence is a time when individuals begin to learn how to balance maintaining close relationships with their parents and peers while simultaneously trying to gain a sense of autonomy and independence (Smetana & Villalobos, 2009). As a result, conflict resolution, negotiation, and the acceptance or failure of emotional or instrumental support are skills that become developed (Smetana et al., 2006).

In addition to adolescents' balancing familial (e.g., parents, siblings, and relatives) and extrafamilial (e.g., peers and romantic partners) relationships, they also form new relationships with their communities and the broad civil society with which they are a part of. These relationships are built through various activities such as school- and community-based involvements or internships (Smetana et al., 2006). The relationships that adolescents form with their community can vary depending on differences in the physical space with which they occupy (e.g., neighborhood, religious institution, and youth center) in addition to their cultural and ethnic identity (Osman et al., 2020).

Adolescence involves changes in the multiple relationships described above and self-examination of social roles across various contexts (Osman et al., 2020). It is important to note that the unique position adolescents have in American society also impacts their sense of identity and view of polity (Osman et al., 2020). Specifically, adolescents take on new societal roles while still being part of institutions where they have subordinate roles. For example, pre-voting aged and some voting aged adolescents are usually still in school and may live with their parents. Thus, it may not be easy for them to be independently involved in the political system due to legal, social, and economic barriers, and even adolescents who are of voting age often face these challenges (Osman et al., 2020). Adolescents who are eligible to vote often lack the social or financial capital to participate in political activities, which are led by and marketed towards adults (Gordon & Taft, 2011; Osman et al., 2020).

### **Internal Dimension of Civic Engagement**

Osman and colleagues' (2020) internal, external, and social dimensions of adolescent civic engagement suggest that individual and environmental factors are useful in predicting adolescent civic engagement. Osman and colleagues (2020) described the internal dimension of adolescent political engagement as an adolescent's thoughts, feelings, and motivations regarding politics. Indeed, this model provides an explanation of youth engagement in the political realm. Cognitive abilities include thought processes about political ideologies and examples include current political news, workings of government, and knowledge about the fundamentals of being informed and involved in the political system (Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009).

The affective aspect of the internal dimension refers to an adolescent's emotional states that are associated with concepts surrounding the democratic system, such as feelings towards public political figures, governmental activities, or any other feature of the political process (Torney-Purta et al., 2004). Lastly, the motivational aspect of the internal dimension of political engagement refers to "forces that can initiate, drive, focus, and maintain politically oriented goals and behaviors" (Osman et al., 2020, p. 6). Motivation involves two major processes: efficacy and identity. An individual's efficacy refers to their confidence or beliefs that they can create political change. Identity refers to an adolescent's sense of self as being politically involved, and political identity has predicted civic engagement in building literature (Beaumont et al., 2006; Crocetti et al., 2012; Flanagan et al., 2007). Further, other aspects of an individual's

identity, such as ethnic or religious identity, have also been found to predict political engagement, especially in disadvantaged communities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007).

### **External Dimension of Civic Engagement**

The external dimension of adolescent civic engagement encompasses civic behaviors that relate to the current democratic system (Osman et al., 2020). The two categories that fall under the external dimension are individual and collective behaviors. Both individual and collective behaviors are politically motivated (e.g., voting, donating to a social cause, petition signing); however, individual behaviors are executed independently and collective behaviors involve multiple people (e.g., an organized group). Both independent and collective behaviors can also be further broken down into normative and radical behaviors.

Normative behaviors are generally legal and safe whereas radical behaviors can be defiant and potentially illegal (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Dahl & Stattin, 2016; Ekman & Amnda, 2012). A behavior can be nuanced and thus deemed either unproductively normative or too radical, depending on the environment and context in which the behavior takes place, and the context's ethical and moral norms (Osman et al., 2020). For example, the Black Lives Matter protests following the police killing of George Floyd were interpreted as normative and radical, depending on the culture of the city each protest took place in as well as the news channel's political viewpoints (Brownstein, 2020; Carlson, 2020).

### **Social Dimension of Civic Engagement**

Finally, the third dimension of Osman and colleague's (2020) conceptual framework for adolescent political engagement is the social dimension. Social refers to the overt interactions that take place between an adolescent and their surrounding political environment. The social dimension differs from an adolescent's thoughts or emotional state associated with politics in its essence of interpersonal relationships. An individual's communication and interpersonal skills are part of their social dimension. It is important to include social skills within civic engagement given the social nature of community and political activism (Osman et al., 2020).

### **Civic Engagement Disparities by Race and Class**

For many young people, particularly youth of color, civic identity and disengagement are fueled by discrimination and daily stressors related to racism, often disenfranchising and dissuading this population from taking action in their communities (Flanagan, 2004). Conversely, research has indicated that some minority youth channel systemic racism and discrimination in ways that are actionable and social justice oriented (Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020). Moreover, there is heterogeneity in how minoritized youth internalize and externalize their experiences, and thus participate civically or not. In addition, young people's civic engagement is heavily fostered by their socioeconomic and community conditions, and inequities loom large (Coley & Sum, 2012; Wray-Lake & Hart, 2012).

For example, Coley and Sum (2012) found that the oldest, most highly educated, and highest-income group in their study scored seven times higher on their Civic Engagement Index than young, low-income, high school dropouts. Similarly, Wray-Lake and Hart (2010) performed a cross sectional time series study to understand class differences in civic engagement. The researchers used post-election interview data between the years of 1952 and 2008 from 26,000 young adults and adults. Their results suggested a growing inequity in civic engagement, as people of color were generally less likely to vote and less likely to engage in political activities compared to their White counter parts. In addition, voting declines were generally far steeper for less-educated youth compared to more-educated youth over the years.

Research suggests that the civic engagement disparities that exist are largely shaped by the opportunities youth may or may not have the privilege of receiving in their communities (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2005). For example, Verba and colleagues' (2003) research indicated that class differences in civic engagement are primarily a result of the educational disparities that exist. Similarly, Levinson (2010) reported that approximately 30% of Black and Latinx students in the United States attend schools that have 90–100% minority student populations and students in these districts are generally socioeconomically disadvantaged and less likely to be civically engaged. Further, Levinson (2010) reported that students who come from average to below average socioeconomic classes are significantly less likely to report studying how laws are made, engaging in service learning, and experiencing debates or panel discussions in their social studies classes compared to their peers in socioeconomically higher classes.

It is important to note that when youth of color are given the opportunities to learn and engage in community action, research suggests that they develop civic efficacy and participate in social change (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2005; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Levinson, 2012). For example, Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) studied the impact of a summer youth program on youths' civic engagement. The youth program included youth of color from a primarily socioeconomically disadvantaged community, and the researchers conducted observations and field notes on three Latina adolescent participants in the program. The program was designed to train youth to frame how power is used and misused in their lives and their communities as well as encourage youth to examine issues in their communities and, with mentorship, take action to solve the chosen issues. Results indicated that the summer program provided the participants with the attitudes, dispositions, and perceived skills to be civically engaged.

Overall, the gap that exists regarding civic engagement is harmful for all Americans since it weakens democracy, and democratic government relies on participatory citizens for its legitimacy, stability, and quality. Reducing the civic engagement gap would support the strengthening of democracy because of its broadening of government representativeness (Levinson, 2012). In order to close the civic engagement gap, researchers and scholars must understand what and how civic opportunities foster civic engagement in diverse youth. In the present research study, I aim to clarify the impact of civic opportunities, namely various civic education pedagogical approaches, on different ethnic youth.

### **Measurement of Civic Engagement**

Although the extant research uses a variety of measures to examine civic engagement, variables that are often used to gauge an individual's civic engagement are civic participation, civic efficacy, civic responsibility, and voter turnout. In the following section, I will define and expand upon ways in which the aforementioned terms are used in the literature.

#### **Civic Participation**

As previously stated, civic participation can be defined as a person's action geared towards problem-solving and helping others in their community or the broader society (Melo & Stockemer, 2014; Osman et al., 2020; Wattenberg, 2015). Within the literature, forms of civic participation can be either community (e.g., volunteering for a local food bank) or politically based (e.g., protesting for a political cause). Further, both community and political forms of participation of citizens is necessary in a democracy because it is how citizens communicate their needs and preferences to those in power (Schlozman et al., 2004). In other words, civic participation is the action that citizens do that make up a collective voice in order for community leaders and politicians to hear and respond to their constituents' needs.

Civic participation is typically measured using survey questions on how often participants engage in various activities geared towards helping the community or the broader political world. A limitation of this way of measurement is that if a person does not engage in the presented forms of civic participation but does engage in other forms of participation not included in the survey, their civic participation may go undocumented. This limitation may also result in diverse youth presenting as less civically engaged than they truly are, as minoritized youth typically engage in less Eurocentric and traditional ways of civic participation compared to White youth (Phan & Kloos, 2023). It is important that researchers continue to investigate youths' community and political forms of civic participation as civic participation is the true action that creates social change. In addition, researchers must be both transparent and culturally appropriate regarding their definition of civic participation as it is variable within the extant literature and may misrepresent certain subpopulations' true civic participation.

### **Civic Efficacy**

Civic efficacy, as briefly stated in a previous section, is defined as an individual's beliefs in their competence as a citizen in their community and the larger political climate, and the confidence they feel to influence their community and political climate (Gainous, & Martens, 2012). The two components of civic efficacy are internal and external efficacy. Internal efficacy refers to an individual's sense of confidence in comprehending the political climate around them and being an active participant in that political climate (Balch, 1974; Gainous & Martens, 2012). External efficacy is referred to as "an individual's beliefs in the responsiveness of government to citizen demands" (Gainous & Martens, 2012, p. 235). Internal efficacy is particularly important for adolescents' political engagement due to their need to feel motivated enough to involve themselves in politics (Pasek et al., 2008). Without internal efficacy, adolescents may not have the confidence in their abilities to engage with their communities or the larger political system.

Internal efficacy is usually measured on surveys by asking individuals questions about their participation in political discussions, understanding of political issues, and desire to know more about politics (Gainous & Martens, 2012). External efficacy is typically measured using survey questions on participants' views of the American government's power and their opinions on how much the government cares about and considers the welfare of the general population in their policy. For example, Gainous and Martens (2012) asked their adolescent participants to respond to how much they agreed with statements such as "The politicians quickly forget the needs of the voters who elected them," and "People in government care a lot about what all of us think about new laws" on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *disagree*, 4 = *strongly disagree*).

### **Civic Responsibility**

Civic responsibility refers to the moral facet of civic engagement; it is an individual's recognition of themselves as a member of a larger society and thus the individual feels at least partly answerable for addressing societal problems (Colby & Ehrlich, 2000; Gottlieb & Robinson, 2006). Colby and Ehrlich (2000) suggested that empathy is needed at the core of civic responsibility for a person to relate to others in their community as well as the broader society. Civic responsibility is an important component of civic engagement, especially in adolescence, because youth are often unable to engage in typical civic behaviors (i.e., vote) because of their age or resource restrictions. However, understanding how young people think about their citizenship can provide insight into future forms of civic engagement (Metzger et al., 2020).

