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A Five-Year Evaluation of a Comprehensive High School Civic Engagement Initiative

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Abstract

In September 2003, Hudson High School in Hudson, MA, launched two new civic development efforts—clustering and schoolwide governance—that provide an opportunity to study the influence of schoolwide democratic deliberation on students' civic knowledge and participation. The intervention involved, in part, organizing the school into clusters of 100 to 150 students that meet for one hour each week to discuss governance and other school-related issues, perform community service, and pursue other cluster-related activities. In 2003 we began collecting data to assess the progress of the clustering and schoolwide governance intervention. The findings to date suggest that the programs have been generally implemented as planned but that changes have been made to address specific issues that have arisen. Because the programs are still evolving, they cannot yet be considered mature. Nevertheless, successive classes of twelfth graders have shown improvements on measures of community service and political knowledge, and the improvements have been widespread in the student population. In addition, these positive changes were relatively larger for disenfranchised youth and other groups of students who initially scored lower than their counterpart groups on these civic measures, indicating that the programs are reaching the students they were designed to reach. Finally, examples from the current study support the idea that adult support, via scaffolding, plays an important role in building youth civic engagement. These findings demonstrate that all students—not just a select few—can and will engage in civic activity in their schools when given appropriate opportunity.

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In February 2003, a group of scholars and practitioners concerned about educating children for citizenship in the United States published *The Civic Mission of Schools* report, which proposed that schools take a "richer, more comprehensive approach" to civic education (Carnegie Corporation & CIRCLE, 2003; p. 4). In September of that year, Hudson High School, in Hudson, MA, undertook such an approach, launching a comprehensive civic engagement initiative involving two interrelated programs—clustering and schoolwide governance—and moving into a new building designed to facilitate them. This report presents the results of a five-year evaluation of these programs.

Background

Since the U.S. Department of Education reported the results of its 1998 national civics assessment, parents, educators, social scientists, and policymakers in the United States have been putting renewed effort into finding ways to prepare young people for active citizenship in adulthood. The assessment found, for example, that only one fourth of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students were "proficient" in civics—the desired level of performance for all students (Lutkus, Weiss, Campbell, Mazzeo, & Lazer, 1999). Almost half of students demonstrated only partial mastery of civics knowledge and skills, and nearly a third of students were essentially civically illiterate.

Noting these civic shortcomings in children, as well as declines in voting and interest in public affairs among young people, *The Civic Mission of Schools* called on educators and policymakers to correct this situation through a variety of education-based interventions (Carnegie Corporation & CIRCLE, 2003). Research indicates that schools can play an important role in the civic development of youth. Niemi and Junn (1998), for example, observed that persons who spend more years in school have greater political knowledge. The report, however, went beyond proposing more school time to

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suggest the potential value of several specific strategies. One is to "give students opportunities to contribute opinions about the governance of the school—not just through student governments, but in forums that engage the entire student body or in smaller groups addressing significant problems in the school" (p. 21). A number of recent studies have demonstrated that adolescents who discuss politics and current events with their teachers (or parents or peers) tend to score higher than other youth on measures of civic behaviors, attitudes, and skills. They develop higher levels of political knowledge, show greater intention to vote in the future, and do better on a range of civic outcomes from petitioning and boycotting to raising money for charities and participating in community meetings (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). Much of the research on political discussion in schools, however, has focused on classrooms of students. Although some research supports the idea of engaging the entire student body in democratic deliberation (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989), there is a general lack of evidence about the impact of this approach on student civic development. Changes in the structure and governance of Hudson High School provide an opportunity to study the impact of such an intervention on students' civic attitudes, skills, knowledge, and behaviors.

Hudson is an industry-based town where about one third of the population is of Portuguese/Brazilian decent (Berman, 2004). The high school serves about 1,000 socially and economically diverse students. Since 1993, the high school has worked to restructure its curriculum, organization, and teaching practices to foster the development of an ethic of civic service and responsibility, as well as abilities that will allow informed participation in the community (Berman, 2004). This effort includes a core ninth-grade civics course designed to develop a greater sense of moral responsibility in students and the integration of service-learning across the curriculum.