Civic responsibility is typically measured via surveys, such as asking a participant to report how responsible they feel it is to participate in various civic activities. For example,

Metzger and colleagues (2020) measured civic responsibility via survey items that gauged adolescents' beliefs of whether or not individuals should engage in certain civic involvement behaviors and whether it was wrong if individuals did not engage in the behaviors. The civic involvement behaviors presented included community (i.e., volunteer to help feed the homeless people), political (i.e., work on a political campaign), and social (i.e., work to change a law that they disagree with) activities. This study is important because the results indicated that geographic location and parental education levels were associated with civic responsibility. Participants who came from less-educated parents and geographical locations that had less political institutions (e.g., rural) felt less obligated to participate in civic life than participants who came from more educated parents and locations with more political institutions (e.g., mid-sized city). Further, a parent education by rurality interaction indicated that youth from less educated families and rural locations may be the least likely to view civic behavior as important. The results of this study suggested civic responsibility is fostered through civic opportunities. Indeed, disparities exist regarding civic responsibility, which is problematic for democracy (Wattenberg, 2015).

### **Voter Turnout**

Voting refers to an individual exercising their right to be part of the electorate and casting their ballot in a local, state, or federal election (Gainous & Martens, 2012). Voting is the most direct and formal link between citizens and their representatives; thus, voting is one of the key ways of measuring civic engagement. Voting is also the most common form of political participation because it can be accessed by people of all genders, races, and socioeconomic statuses, although access may be easier for some than others due to voter suppression (Campbell, 2006). Voting is typically measured among youth by a single item survey, which asks about intentions to vote either in the present or the future, depending on the age group surveyed (Martens & Gainous, 2013). Adolescents' voting intentions are antecedents of their voting behavior (Glasford, 2008). Voting can also be measured overtly by accessing public data of voter turnout after local and national elections. Several researchers have found that adolescents who have reported that they intended to vote in an upcoming election (e.g., local or federal) were more likely to have learned about voting in school, had greater political knowledge, planned on going to college, and had participated in student government (Maiello et al., 2003).

Moreover, there is great variability of voter turnout among youth (ages 18–29) by election (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014). For example, the 2012 Nevada caucuses had a 1% youth voter turnout (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014), whereas the 2016 national election yielded a 46.1% youth voter turnout (CIRCLE, 2021). There was record-breaking youth voter turnout in the United States 2020 general election with an estimated 52%–55% of voting-eligible 18- to 29-year-olds exercising their right to vote (CIRCLE, 2020); however, it is important to note that while the youth vote increased in the 2020 general election compared to previous years, so did the rates of nearly every other age group. Thus, the disparity between youth and non-youth voters persists and is problematic for youth representation in the electorate as well as democracy as a whole (Wattenberg, 2015).

Overall, civic engagement is crucial for both an individual's identity formation throughout the lifespan as well as the state of democracy (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). When young people feel that they have a stake in the issues that influence them (e.g., high school dropout rates, climate change, school shootings), they may be active in their communities and in the public at large, which can ultimately result in better representation and stabilization in democratic societies (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Civic engagement is a pathway for change by

allowing individuals to channel knowledge and discontent into action and solutions for the future. Although it is clear that civic engagement is important, many young people are not developing the knowledge, dispositions, or skills to become civically engaged (Levinson, 2010). In particular, socioeconomically disadvantaged youth are receiving less opportunities to become engaged in their communities and the larger political world when compared to their more advantaged counterparts (Coley & Sum, 2012; Wray-Lake & Hart, 2012). Because schools are central to communities and reach nearly all young people, many researchers and scholars turn to civics education as a potential pathway for fostering youth civic engagement.

### **Civics Education as a Predictor of Civic Engagement**

Civics education is defined as instruction in students' schools that teaches about how the United States government functions and the roles and responsibilities of each citizen in America's democracy (Neundorf et al., 2016). Scholars and American leaders dating back to the 1700s believe that the primary purpose of the public school system in the United States is to create a population that is informed and possesses the necessary skills to assume their roles as citizens (Barr, 1977). Hundreds of years later, the National Council for the Social Studies (n.d.) and National Common Core State Standards (2018) still represent this view by including in their standards the requirement that students should learn and synthesize knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will prepare them to be responsible citizens for the years following their formal schooling and beyond. Schools have been and still are seen as institutions in which children, especially adolescents, receive the tools to assume the responsibilities of active American citizens, including the fundamental information to understand the workings of government and actively participate in their communities and the greater political world (Ben-Porath, 2012; Comber, 2005; National Council for the Social Studies, 2018; Pasek et al., 2008). Nevertheless, researchers, scholars, and school leaders across the nation have not come to a common consensus on exactly how to best reach the goal of fostering active citizenry through civics education.

Civics education has been a topic of debate in the United States for decades (Langston & Jennings, 1968; Somit et al., 1958). Some of the first social science researchers who investigated civics education deemed it ineffective (Langston & Jennings, 1968; Somit et al., 1958). For example, Somit and colleagues (1958) examined the impact of various introductory political courses on undergraduate students' intentions towards political participation at New York University. In their three-year study, they measured and compared four different kinds of political science courses. One course primarily focused on traditional American government without any visiting speakers and was a standard lecture-based course. The other three courses were participation-offering courses in which public figures would take part in classes and discuss their political experiences with the students; however, all had different approaches in terms of theoretical frameworks (e.g., government, political science, social science). In particular, the fourth course used the majority of class time to have visiting lecturers encourage political participation. Students in the four classes took pre- and post-surveys on self-reported political attitudes towards political participation with responses on a four-point Likert Scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Samples of survey questions included "I would like to run for the position of United States Congressman" and "I pay very little attention to speeches and decisions by the Governor and other state officials." There were no differences among students' attitudes towards political participation based on their enrollment in the four courses.

A decade later, in a study at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center, Langston and Jennings (1968) interviewed 1,669 high school seniors and their parents from 97

public and non-public schools across the United States. Some students had taken a social studies course that comprised of civics curriculum at least once in their high school career (e.g., American government and problems of democracy, political science, Americanism, communism and democracy, international relations, world citizenship, and comparative politics) and some had not. Results of Langston and Jennings's (1968) interviews suggested that civics education did not have significant effects on various outcomes such as political knowledge, political interest, spectator politicization (consumption of political content in mass media), political discourse (political conversations), political efficacy, political cynicism, and civic tolerance. However, Langston and Jennings's (1988) findings suggested that African American students benefitted from their civics courses at school.

Researchers Niemi and Junn (1998) shifted the narrative regarding civics education. Using data from a national civics assessment data base, the researchers reported that high school civics classes did increase students' knowledge about the United States government and politics. Specifically, students who took a civics course earned, on average, one-third of a letter grade higher (e.g., B+ to A-) on the national civics assessment than those who did not take a civics class. The authors suggested that the most beneficial civics curriculum is one that provides additional experiences that go beyond learning standard curriculum (e.g., engaging in political discussions, participating in community projects revolving around politics or social issues; Feldman et al., 2007). Further, Luskin and Fishkin (2002) suggested that the most effective approach for students to become politically engaged is for teachers to provide students with opportunities to appreciate politics through hands-on activities that encourage stimulating discussion and critical evaluation of both relatable yet prevalent political issues. These studies begin to highlight the importance of pedagogy in the classroom as an instrumental factor for the effectiveness of civics.

Kawashima-Ginsberg and Levine (2014) looked at high school civics education requirements and testing in various states across the United States. The researchers examined if the requirements, testing, and quality of civics education boosted electoral engagement, informed voting, and political knowledge among 4,483 participants between the ages of 18 and 24, with at least 75 participants representing each of the 50 states and DC ( $n$  range = 75–131 per state). After analyzing self-report surveys and interviews, results suggested that state laws and policies were not related to civic education and political engagement. Moreover, the results of this study indicated that high-quality civics education (e.g., discussing current events and teaching students to vote in classrooms) had more of an influence on adolescents' political engagement than whether states required a course that emphasized the United States Constitution or not.

Although some states' standards mention current events and teach students to vote (Godsay et al., 2012), the authors found no states strongly emphasized these concepts or included current events on state assessments (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014). A common flaw among current civics education policies is that even if students take a course that the state considers mandatory civics instruction, it may not actually focus on civics. In recent years, more momentum has been given to civics education research and initiatives, but research suggests that *effective* civics instruction must be assessed in tandem with the mere implementation of civics education (Booth et al., 2023; Galston, 2001; Gainous & Martens, 2012; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014). Ultimately, research has suggested that in order to maximize all forms of civic engagement, it is crucial to understand the pedagogical techniques that make some civics education classrooms more effective than others.

### **Evidence-Based Civics Education Classroom Practices**

Extant research has suggested that pedagogical practices, including political discussions in school, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process have been found to be effective civics education approaches that support students' civic knowledge, skill, and disposition development (Campbell, 2008; Martens & Gainous, 2013)

### **Political Discussions in School**

The in-class facilitation of discussions about contemporary political issues has been deemed as an effective pedagogical tool that can help students learn how to properly handle political conflict outside of their classroom (Bickmore, 1993; Hess, 2004; McAnulty & Garrett, 2021; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Parker, 2003; Parker & Hess, 2001) and increase students' voting intent (Martens & Gainous, 2013). Although findings from the literature suggest political discussions as a potential approach to enhance democratic engagement in youth (Campbell, 2008; Martens & Gainous, 2013), there is a dearth of research explicitly pertaining to political discussions in middle school.

Martens and Gainous (2013) investigated the impact of political discussions in classrooms through exploring instructional techniques of teachers. The participants included 2,811 9<sup>th</sup> grade students from 24 schools across the nation as well as their respective social studies teachers and principals. Results indicated that classroom climate that included open discussions about social and political issues in combination with any of the other common methods found (i.e., traditional teaching, active learning, video learning) was associated with an increase in political knowledge, political efficacy, and voting intent. Although a classroom climate that included open discussions about social and political issues was deemed beneficial, only 10% of teachers used it often in their classrooms, which suggests that there is limited curriculum and lack of explicit evidence-based standards regarding quality civics instruction.

Further, Campbell (2008) explored specific classroom instructions' effects on adolescents' levels of civic knowledge (i.e., assessment results). In the study, surveys were administered to 14-year-old students in public and private schools who were enrolled in a civics-related subject (e.g., social studies). Results indicated that students who participated in open classroom discussions and engaged in respectful exchanges of ideas in their classroom scored higher on their civics assessment than students who did not.

The aforementioned studies suggest that political discussions in school are important in fostering students who are engaged with and understand politics; however, the studies do not reveal the influence that political discussions have on middle school students. In the current dissertation study, I examined political discussions in middle school as a potential pathway to civic attitudes and behaviors.

### **Service Learning**

Service learning can be defined as a pedagogical approach that combines one's experience regarding community action with structured classroom learning through instruction and reflection (Nishishiba et al., 2018). Service learning is different from community service because of its emphasis on academic frontloading, assessment, and reflection in tandem with service (Willeck & Mendelberg, 2021). Further, service learning has been found to be correlated with various positive outcomes, such as students' improvement in the academic content that is part of the traditional in-school curriculum, youths' personal development, youths' civic dispositions, and the community at large (Waterman, 2014).

For example, research on Generation Citizen (n.d.), an educational curriculum program that is made for middle and high school students as well as the PD of teachers, has been found to have positive outcomes on both students and teachers (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). Generation



Citizen was created to give students opportunities to partake in real-world engagement in their own communities by using service learning (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). For example, Generation Citizen's framework includes students identifying a focus issue in their community, researching and analyzing the issue, planning for their action, and then taking action and implementing their thought-out plans. At the end of the course, the class participates in "Civics Day," where students have the opportunity to present their plans to community members, including public officials. Civics Day is Generation Citizen's way of trying to foster civic engagement in adolescents after their class is over (Generation Citizen, n.d.).

Generation Citizen's most recent published progress report (2017–2018) indicated that their non-profit organization engaged 14,025 students in action civics across 141 schools in seven states (Generation Citizen, 2018). Teachers who taught Generation Civics during the 2017–2018 school year reported that, on average, 76% of their students increased their civic knowledge, 71% increased their civic skills, and 61% increased their civic dispositions over the course of the program. Of the 3,662 students who were surveyed pre- to post-semester of participating in action civics, there was a 175% increase in the number of students who had ever contacted a public official and a 135% increase in the number of students who had ever written an article or op-ed. There was a 49% increase in students knowing who to contact to solve a community problem, an 11.5% increase in students' beliefs in their abilities to research issues, and a 10% increase in students feeling like they can work with others they may disagree with. Further, 73% of student participants and 78% of teacher participants recommended the program to a friend or fellow teacher, respectively (Generation Citizen, 2018). Overall, 70% of student participants indicated that they had the power to make a difference in their communities after completing the course. These results suggest that Generation Citizen not only increases the knowledge that students have about communities and politics, but also their sense of civic efficacy and tolerance.

Although Generation Citizen is a successful curriculum program, not all schools utilize it. In order to receive Generation Citizen programming, school staff must sign up and go through a thorough process, which requires administration buy-in, time, and resources. The rigorous process in place to receive Generation Citizen programming is meant to ensure curriculum fidelity and support school administration, teachers, and students; however, it is not quick nor completely accessible for all teachers. In the present study, I investigated if middle school teachers' utilization of service learning practices impact students' civic outcomes.

### **Simulations of the Democratic Process**

Simulations of the democratic practice can be defined as activities that allow students to act in hypothetical scenarios that are fictional and mimic democratic procedures in the real world (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011). Examples include but are not limited to mock trials, debates, model congress, and mock elections. Research has suggested that when students engage in simulations of the democratic process, their community connection increases and likelihood of school dropout rate decreases (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). For example, We the People (WTP) is a civics education program that emphasizes constitutional principles, the Bill of Rights, and Supreme Court cases through simulations (Owens, 2015). WTP includes a portion of the curriculum where students take part in a simulated congressional hearing, requiring the development of a research project to find answers to well-developed questions about politics as well as the practical aspect of presenting material and speaking as a mock congress worker.

Owens (2015) compared the civic knowledge (via assessment data) of 1,015 junior and senior high school students who did or did not take civics courses with the WTP curriculum across multiple schools in Indiana. Owens also compared civic knowledge scores in students who did or did not take the WTP class with a teacher who had WTP PD experience. Although all students who took part in some sort of civics education (WTP or a traditional approach) had increases in civic knowledge, students who participated in WTP had significantly higher civic knowledge than those who did not.

In addition to in-person simulations, technology-based simulations are also an effective tool for fostering students to engage in the democratic process (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011). For example, iCivics (iCivics, n.d.), founded by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, is an online civics curriculum for teachers and parents where teachers can register each of their classes on the site and parents can use the platform as a guide at home to help socialize adolescents in a political fashion. iCivics uses a more recent type of simulation, game-based learning, which has been introduced in civics education classrooms to promote civic knowledge, action, participation, and engagement (Raphael et al., 2010). The program currently reaches 200,000 teachers and over 5 million students in all 50 states of the United States (iCivics, n.d.). iCivics is a free and accessible resource for students that uses online interactive games to teach adolescents (aimed at middle- and high-schoolers) the political system and helps them practice political engagement by using hands-on tools. For example, students can participate in interactive modules and games that revolve around political issues including upcoming elections, campaigns, passing laws, and the branches of government. Additionally, the content from the videos and games correspond to curriculum units that come with a lesson plan if teachers want to adopt lessons for their classroom instruction.

LeCompte and colleagues (2011) studied the civic knowledge of 253 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th and 12th Grade students who participated in iCivics. The researchers used pre- and post-tests based on questions aligned with the United States' citizenship test and Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (Texas Education Agency, 2011b, 2011c). The tests were administered to participants before and after spending at least 30 minutes per week for 6 weeks on the iCivics interactive website where students simulated the democratic process. Results revealed that test score means were significantly higher on the post-tests compared to the pre-tests for all grades. In addition, students in Grade 4 had the biggest difference in pre- and post-test score means, compared to students in Grades 5, 6, 8, and 12. These results suggested that iCivics supported students' development of civic knowledge in elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Overall, simulations of the democratic process, both in-person and technology-based, are a helpful tool in fostering students' civic knowledge and civic skillsets; however, there is less research regarding the impact of democratic simulations on diverse and historically marginalized students. In the present dissertation study, I investigated diverse students' experiences service learning and whether or not this pedagogical approach fosters their civic behaviors and attitudes.

### **School-Based Practices Outside the Classroom**

In addition to formal modes of education, researchers have claimed informal learning as a powerful source for adolescent civic engagement in schools (Keeter et al., 2002; Kirlin, 2002; McFarland & Starmanns, 2009; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Mirazchiyski et al., 2014; Reichert & Print, 2018; Youniss et al., 1997). In the following section, I review two school-based practices outside of the classroom, school climate and participation in extracurricular activities.

### **School Climate**

As previously mentioned, research indicates that young people are more likely to be engaged with communities and politics when they are in spaces (e.g., schools) that allow them to build upon their knowledge and learn how to take action regarding community and societal issues (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). In the extant literature, the combination of characteristics within a school that serve to enhance one's overall experience is referred to as school climate (Thapa et al., 2012). School climate is "based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflect norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 5). A positive school climate is related to all stakeholders within a school feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe (Cohen et al., 2009).

Flanagan and colleagues (2004) conducted a study that included 123 students (aged 11–18) in a Midwestern state by measuring their perceptions of their civic commitments, sense of community connectedness, beliefs in a just America, and teachers' democratic ethos. Results indicated that regardless of race/ethnicity, participants were more likely to believe that America is a just society and endorse civic goals if they felt that their teachers respected and were fair to students. Further, the models in the study explained a greater percent of the variance in the ethnic minority individuals than the majority individuals. Karakos and colleagues (2016) conducted a similar study where they surveyed 4,939 students in 11 middle schools (Grades 5–8) in a large urban school district to examine the association between school climate and leadership behaviors at school and in one's community (i.e., civic participation). School climate in this study included the evaluation of students' perceptions of student-peer relationships, student-teacher relationships, sense of consistency of school rules, and democratic climate. Results indicated that students who reported high levels of leadership behaviors at school and in their communities also reported stronger perceptions of school climate when compared to students who reported low levels of leadership behaviors at school and in their communities.

The results from both aforementioned studies indicate that school climate is associated with young people's civic attitudes and participation. However, there is a dearth of research regarding the relationship between school climate and civic outcomes, especially political behavior (i.e., political action and voting). I seek to add to the literature by exploring school climate and its association with civic attitudes and behaviors in White and non-White middle school students. Further, I will explore the relationship between school climate and political behavior, namely voting intention.

### **Participation in Extracurricular Activities**

Extracurricular activities, defined as experiences and activities outside of the classroom (e.g., debate, student council, and school clubs; Lunenberg, 2010), are believed to help socialize adolescents to appreciate and seek communal unity, while simultaneously fostering exposure to organizational norms and relevant political and social skills (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Kahne and Sporte (2008) asked 4,057 junior high school students representing 52 schools in Chicago to report how often they participated in any after school clubs sponsored by either the school or other organizations. The outcome variable in this study was commitment to civic participation, which included aspects of political participation. Most students in the sample were from underrepresented (50% African American, 78% Latino, 11% White, 5% Asian) or impoverished (78% received free and reduced priced lunch) backgrounds. Results revealed that participation in afterschool extracurricular activities other than sports was related to increased commitment to civics participation. Similarly, Thomas and McFarland (2010) found that participation in a wide range of extracurricular activities increased students' voting rates. In

particular, extracurricular activities that included opportunities for group collaboration and teamwork (e.g., sports, performing arts) were especially influential on adolescents' intentions to vote. More research may benefit from exploring sport activities and civic engagement, due to the conflicting results described above.

Activities within the school, such as student government and students' elections, have also been associated with future civic engagement (Kirlin, 2002; Print et al., 2002; Saha & Print, 2010). For example, Saha and Print (2010) explored the relationship between participation in school elections (e.g., running for student government, voting) and future intended civic engagement. The sample included 4,923 students across 155 schools in Australia. The results of the study suggested that students who participated in their school elections, either as a candidate for student government or as a voter, felt more prepared and committed to vote in future governmental elections compared to students who did not participate in their school election. Further, participation in a student government club was associated with civic knowledge and engagement in civic activism. School elections may be the closest an adolescent can get to practicing one of the core fundamentals of democracy (Saha & Print, 2010). This being said, the results are limited in that voting is compulsory in Australia and may reflect a stronger meaning if replicated on an American sample.

Moreover, adolescents who come from socioeconomically advantaged and highly educated familial backgrounds are more likely to have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities compared to students from less privileged backgrounds. Due to this opportunity gap, the already existing political engagement disparity that exists between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds may be exacerbated (Campbell, 2019). Extracurricular activities are often costly and adolescents who do not come from families that can afford the costs of extracurricular activities are more likely to live in communities that also have fewer resources to support extracurricular activities (Kawashimi-Ginsberg, 2014; Lareau, 2011). The high costs and limited opportunities for extracurricular activities in disadvantaged communities perpetuates the cycle of advantaged adolescents being more likely to participate and be engaged with politics (Campbell, 2019). Further, states in America do not have policies that support or require schools to provide opportunities for extracurricular activities (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014).

### **Compensation Effect**

The results of Langston and Jennings's (1968) study, which suggested that students of color benefitted from civics education compared to their White counterparts, was an example of what many have called the compensation effect, meaning schools have a greater influence on adolescents who receive minimal political socialization from their families than adolescents who do receive political socialization at home (Neudorf et al., 2016). There is evidence for the compensation effect in current research. For example, Neudorf and colleagues (2016) analyzed data from the Belgian Political Panel Study and the United States Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, both of which measured political attitudes and behaviors of adolescents and emerging adults (ages 14–24) and their parents, as well as the educational curriculum the adolescents received. Results supported the notion that civics instruction in schools can compensate for unequal political socialization that students received outside of the classroom.

Campbell and Niemi (2015) also tested the compensation effect among Latinx students by analyzing the 2006 and 2010 NAEP Civics Assessment data. These researchers' results indicated strong support for the compensation effect in this population. Specifically, Latinx high school seniors had higher test results on the NAEP Civics Assessment in states that had civics

education requirements. States that required a civics exam as part of the requirements to graduate high school had a large effect on Latinx students' civic knowledge, and an even greater impact on Latinx immigrant students. Thus, civics classes compensated for social disparities faced by youth in different countries (the United States and Belgium) and time periods (the 1960s and early 2000s) and this effect was also stronger in socioeconomically disadvantaged youth.

The compensation effect is important, given that White students' mean scores on the NAEP Civics Assessment have been significantly higher than non-White students for decades (NAEP, 2022). In fact, nearly 90% of Black and Latinx students scored below proficient on the 2018 NAEP Civics Assessment. The compensation effect supports what many scholars, including those in the American Political Science Association (McCartney, et al., 2013), have called for: attention to civics education initiatives (Campbell & Niemi, 2016; Levinson, 2012).

### **Variability in Civics Education Initiatives**

Leaders in states have adopted the idea of trying to create a high-quality civics education for students, which is why there have been many recent civics education reforms across the nation (CivXNow, n.d.; Sawchuck, 2019; Stern et al., 2021); however, the present political polarization of the United States has permeated the public education system, and has affected civics education reforms (DiGiacomo et al., 2021). Culture wars exist among scholars, educational leaders, and the public, resulting in civics education becoming controversial (NAEP, 2022). For example, one report indicated that 25% of teachers believe that parents or other adults in their community would object if politics were discussed in their classrooms, even in government or civics courses (The Report of the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge, 2013). In addition, civics education policies and standards have become highly variable from state to state (Stern et al., 2021). Some state educational departments, such as Texas, have passed policies that include banning books about the United States' political history (Pen America, 2022).

In addition, state leaders in Florida designed and are implementing new civics education standards for the 2023–2024 school year that highlight the ideology of patriotism and remove simulation activities (e.g., mock elections, community service projects) as well as opportunities for pre-registering or registering to vote in schools (Najarro, 2022). On the other hand, states such as Illinois shifted their civics policies and standards recently to require evidence-based pedagogical classroom practices and the inclusion of Asian American and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transexual and Queer (LGBTQ) history (Illinois.gov, 2021; Illinois State Board of Education, 2017, 2019). It is important for educational researchers and scholars to know the impact civic standards have on student outcomes for future civics education legislation to properly address the original purpose of civics education: to ensure youth become informed, engaged, and capable of participating adequately in the United States' self-governing democracy (Gainous & Martens, 2012).

### **Civics Education in Illinois**

The state of Illinois is valuable to study due to (a) its implementation of new civics education requirements at the high school and middle school level, (b) the required content included in the policy, and (c) its push for cross-curricular integration of civics. In August of 2015, Illinois legislators signed into law House Bill 4025, which mandates that all public high schools include civics as a course of study in order to support students acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will prepare them to be responsible and competent citizens for years following high school. Four years later, Governor Jay Robert Pritzker extended this requirement to middle school students through Public Act 101–0254 (2020). The Illinois State Board of Education

offered further clarification of Public Act 101-0254, specifying that the required content in civics courses must include government institutions, discussion of current and societal issues, service learning, and simulations of the democratic practice, all of which will be described below.

According to the Illinois State Board of Education (2019), government institutions include the branches of American government as well as their origins and other civic and political institutions. Discussion of current and societal issues includes the facilitation of respectful conversations that address meaningful and timely essential questions about public policy issues within students' community or the larger society. Service learning includes addressing the idea of taking informed action upon learning. Service learning must connect classroom content to the outside world. Service learning activities can be traditional service projects in civic society or advocacy for public policy at the local, state, or federal levels of government. Service learning does not refer to students acquiring service hours or volunteering. Simulations of the democratic process includes fostering students to engage in practices of citizenship and promoting deeper understanding of the workings of government institutions through role-playing, scenario considerations, or problem-based case solutions (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019).

The guidance on the mandate does not indicate exactly how to incorporate civics education; however, Illinois civics education policy suggests that curricula be incorporated in a way that best fits the needs of the schools' students (Illinois Civics Hub, 2017). The guidance document emphasizes that the legislation does not require civics itself to be a standalone course, but rather, that educators should work to incorporate civic learning into current existing course structures. This legislation and advocacy for research-based classroom practices to enhance civic learning in the classroom have made the state of Illinois a stand-out in civics education in the national civics education community (Hayat & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2020).

### **Summary**

Civic engagement is a broad term that encompasses components such as citizenship, political socialization, and civic participation. Common measurements of civic engagement used in the extant literature include civic participation, civic efficacy, civic responsibility, and voter turnout. Research suggests that a person's understanding of their civic responsibilities, influence of citizenship from social institutions, and involvement in their community and/or political system all make up civic engagement. For this paper, the conceptual framework used was Osman and colleagues' (year) three theoretical dimensions of civic engagement in adolescence: internal, external, and social. According to this conceptual framework, individual and environmental factors can influence an adolescent's civic engagement. Disparities exist within civic engagement, particularly regarding the opportunities provided to young people to develop their civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Further, the civic engagement gap that exists between White youth and marginalized youth is harmful for democracy, as it hurts the country's representativeness and stability.

Researchers and scholars have turned to civics education as a potential pathway for fostering civic engagement in youth due to the fact that schools are central to communities and support nearly every young person nationwide. Practices that have been found to be beneficial for fostering civic engagement include political discussions in school, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process. Outside the classroom, school climate and extracurricular activities are informal modes of education that influence civic engagement. Students who receive quality civics education typically live in communities that are more socioeconomically advantaged and these students are more likely to receive civic socialization outside of the

classroom. Thus, civic education typically has a greater influence on students who receive minimal political socialization from their families.

### **The Present Study**

In the present quantitative, survey-based study, I examined data from middle schoolers in three districts in Illinois to assess their perceptions of Illinois' state required civics content and whether the applied pedagogical approaches were correlated with their civic attitudes and behaviors. Further, I investigated if school climate and extracurricular engagement were predictors of students' civic attitudes and behavior. I asked the following research questions: (a) Were student perceptions of Illinois civics education mandated pedagogical approaches (i.e., foundational civic knowledge, current issue discussions, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process) related to civic efficacy, civic responsibility, civic participation, and voting intention, and (b) were school climate and extracurricular engagement related to civic attitudes and behaviors?

Based on prior research (Campbell, 2008; Gainous & Martens, 2012; Kahne et al., 2013; Martens & Gainous, 2013; Persson, 2015), it was hypothesized that reports of civic learning engagement in middle school would predict civic attitudes and behaviors. In addition, due to preliminary research on the relationship between the school environment and civic attitudes and behaviors (Flanagan et al., 2004; Karakos et al., 2016; Lenzi et al., 2014), it was hypothesized that student reports of a positive climate in school would predict civic attitudes and behaviors. Further, based on the extant literature (McFarland & Starmanns, 2009; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Mirazchiyski et al., 2014; Reichert & Print, 2018; Youniss et al., 1997), it was hypothesized that extracurricular engagement would predict civic attitudes and behaviors.

## **Method**

### **Data Source and Participants**

The data analyzed in the present study were from a larger study conducted in 2023 by CIRCLE at Tufts University. The goal of the original study was to evaluate how the passage of new legislation in Illinois mandating civic education affected middle school educators' instruction as well as teacher and student attitudes and behavior. Participants in the present study included approximately 443 8th Grade students from three school districts in the state of Illinois. The districts were chosen to be representative of the demographic profile of the state, excluding the Chicago metro area. As state law requires a full semester of civics instruction by the time Grade 8 is completed, the participating students were surveyed in the spring of their 8th Grade year. Students were asked to reflect on their civic learning experiences from Grades 6 through 8.

### **Measures**

Several covariates were used as control variables. These included race/ethnicity, perceived grades, parental educational attainment, familial political discussions, and friend political discussions. The predictor (independent) variables in the study were students' perceptions of engaging in the various required civic pedagogies in the state standards, including foundational civic knowledge, current issue discussions, service learning and simulations of the democratic processes. In addition, school climate and extracurricular engagement were included as predictor variables. Participants' civic attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, namely civic efficacy, civic responsibility, civic participation, and voting intention were used as the dependent variables.

### **Demographic Variables**

Participants reported their race/ethnicity, perceived grades compared to their peers, parental educational attainment, amount of perceived familial political discussions, and amount

of perceived friend political discussions. For race/ethnicity, participants indicated whether they identified as American Indian/Native American, Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Pacific islander, White, Two or More Races, or Other. For perceived grades compared to peers, participants were asked to report whether they believed their grades fell in the top 10%, top 11–25%, average 26–75%, bottom 11–25%, or bottom 10%. For parental educational attainment, students were asked to report if their parents received a high school diploma, equivalent (e.g., GED), or less; professional certificate (e.g., EMT, Licensed electrician); associate degree or some college courses (e.g., community college); or a bachelor's degree or higher (e.g., four-year college degree, graduate school degree).

For amount of perceived familial political discussions, participants were asked how often they and their family have conversations regarding politics or social issues. Responses were recorded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never or almost never*) to 5 (*every day or almost every day*). For amount of perceived friend political discussions, participants were asked how often they and their friends engage in conversations regarding politics or social issues. Responses were recorded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never or almost never*) to 5 (*every day or almost every day*).

### **School Climate**

School climate was measured using an index constructed from nine items. Survey questions were designed to measure how students generally perceived their school environment. For example, participants were asked if they were encouraged to express their opinions in class while respecting others. Responses were recorded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). In the current sample, the Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  values for school climate scores demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = .92$ ; 95% CI [.90, .93]) and a one factor structure was supported by an exploratory factor analysis.

### **Extracurricular Engagement**

Extracurricular engagement was measured using one item. The survey question was designed to measure if students participated in a group or club at school (i.e., sports, chorus, student government, cultural group). Responses were recorded using a 2-point scale option ranging from 0 (*I do not remember/no*) to 1 (*yes*). Higher scores reflect participation in an extracurricular activity.

### **Foundational Civic Knowledge**

Foundational civic knowledge was measured using 10 items. Survey questions were designed to measure students' learning of core civic concepts, including the roles and responsibilities of citizens; the role of government (federal, state, and local); significant events in the history of the United States; the United States constitution as applied to the past and present; various public policies (local, state, national, international); the ways in which communities create, interact, and change structures of power, authority, and governance; and the ways in which digital platforms have created opportunities and challenges for civic and political engagement. For example, participants were asked how much major themes in the history of the United States, including tensions in our democracy and issues related to race, class, gender, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation was covered in their social studies classes throughout middle school (Grades 6–8). Responses were recorded using a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (*I do not remember this topic*) to 2 (*we learned about this in depth*). Higher scores reflect greater engagement with learning core civic concepts in the classroom. In the current sample, the Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  values for foundational civic knowledge scores demonstrated



acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = .90$ ; 95% CI [.88, .91]) and a one factor structure was supported by an exploratory factor analysis.

### **Simulations of the Democratic Process**

Simulations of the democratic process was measured using five items. Survey questions were designed to measure the opportunities students had to engage in interactive activities that invoke civic learning and engagement (e.g., mock elections, interactive case studies, online games) and if students discussed and reflected on how lessons learned in the simulation applied to other contexts, including local communities and society. For example, participants were asked if they ever engaged in taking on the role of a citizen and/or government official to understand the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Responses ranged from 0 (*no*) to 1 (*yes*). Higher scores reflect greater engagement with simulations of the democratic process in the classroom. In the current sample, the Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  values for simulations of the democratic process scores demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = .66$ ; 95% CI [.61, .71]) and a one factor structure was supported by an exploratory factor analysis.

### **Current Issue Discussions**

A single item was used to assess discussions of current issues. The survey question assessed the intentional discussion of current events related to civics, government, and/or history. Responses were recorded using a 2-point scale ranging from 0 (*did not do this in social studies*) to 1 (*did this in social studies*).

### **Service Learning**

Service learning was measured using one item. The survey question was designed to measure the opportunity students received to apply academic content to real world problems through service learning (i.e., writing letters to or meeting with a decision maker, raising awareness regarding a social issue with community members, raising money or collecting goods to donate to a community cause). Responses ranged from 0 (*no*) to 1 (*yes*).

### **Civic Efficacy**

Civic efficacy was measured using an index from six items. Survey questions were designed to measure participants' perceived ability to perform certain civic competencies. For example, participants were given a scenario involving an issue in their school that they cared about, then were asked if they would be able to create a plan to address the issue. Responses were recorded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). Higher scores reflect greater feelings of efficacy regarding civic competencies. In the current sample, the Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  values for civic efficacy scores demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = .90$ ; 95% CI [.88, .91]) and a one factor structure was supported by an exploratory factor analysis.

### **Civic Responsibility**

Civic responsibility was measured using an index from five items. Survey questions were designed to measure students' sense of personal responsibility to contribute to civic life. For example, participants were asked if they agreed that being concerned with national, state, and local issues is an important responsibility for everybody. Responses were recorded using a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree*) to 4 (*somewhat agree*). Higher scores reflect greater feelings of responsibility towards civic life. In the current sample, the Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  values for civic responsibility scores demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = .81$ ; 95% CI [.78, .84]) and a one factor structure was supported by an exploratory factor analysis.

### **Civic Participation**

Civic participation was measured using an index constructed from seven items. Survey questions were designed to measure community involvement in both political and non-political ways. For example, participants were asked if they had ever worked with a group to try to change a policy or law in their community, state, or nation. Responses ranged from 0 (*no*) to 1 (*yes*). In the current sample, the Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  values for civic participation scores demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = .82$ ; 95% CI [.79, .84]) and a one factor structure was supported by an exploratory factor analysis.

### **Voting Intention**

Voting intention was measured with a single item which asked participants to report if they planned to vote regularly when they became eligible to vote. Responses ranged from 0 (*no*) or 1 (*yes*).

### **Procedure**

The larger research study that the data are taken from was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Tufts University. The data in the present study were collected in May of 2023. The survey was distributed to students during school hours and could be accessed on their computers or smart phones via Qualtrics. All participants read an informed consent form and agreed to participate in the research study prior to beginning the digital survey. In addition, if participants wanted to stop taking the survey at any time, they were able to do so with no repercussions. In total, participants took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete the survey and were done in a single sitting. However, participants could take a break if they needed to. Upon completing the survey, participants were thanked for their participation.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analyses**

The percentage of missing data varied across items, ranging from no missing data to 51% ( $n = 229$ ) on one civic responsibility item, and analyses indicated that the data were missing at random. Therefore, missing data were imputed using the expectation maximization algorithm. The original sample size was 443 participants; however, when the sample was categorized into White and non-White subsamples, the sample size decreased substantially ( $n = 325$ ) as 118 participants did not indicate their race/ethnicity. The White subsample included participants who are White and non-Hispanic. The non-White subsample included participants who indicated any other race/ethnicity that is not White (e.g., American Indian/Native American, Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Pacific islander, Two or More Races, or Other). The final subsamples included 129 White participants and 196 non-White participants. Means and standard deviations for all major variables are presented in Table 1 for the White and non-White subsamples.

As seen in Table 1, the only difference in means between the White and non-White subsamples worth noting was parent educational attainment, with the White subsample generally having parents who received more education than the non-White subsample. Practical significance was used for interpretation (Ferguson, 2009). As seen in Table 2 in the White subsample, several correlations met the minimum effect size for interpretation (i.e.,  $r = .20$ ). Parent educational attainment was correlated with perceived grade and voting intent. Further, perceived grades were positively correlated with extracurricular engagement, civic efficacy, and voting intent. Family political discussions were positively correlated with friend political discussions and civic participation, and friend political discussions were also correlated positively with civic efficacy and civic participation.

School climate was positively correlated with civic efficacy, civic responsibility, and voting intent and there was a positive correlation between service learning and civic participation

as well. Moreover, civic efficacy was positively correlated with civic responsibility, civic participation, and voting intent. Civic responsibility was positively correlated with civic participation and voting intent, and civic participation was positively correlated with voting intent. Unexpected intercorrelations included a negative association between perceived grades and simulations of the democratic process as well as perceived grades and service learning. Further, a positive correlation between gender and voting intent indicated that White male identifying youth were more likely to plan to vote than White female identifying youth.

There were also meaningful positive correlations in the non-White subsample. The included parent educational attainment and civic efficacy, perceived grades and civic efficacy, family political discussions and friend political discussions, and friend political discussions and civic participation. Further, school climate was positively correlated with simulations of the democratic process, civic efficacy, civic responsibility, and voting intent. In addition, extracurricular engagement was positively correlated with civic efficacy. Simulations of the democratic process was positively correlated with service learning, civic efficacy, and civic participation. Current issue discussions was positively correlated with civic participation, and service learning was positively correlated with civic engagement. Finally, civic efficacy was positively correlated with civic responsibility. There was also an unexpected negative correlation between foundational civic knowledge and school climate.

### **Regression Analyses**

Eight hierarchical regressions were used to investigate how much variance beyond the classroom school factors (i.e., school climate, extracurricular engagement) and specific pedagogical approaches inside the classroom (i.e., foundational civic knowledge, simulations of the democratic process, current issue discussions, and service learning) account for in civic efficacy, civic participation, civic responsibility, and voting intention. Data from the White and non-White subsamples were analyzed separately. Gender, parent educational attainment, perceived grades, family political discussions, and friend political discussions were included in Block 1. School climate and extracurricular engagement were included in Block 2 in order to assess whether school climate and extracurricular engagement accounted for meaningful percentages of variance in the dependent variables (i.e., civic efficacy, civic participation, civic responsibility, voting intention) beyond the contribution of the demographic variables. Foundational civic knowledge, simulations of the democratic process, current issue discussions, and service learning were included in Block 3 in order to examine whether these pedagogical practice variables accounted for meaningful percentage of variance in the dependent variables (i.e., civic efficacy, civic participation, civic responsibility, voting intention) beyond the contribution of the demographic and out of classroom (i.e., school climate, extracurricular engagement) variables.

Results of the regression analyses for White youth with civic efficacy as the dependent variable are presented in Table 4. The demographic variables entered in Block 1 accounted for more than 6% of the variance in civic efficacy. School climate and extracurricular engagement were added in Block 2 and they accounted for five times the variance accounted for by the demographic variables. However, the four pedagogical practices (i.e., foundational civic knowledge, simulations of the democratic process, current issue discussions, and service learning) added in Block 3 accounted for less than 2% additional variance. Further, as can be seen in Table 4, perceived grades, family political discussions, friend political discussions, and school climate were the only variables that contributed meaningfully to (i.e.,  $\beta \leq .20$ ) civic efficacy in Block 3.

Results of the regression analyses for White youth with civic responsibility as the dependent variable are presented in Table 5. The demographic variables entered in Block 1 accounted for just under 3% of the variance in civic responsibility. School climate and extracurricular engagement were added in Block 2 and accounted for four times the variance accounted for by the demographic variables. However, the four pedagogical teaching practices added in Block 3 accounted for less than 4% additional variance. The variance added in both Block 2 and Block 3 met the threshold for practical significance (Ferguson, 2009). Further, as can be seen in Table 5, school climate was the only variable that meaningfully contributed to civic responsibility in Block 3.

Results of the regression analyses for White youth with civic participation as the dependent variable are presented in Table 6. The demographic variables entered in Block 1 accounted for just over 11% of the variance in civic participation. However, school climate and extracurricular engagement were added in Block 2 and they accounted for less than 1% of additional variance. The four pedagogical teaching practices added in Block 3 accounted less than 6% additional variance. Further, as can be seen in Table 6, only service learning was a meaningful contributor to civic participation in Block 3.

Results of the regression analyses for White youth with voting intention as the dependent variable are presented in Table 7. The demographic variables entered in Block 1 accounted for more than 13% of the variance in voting intent. School climate and extracurricular engagement were added in Block 2 and they accounted for less than 4% additional variance. The four pedagogical teaching practices added in Block 3 accounted for less than 1% additional variance. Only the variance added in Block 1 met threshold for practical significance (Ferguson, 2009). Further, as can be seen in Table 7, parent educational attainment, perceived grades, and friend political discussions contributed meaningfully to voting intent in Block 3.

Results of the regression analyses for non-White youth with civic efficacy as the dependent variable are presented in Table 8. The demographic variables entered in Block 1 accounted for just over 8% of the variance in civic efficacy. School climate and extracurricular engagement were added in Block 2 and they accounted for over double the variance accounted for by the demographic variables. However, the four pedagogical teaching practices added no additional variance. Further, as can be seen in Table 8, only school climate contributed meaningfully to civic efficacy in Block 3.

Results of the regression analyses for non-White youth with civic responsibility as the dependent variable are presented in Table 9. The demographic variables entered in Block 1 accounted for less than 2% of the variance in civic responsibility. School climate and extracurricular engagement were added in Block 2 and they accounted for about 14 times the variance accounted for by the demographic variables. However, the four pedagogical teaching practices added in Block 3 did not account for additional variance. Further, as can be seen in Table 9, only school climate was a meaningful contributor to civic responsibility in Block 3.

Results of the regression analyses for non-White youth with civic participation as the dependent variable are presented in Table 10. The demographic variables entered in Block 1 accounted for less than 3% of the variance in civic participation. School climate and extracurricular engagement were added in Block 2 and they accounted for twice the variance accounted for by the demographic variables. The four pedagogical teaching practices added in Block 3 accounted for 6% additional variance. Further, as can be seen in Table 10, extracurricular engagement and service learning were meaningful contributors to civic participation in Block 3.

Results of the regression analyses for non-White youth with voting intent as the dependent variable are presented in Table 11. The demographic variables entered in Block 1 accounted for over 3% of the variance in voting intent. School climate and extracurricular engagement were added to Block 2 and they accounted for 4% additional variance. The four pedagogical teaching practices added in Block 3 accounted for less than 1% additional variance. Further, as can be seen in Table 11, only school climate meaningfully contributed to voting intent in Block 3.

### **Discussion**

This study was conducted to better understand the impact of civic education policy, namely specific pedagogical approaches in the classroom (i.e., foundational civic knowledge, simulations of the democratic process, current issue discussions, service learning), as well as outside classroom school factors (i.e., school climate and extracurricular engagement) as potential predictors for increased civic attitudes and behaviors (i.e., civic efficacy, civic responsibility, civic participation, voting intention) in White and non-White youth. In this study, I attempted to answer the following research questions: (a) Were student perceptions of Illinois civics education mandated pedagogical approaches (i.e., foundational civic knowledge, current issue discussions, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process) related to civic efficacy, civic responsibility, civic participation, and voting intention, and (b) were school climate and extracurricular engagement related to civic attitudes and behaviors?

The first hypothesis was partially supported as service learning meaningfully contributed to civic participation in the White and non-White subsamples. However, students' perceptions of receiving other mandated pedagogical approaches did not meaningfully contribute to civic attitudes or behaviors in White and non-White youth. The second hypothesis was also partially supported as school climate meaningfully contributed to civic efficacy and civic responsibility in the White subsample and civic responsibility and voting in the non-White subsample. Further, extracurricular engagement meaningfully contributed to civic participation in the non-White subsample.

#### **Classroom Pedagogical Approaches and Civic Attitudes and Behaviors**

Foundational civic knowledge, simulations of the democratic process, and current issue discussions did not meaningfully contribute to any of the civic attitude and behavior variables (i.e., civic efficacy, civic responsibility, civic participation, voting intention). This finding is surprising as there are research studies suggesting that specific pedagogical approaches used in the classroom support students in developing civic attitudes and behavior (Campbell, 2008; Martens & Gainous, 2013). However, it is important to note that in the current study, the pedagogical variables included few and very general questions that only gathered information regarding if students remembered being exposed to a certain pedagogy throughout their whole middle school experience. Students did not report how many times or how in-depth their engagement was over their middle school years. Further, students' perceptions of the teachers' effectiveness in using the pedagogy were not included in the study, nor were any teachers' perceptions or experiences with the pedagogies assessed. These factors may be important in analyzing the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches and could have influenced the results of the study.

Service learning was the only pedagogical approach that meaningfully contributed to any of the civic attitude and behavior variables—namely civic participation—in both the White and non-White subsamples. This result is commensurate with extant literature, which suggests that when students have the opportunity to engage in service learning in their school, they are able to

practice community participation and gain awareness of how their influence can create change in their community (Albanesi & Compare, 2023). However, it is surprising that service learning did not foster civic attitudes (i.e., civic efficacy and/or civic responsibility) among youth in the current study. Due to the fact that most research regarding service learning includes college- or high school-aged youth, this result may highlight the developmental difference that middle school aged youth have compared to traditionally studied older youth. Although students who participated in service learning in middle school were more likely to engage in their local communities, it still may take more time and civic experience beyond middle school for youth to develop confidence in their individual capabilities to create change as well as an understanding of their responsibilities as a citizen.

### **School Climate and Civic Attitudes and Behaviors**

School climate meaningfully contributed to civic efficacy and civic responsibility in the White subsample and civic responsibility and voting in the non-White subsample. This finding was expected, as there are research studies suggesting that youth who perceive their school climate positively have higher rates of civic attitudes and behaviors compared to youth who do not perceive their school climate positively (Jagers et al., 2017; Lenzi et al., 2014). However, it is interesting that school climate contributed meaningfully to civic efficacy and civic responsibility in the White subsample and civic responsibility and voting intention in the non-White subsample, but not to civic participation in both subsamples. In a literature review, Guillaume and colleagues (2015) reported that school climate predicted civic participation via the variable of school connectedness, but not directly. To become actively engaged in one's community during adolescence, a young person may need more than the perception of their school environment. This study demonstrates the importance of school climate in being associated with civic efficacy, civic responsibility, and intent to vote, even more strongly than engaging in evidence-based pedagogical approaches in the classroom.

Previous research in civics education primarily focuses on explicit forms of curriculum and classroom factors, but not on other school factors that impact students' civic development. Especially in early and middle adolescence, the age of middle school youth, there may be a foundational need for positive perceptions of the school environment before valuable learning and development can take place. A school climate that includes democratic values, where students feel like their voices are heard and valued by adults and peers, impacts students' civic attitudes and behavior in the future.

Although school climate meaningfully contributed to civic responsibility in both the White and non-White subsamples, school climate meaningfully contributed to civic efficacy only in the White subsample and school climate meaningfully contributed to voting intent only in the non-White subsample. These results highlight the different effects that a positive school environment can have on students, depending on their demographic profile. Further, although White students who experience a positive school climate may feel efficacious to contribute to their community, students who are historically marginalized may need more interventions than merely their school climate to foster civic efficacy. In addition, non-White students who experience a positive school climate are more likely to vote in future elections, and White students are not more likely to vote if they experience a positive school climate. This result suggests that non-White youth's out of classroom experiences (i.e., relationships with teachers, feelings of personal safety in school) contribute to political behavior and White students may need specific political interventions to support their intent to vote.

The importance of school climate has been recognized by some civics education organizations (Illinois Civics Hub, 2021). For example, the Illinois Civics Hub (2021), an organization geared towards providing guidance and information on required implementation of civics education in Illinois, includes school climate in their recommendations for what needs to be in place for schools to be considered equipped to have a sustainable commitment to civic learning. Researchers and leaders in civics education at Illinois Civics Hub report that school climates are a foundational part of the organization culture that is needed to promote youths' civic development.

### **Extracurricular Engagement and Civic Engagement**

Extracurricular engagement meaningfully contributed to civic participation in the non-White subsample but did not meaningfully contribute to civic participation in the White subsample. Pertaining to the non-White subsample, this finding is commensurate with research (Kahne & Sporte, 2008) suggesting that students who come from marginalized backgrounds are more likely to be civically engaged if given the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities through school. The present study adds to the extant literature by replicating previous findings but in a middle school-aged sample. Even in middle school, extracurricular activities for marginalized students support students' engagement with their communities. However, White students may not receive the same civic benefits from extracurricular engagement as their non-White peers. Generally, students who receive opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities typically live in communities that tend to be majority White and affluent (Campbell, 2019). Results from this study suggest that middle schools serving students from diverse and marginalized backgrounds should provide opportunities for students to get involved with extracurricular activities in order to foster youth civic engagement.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study has several limitations that are important to note. First, dichotomizing the sample into White and non-White subsamples makes the results less generalizable. Although youth of color generally have lower rates of civic attitudes and behaviors (Suttie, 2021) compared to White youth, various populations who identify as youth of color (i.e., Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black, Latinx, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander) still have diverse histories and trends as it relates to civic attitudes and behaviors (CIRCLE, 2020). It is important that all groups who have been marginalized are represented in future research regarding civic attitudes and behavior; in this way, practices and policies can better target and foster these groups of youth to become more actively engaged.

Second, the scales created in this study were from an already existing dataset; thus, the measures were not perfectly aligned with the constructs being assessed. Although the pedagogical approach scales (foundational civic knowledge, simulations of the democratic process, service learning, current issue discussions) generally measured the broad characterizations of pedagogical approaches used by teachers in the classroom that was mandated through Illinois educational policy, the limited number of questions likely missed critical components to the complex and multidimensional aspects of the civics pedagogies. For example, the current issue discussions variable only consisted of one question, which increases the likelihood of measurement error (Ansolabehere et al., 2008).

Furthermore, research indicates that the quality of discussions taking place in the classroom are vital to civic attitudes and behavior outcomes (Campbell, 2008; Gainous & Martens, 2012; Kahne et al., 2013; Martens & Gainous, 2013; Persson, 2015), but it was not possible to explore discussion quality facilitated by the teacher with the available data. Future

researchers should investigate if more reliable and valid measures of the pedagogical practices affect civic attitudes and behaviors of youth. Reliable and valid measures of pedagogical approaches would be beneficial so teaching practices can be targeted to better foster student participation in American democracy. Moreover, future researchers should investigate the quality of classroom pedagogies (e.g., open classroom climate; Campbell, 2019) taking place in the classroom and how different applications of pedagogical approaches may predict future civic attitudes and behavior.

Third, in the present study I only measured students' perspectives of their experiences with civics education pedagogical approaches in the classroom. Thus, teachers' experiences, such as their competence and confidence in applying the pedagogical strategies, are unknown. Teachers' levels of confidence and competence likely make a difference in how students perceive and respond to their pedagogical approaches (Kraft & Donohoo, 2023). Future researchers should explore teachers' experiences in providing civics education in order to understand where teachers feel they need additional support. Teacher's reports of their pedagogical experiences would be beneficial so specific professional development activities can be created in order to support teachers' abilities to deliver high quality civics education with fidelity.

Finally, in the present study, I only included measures of participants' present levels of civic attitudes and behaviors. Thus, participants future civic attitudes and behaviors are unknown, making it unclear of the lasting impact classroom and outside middle school factors have on students' civic attitudes and behaviors in high school and into adulthood. More longitudinal research must be performed to investigate at what time getting involved in the community influences youths' future civic attitudes behavior and if school factors influence attitudinal and behavioral changes over time.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of the present study are both consistent and inconsistent with previous research demonstrating school factors' influence on civic attitudes and behavior. Although more research is needed to understand the role of the schools in providing opportunities for young people to be participants in democracy, nevertheless, the results of the present study can help inform future researchers and other educational stakeholders about the importance of prioritizing the climate and culture of schools as well as opportunities for students to participate in service learning. It is hoped that results of this study will motivate researchers in the political science and educational fields alike to continue examining factors that influence young people to develop positive civic attitudes and behaviors, especially factors within educational settings. Specifically, it will be vital to continue exploring factors that promote democratic engagement in young people of color, especially because this population has been historically disenfranchised from voting and other civic opportunities (Levinson, 2014).

In the present study, I investigated individuals' experiences in middle school. However, some researchers suggest that the development of civic attitudes and behaviors can begin even earlier than adolescence (Holbein, 2017; Malin et al., 2017; Youniss et al., 1997). It is important to continue studying students in elementary and middle schools, and how school factors influence these young students' future civic attitudes and behaviors (Campbell, 2006; Flanagan, 2013; Franklin, 2004; Green et al., 2003; Osman et al., 2020). It is imperative that future research performed includes youth in all grades, so intervention practices to increase democratic participation as well as policies designed for civics education can be implemented in the most optimal ways. Amid a time of heightened concern about democratic backsliding in the United States, it is more important than ever that young people receive the opportunities to be active in



their communities and in democracy as a whole. School-based stakeholders are capable of cultivating democratically engaged young people, and if school stakeholders fail to provide students with the knowledge and skills to be able to actively participate in democracy, then who will?

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**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables in White and Non-White Youth**

| Variable                              | Variable Range | White<br>(129) |      | Non-White<br>(196) |      |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|------|--------------------|------|
|                                       |                | M              | SD   | M                  | SD   |
| Parent Educational Attainment         | 1–5            | 4.25           | 1.22 | 2.89               | 1.39 |
| Perceived Grades                      | 1–5            | 3.82           | .88  | 3.41               | .93  |
| Family Political Discussions          | 1–5            | 2.39           | 1.19 | 2.12               | 1.20 |
| Friend Political Discussions          | 1–5            | 1.88           | 1.14 | 1.61               | .90  |
| School Climate                        | 1–5            | 4.09           | .78  | 3.85               | .85  |
| Extracurricular Engagement            | 0–1            | .89            | .31  | .73                | .43  |
| Foundational Civic Knowledge          | 0–2            | .76            | .58  | .81                | .57  |
| Simulations of the Democratic Process | 0–1            | 2.14           | 1.33 | 2.02               | 1.48 |
| Current Issue Discussions             | 0–1            | .76            | .40  | .75                | .39  |
| Service Learning                      | 0–1            | 1.14           | .72  | 1.15               | .66  |
| Civic Efficacy                        | 1–5            | 3.67           | .97  | 3.55               | .92  |
| Civic Responsibility                  | 1–4            | 3.19           | .61  | 3.23               | .53  |
| Civic Participation                   | 0–1            | 2.29           | 1.91 | 2.32               | 1.98 |
| Voting Intent                         | 0–1            | .93            | .23  | .84                | .31  |

**Table 2**  
Intercorrelations for Study Variables in White Youth

| Variable | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10  | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. Ge    | 1    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2. PEA   | .03  | -    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 3. PG    | .07  | .43  | -    |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 4. FPD   | .04  | -.03 | .00  | -    |      |      |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 5. FrPD  | .09  | .05  | .04  | .49  | -    |      |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 6. SC    | .14  | .02  | .01  | .01  | -.06 | -    |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 7. EE    | .05  | .09  | .25  | .10  | .17  | .08  | -    |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 8. FCK   | .18  | .09  | .03  | -.07 | -.03 | -.14 | -.07 | -    |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 9. Sim   | -.02 | -.07 | -.24 | .20  | .02  | .211 | .06  | -.04 | -    |     |     |     |     |     |
| 10. CID  | -.01 | .02  | .04  | .12  | -.03 | .03  | -.05 | -.09 | .19  | -   |     |     |     |     |
| 11. SL   | -.09 | -.10 | -.22 | -.00 | .13  | .15  | -.04 | -.04 | .24  | .08 | -   |     |     |     |
| 12. CE   | .08  | .19  | .23  | .09  | .20  | .54  | .19  | .02  | .13  | .08 | .19 | -   |     |     |
| 13. CR   | .05  | .16  | .16  | .13  | .17  | .36  | .00  | .12  | -.02 | .03 | .18 | .55 | -   |     |
| 14. CEn  | -.13 | -.10 | .01  | .26  | .30  | .02  | .17  | -.14 | .12  | .12 | .29 | .29 | .22 | -   |
| 15. VI   | .53  | .35  | .30  | .13  | .03  | .22  | .04  | -.06 | .01  | .05 | .11 | .43 | .31 | .20 |

*Note.* Ge = gender; PEA = parent educational attainment; PG = perceived grades; FPD = family political discussions; FrPD = friend political discussions; SC = school climate; EE = extracurricular engagement; FCK = foundational civic knowledge; Sim = simulations; CID = current issue discussions; SL = service learning; CE = civic efficacy; CR = civic responsibility; CEn = civic engagement; VI = voting intent

**Table 3**  
**Intercorrelations for Study Variables in Non-White Youth**

| Variable | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9   | 10  | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. Ge    | 1    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2. PEA   | .10  | -    |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 3. PG    | .06  | .13  | -    |      |      |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 4. FPD   | -.06 | .14  | .04  | -    |      |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 5. FrPD  | .07  | .06  | .04  | .29  | -    |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 6. SC    | -.06 | .10  | .13  | -.17 | -.04 | -    |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 7. EE    | -.02 | .04  | .14  | .10  | .01  | -.01 | -    |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 8. FCK   | .05  | .03  | .03  | .09  | .04  | -.20 | .00  | -    |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 9. Sim   | -.02 | .19  | -.04 | .04  | .02  | .28  | .04  | -.08 | -   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 10. CID  | -.09 | .07  | -.06 | .06  | -.09 | .01  | .07  | -.07 | .17 | -   |     |     |     |     |
| 11. SL   | -.06 | .03  | .04  | .13  | .17  | .04  | -.03 | -.01 | .23 | .04 | -   |     |     |     |
| 12. CE   | .12  | .27  | .20  | .03  | .03  | .43  | .20  | -.14 | .20 | .04 | .04 | -   |     |     |
| 13. CR   | .05  | -.07 | .04  | -.14 | .01  | .41  | -.01 | -.15 | .09 | .06 | .06 | .36 | -   |     |
| 14. CEn  | .01  | .05  | .01  | .16  | .20  | .14  | .10  | .07  | .20 | .27 | .27 | .19 | .09 | -   |
| 15. VI   | -.12 | .14  | .07  | .14  | .03  | .20  | .04  | -.06 | .12 | .12 | .12 | .15 | .16 | .12 |

*Note.* Ge = gender; PEA = parent educational attainment; PG = perceived grades; FPD = family political discussions; FrPD = friend political discussions; SC = school climate; EE = extracurricular engagement; FCK = foundational civic knowledge; Sim = simulations; CID = current issue discussions; SL = service learning; CE = civic efficacy; CR = civic responsibility; CEn = civic engagement; VI = voting intent

**Table 4**  
Hierarchical Regression Results for Civic Efficacy in White Youth

| Variable                 | B     | SE B | $\beta$ | R <sup>2</sup> | $\Delta R^2$ |
|--------------------------|-------|------|---------|----------------|--------------|
| Step 1                   |       |      |         | .06            | .06          |
| Constant                 | 2.24  | .44  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .08   | .17  | .04     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .08   | .08  | .10     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .20   | .11  | .18     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .00   | .08  | .00     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .15   | .08  | .18     |                |              |
| Step 2                   |       |      |         | .37            | .31          |
| Constant                 | -.57  | .51  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | -.07  | .14  | -.04    |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .07   | .06  | .09     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .19   | .09  | .17     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | -.02  | .07  | -.03    |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .19   | .07  | .23     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .68   | .09  | .55*    |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .19   | .23  | .06     |                |              |
| Step 3                   |       |      |         | .38            | .01          |
| Constant                 | -1.10 | .55  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | -.08  | .14  | -.04    |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .07   | .06  | .08     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .22   | .09  | .20     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | -.02  | .07  | .21     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .18   | .07  | .21     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .67   | .09  | .54*    |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .22   | .23  | .07     |                |              |
| FCK                      | .19   | .21  | .11     |                |              |
| Simulations              | .02   | .06  | .03     |                |              |
| Current Issue Discuss    | .15   | .17  | .06     |                |              |
| Service Learning         | .17   | .10  | .13     |                |              |

*Note.* Parent Ed Attainment = parent educational attainment; Fam Political Discuss = family political discussions; Friend Political Discuss = friend political discussions; Extracurricular Engage = extracurricular engagement; FCK = foundational civic knowledge; Simulations = simulations of the democratic process; Current Issue Discuss = current issue discussions

\*  $p < .004$ .

**Table 5**  
 Hierarchical Regression Results for Civic Responsibility in White Youth

| Variable                 | B    | SE B | $\beta$ | R <sup>2</sup> | $\Delta R^2$ |
|--------------------------|------|------|---------|----------------|--------------|
| Step 1                   |      |      |         | .03            | .03          |
| Constant                 | 2.45 | .28  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .03  | .11  | .02     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .06  | .05  | .12     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .07  | .07  | .10     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .04  | .05  | .07     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .07  | .05  | .13     |                |              |
| Step 2                   |      |      |         | .16            | .13          |
| Constant                 | 1.36 | .37  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | -.04 | .10  | -.03    |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .05  | .05  | .10     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .09  | .07  | .13     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .03  | .05  | .06     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .10  | .05  | .18     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .30  | .07  | .38*    |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | -.21 | .17  | -.11    |                |              |
| Step 3                   |      |      |         | .20            | .04          |
| Constant                 | 1.02 | .39  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | -.07 | .10  | -.05    |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .05  | .05  | .09     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .09  | .07  | .13     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .05  | .05  | .11     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .08  | .05  | .14     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .32  | .07  | .40*    |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | -.15 | .17  | -.08    |                |              |
| FCK                      | .19  | .09  | .18*    |                |              |
| Simulations              | -.06 | .04  | -.12    |                |              |
| Current Issue Discuss    | .04  | .13  | .02     |                |              |
| Service Learning         | .14  | .07  | .17     |                |              |

*Note.* Parent Ed Attainment = parent educational attainment; Fam Political Discuss = family political discussions; Friend Political Discuss = friend political discussions; Extracurricular Engage = extracurricular engagement; FCK = foundational civic knowledge; Simulations = simulations of the democratic process; Current Issue Discuss = current issue discussions

\*  $p < .004$ .

**Table 6**  
Hierarchical Regression Results for Civic Participation in White Youth

| Variable                 | B    | SE B | $\beta$ | R <sup>2</sup> | $\Delta R^2$ |
|--------------------------|------|------|---------|----------------|--------------|
| Step 1                   |      |      |         | .11            | .11          |
| Constant                 | 1.57 | .84  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | -.62 | .32  | -.16    |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | -.21 | .15  | -.14    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .16  | .20  | .07     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .22  | .15  | .14     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .42  | .16  | .25     |                |              |
| Step 2                   |      |      |         | .12            | .01          |
| Constant                 | .73  | 1.19 |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | -.65 | .32  | -.17    |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | -.21 | .15  | -.13    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .09  | .21  | .04     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .21  | .15  | .13     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .40  | .16  | .24     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .12  | .21  | .05     |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .77  | .54  | .13     |                |              |
| Step 3                   |      |      |         | .17            | .05          |
| Constant                 | -.07 | 1.25 |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | -.48 | .32  | -.13    |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | -.19 | .14  | -.12    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .20  | .21  | .09     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .22  | .15  | .14     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .32  | .16  | .19     |                |              |
| School Climate           | -.03 | .21  | -.01    |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .80  | .53  | .13     |                |              |
| FCK                      | -.24 | .28  | -.07    |                |              |
| Simulations              | .02  | .13  | .02     |                |              |
| Current Issue Discuss    | .41  | .40  | .09     |                |              |
| Service Learning         | .68  | .23  | .26*    |                |              |

*Note.* Parent Ed Attainment = parent educational attainment; Fam Political Discuss = family political discussions; Friend Political Discuss = friend political discussions; Extracurricular Engage = extracurricular engagement; FCK = foundational civic knowledge; Simulations = simulations of the democratic process; Current Issue Discuss = current issue discussions

\*  $p < .004$ .



**Table 7**  
 Hierarchical Regression Results for Voting Intent in White Youth

| Variable                 | B    | SE B | $\beta$ | R <sup>2</sup> | $\Delta R^2$ |
|--------------------------|------|------|---------|----------------|--------------|
| Step 1                   |      |      |         | .14            | .14          |
| Constant                 | .47  | .10  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .02  | .04  | .04     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .05  | .12  | .28*    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .05  | .02  | .18     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .03  | .02  | .18     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | -.02 | .02  | -.08    |                |              |
| Step 2                   |      |      |         | .17            | .03          |
| Constant                 | .25  | .14  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .00  | .04  | .01     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .05  | .02  | .27*    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .05  | .02  | .20*    |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .03  | .02  | .17     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | -.01 | .02  | -.05    |                |              |
| School Climate           | .06  | .02  | .22     |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | -.05 | .06  | -.06    |                |              |
| Step 3                   |      |      |         | .18            | .01          |
| Constant                 | .22  | .15  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .02  | .04  | .04     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .05  | .02  | .29*    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .06  | .03  | .22     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .04  | .02  | .19     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | -.02 | .02  | -.20    |                |              |
| School Climate           | .05  | .03  | .18     |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | -.04 | .06  | -.06    |                |              |
| FCK                      | -.03 | .03  | -.07    |                |              |
| Simulations              | -.01 | .02  | -.03    |                |              |
| Current Issue Discuss    | -.01 | .05  | -.01    |                |              |
| Service Learning         | .06  | .03  | .18     |                |              |

*Note.* Parent Ed Attainment = parent educational attainment; Fam Political Discuss = family political discussions; Friend Political Discuss = friend political discussions; Extracurricular Engage = extracurricular engagement; FCK = foundational civic knowledge; Simulations = simulations of the democratic process; Current Issue Discuss = current issue discussions  
 \*  $p < .004$ .

**Table 8**  
Hierarchical Regression Results for Civic Efficacy in Non-White Youth

| Variable                 | B    | SE B | $\beta$ | R <sup>2</sup> | $\Delta R^2$ |
|--------------------------|------|------|---------|----------------|--------------|
| Step 1                   |      |      |         | .08            | .08          |
| Constant                 | 2.48 | .29  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .16  | .13  | .09     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .16  | .05  | .24*    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .16  | .07  | .16     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | -.01 | .06  | -.01    |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .01  | .07  | .01     |                |              |
| Step 2                   |      |      |         | .27            | .19          |
| Constant                 | .65  | .37  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .24  | .04  | .19     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .12  | .04  | .19*    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .09  | .06  | .09     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .05  | .05  | .06     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .01  | .07  | .01     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .45  | .07  | .42*    |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .40  | .13  | .18*    |                |              |
| Step 3                   |      |      |         | .27            | .00          |
| Constant                 | .78  | .41  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .25  | .12  | .13     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .12  | .04  | .18     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .10  | .06  | .10     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .05  | .05  | .06     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .01  | .07  | .01     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .42  | .07  | .39*    |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .39  | .14  | .18*    |                |              |
| FCK                      | -.12 | .10  | -.08    |                |              |
| Simulations              | .03  | .04  | .05     |                |              |
| Current Issue Discuss    | .00  | .15  | .00     |                |              |
| Service Learning         | .00  | .09  | .00     |                |              |

*Note.* Parent Ed Attainment = parent educational attainment; Fam Political Discuss = family political discussions; Friend Political Discuss = friend political discussions; Extracurricular Engage = extracurricular engagement; FCK = foundational civic knowledge; Simulations = simulations of the democratic process; Current Issue Discuss = current issue discussions

\*  $p < .004$ .

**Table 9**  
Hierarchical Regression Results for Civic Responsibility in Non-White Youth

| Variable                 | B    | SE B | $\beta$ | R <sup>2</sup> | $\Delta R^2$ |
|--------------------------|------|------|---------|----------------|--------------|
| Step 1                   |      |      |         | .01            | .01          |
| Constant                 | 3.17 | .17  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .04  | .08  | .04     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | -.03 | .03  | -.07    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .06  | .04  | .11     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | -.07 | .03  | -.15    |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .03  | .04  | .05     |                |              |
| Step 2                   |      |      |         | .16            | .15          |
| Constant                 | 2.24 | .23  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .08  | .07  | .08     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | -.04 | .03  | -.11    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .03  | .04  | .06     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | -.03 | .03  | -.07    |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .03  | .04  | .05     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .26  | .04  | .41*    |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .00  | .08  | .00     |                |              |
| Step 3                   |      |      |         | .16            | .00          |
| Constant                 | 2.21 | .25  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .09  | .07  | .09     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | -.04 | .03  | -.11    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .03  | .04  | .06     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | -.03 | .03  | -.07    |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .03  | .04  | .05     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .25  | .05  | .40*    |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | -.00 | .08  | -.00    |                |              |
| FCK                      | -.06 | .06  | -.06    |                |              |
| Simulations              | -.01 | .10  | .07     |                |              |
| Current Issue Discuss    | .09  | .10  | .07     |                |              |
| Service Learning         | .04  | .06  | .05     |                |              |

*Note.* Parent Ed Attainment = parent educational attainment; Fam Political Discuss = family political discussions; Friend Political Discuss = friend political discussions; Extracurricular Engage = extracurricular engagement; FCK = foundational civic knowledge; Simulations = simulations of the democratic process; Current Issue Discuss = current issue discussions

\*  $p < .004$ .

**Table 10**  
 Hierarchical Regression Results for Civic Participation in Non-White Youth

| Variable                 | B     | SE B | $\beta$ | R <sup>2</sup> | $\Delta R^2$ |
|--------------------------|-------|------|---------|----------------|--------------|
| Step 1                   |       |      |         | .03            | .03          |
| Constant                 | 1.08  | .64  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .00   | .29  | .00     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .03   | .10  | .02     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .05   | .15  | .02     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .19   | .12  | .11     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .36   | .16  | .16     |                |              |
| Step 2                   |       |      |         | .09            | .06          |
| Constant                 | -.91  | .88  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .09   | .28  | .02     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | -.01  | .10  | -.00    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | -.06  | .15  | -.03    |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .22   | .12  | .13     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .37   | .16  | .17     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .42   | .17  | .18     |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .97   | .32  | .21*    |                |              |
| Step 3                   |       |      |         | .15            | .06          |
| Constant                 | -1.80 | .95  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | .15   | .27  | .04     |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | -.04  | .10  | -.03    |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | -.06  | .15  | -.03    |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .16   | .12  | .10     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | .30   | .16  | .14     |                |              |
| School Climate           | .37   | .17  | .16     |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .98   | .31  | .21*    |                |              |
| FCK                      | .33   | .24  | .09     |                |              |
| Simulations              | .13   | .10  | .10     |                |              |
| Current Issue Discuss    | .12   | .35  | .02     |                |              |
| Service Learning         | .66   | .21  | .22*    |                |              |

*Note.* Parent Ed Attainment = parent educational attainment; Fam Political Discuss = family political discussions; Friend Political Discuss = friend political discussions; Extracurricular Engage = extracurricular engagement; FCK = foundational civic knowledge; Simulations = simulations of the democratic process; Current Issue Discuss = current issue discussions

\*  $p < .004$ .

**Table 11**  
 Hierarchical Regression Results for Voting Intent in Non-White Youth

| Variable                 | B    | SE B | $\beta$ | R <sup>2</sup> | $\Delta R^2$ |
|--------------------------|------|------|---------|----------------|--------------|
| Step 1                   |      |      |         | .03            | .03          |
| Constant                 | .66  | .10  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | -.08 | .04  | -.13    |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .03  | .02  | .13     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .02  | .02  | .07     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .03  | .02  | .12     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | -.00 | .03  | -.01    |                |              |
| Step 2                   |      |      |         | .07            | .04          |
| Constant                 | .37  | .14  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | -.07 | .04  | -.11    |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .02  | .02  | .11     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .01  | .02  | .04     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .04  | .02  | .15     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | -.00 | .03  | -.01    |                |              |
| School Climate           | .07  | .03  | .21     |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .05  | .05  | .07     |                |              |
| Step 3                   |      |      |         | .08            | .01          |
| Constant                 | .27  | .15  |         |                |              |
| Gender                   | -.06 | .04  | -.09    |                |              |
| Parent Ed Attainment     | .02  | .02  | .10     |                |              |
| Perceived Grades         | .02  | .02  | .05     |                |              |
| Fam Political Discuss    | .04  | .02  | .14     |                |              |
| Friend Political Discuss | -.00 | .03  | -.00    |                |              |
| School Climate           | .07  | .03  | .20     |                |              |
| Extracurricular Engage   | .04  | .05  | .06     |                |              |
| FCK                      | -.01 | .04  | -.02    |                |              |
| Simulations              | -.00 | .02  | -.01    |                |              |
| Current Issue Discuss    | .11  | .06  | .14     |                |              |
| Service Learning         | .04  | .03  | .09     |                |              |

*Note.* Parent Ed Attainment = parent educational attainment; Fam Political Discuss = family political discussions; Friend Political Discuss = friend political discussions; Extracurricular Engage = extracurricular engagement; FCK = foundational civic knowledge; Simulations = simulations of the democratic process; Current Issue Discuss = current issue discussions

\*  $p < .004$ .