In the fall of 2003, the school launched its clustering and schoolwide governance programs and moved into a new building designed accommodate them (Berman, 2004). Clustering aims to achieve a sense of community within a large school by creating small communities of 100 to 150 students. To create common bonds that tie each group together, clusters at the grade 10-12 level are organized around four areas of student interest: communications, media, and the arts; science, health, recreation, and the environment; business, engineering, and technology; and public policy, education, and service. Clusters meet for one hour each week to discuss and work on school and cluster issues. Each cluster has a lead teacher, a counselor, and a dozen or more supporting teachers, with students and faculty working together to organize and run the cluster. Clusters typically elect officers, select a steering group or agenda committee, and form interest groups to pursue the various activities of the cluster such as raising funds for charity, doing community service projects, locating guest speakers, and planning trips and other events. The new school building was designed with space to facilitate such meetings, reflecting the idea that democratic deliberation requires "public space" where people can gather and engage with each other (Boyte & Kari, 1996).

Clusters also form the basic unit of the schoolwide governance program, which was derived from the concept of "just communities" within high schools (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). The belief underpinning schoolwide governance is that students become more civic minded and engaged if they participate in democratic deliberation as part of their school experience. Research suggests that deliberation creates new knowledge, which can promote the decision-making that leads to civic action (Barber, 2003). In the cluster/governance programs, students discuss and vote on governance issues in clusterwide meetings, much like a New England town meeting. Recommendations passed by the clusters are sent for a vote at the monthly meeting of a "Community Council" made up of student, faculty, administration, and community

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representatives. Student representatives have the additional responsibility of keeping their respective clusters informed about the workings of the council.

The overall goals of the clustering and governance programs are to enhance the civic development of students and to generate greater feelings of community, particularly among "disenfranchised" students who come to school every day, do their academic work, but participate in almost nothing else. In the sections below, we briefly describe the implementation of these two programs, focusing on what works well and what does not. We then look in depth at the impact these programs may have had on the civic development of twelfth graders since the initiative was launched.

Method

In spring 2003—prior to implementing the two programs—we collected data from twelfth graders to generate baseline measures of civic development. Over the next four years we collected data from each senior class to determine what effect the new programs might have had on the students' civic behaviors, skills, and attitudes. In addition, we collected data from two classes as they progressed through four years of high school. Data collection also involved senior focus groups, faculty surveys, interviews with exemplary students, alumni surveys, interviews with key informants in the school district, and collection of voting data on 18-to-24-year-olds in the town of Hudson.

The current study presents the results of two sets of analyses. The first set uses qualitative data from senior focus groups and interviews with key informants to explore how well the cluster/governance programs were implemented. The second set of analyses is based on quantitative data from senior surveys and evaluates the impact of the programs on the civic development of twelfth graders overall and by groups: male/female, White/non-White, high/low socioeconomic status (SES), and high/low level of participation in nonacademic school activities.

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Qualitative Data

Each spring during 2004-2007, focus groups were conducted with seniors to learn what they thought of the programs, as well as the students' suggestions to improve them. The number of participating seniors ranged from 25 (14% of seniors) in 2004 to 38 (23% of seniors) in 2006 and averaged 29 (17% of seniors) per year. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted in spring 2007 with nine key informants in the school district to learn their views on the implementation of the programs and what might be done to strengthen them. Informants included the president of the district school board, district superintendent, high school principal, president of the parent-school association, president of the teachers' union, a counselor, and three teachers involved with the development of the two programs. Requests to interview were extended to several known critics of the programs, but none accepted the invitation.

Quantitative Data

The annual student surveys used questionnaires developed in part with items from the Monitoring the Future (Johnston, Bachman, O'Malley, & Schulenberg, 2003) and the National Household Education Survey questionnaires (Nolin et al., 2000). Items on the student questionnaires measure political and community behavior (e.g., planning to vote, performing community service), political knowledge (e.g., How much of a majority is required for Congress to override a presidential veto?), civic skills (e.g., Do you think you could make a comment or statement at a public meeting?), and political interest (e.g., How often do you watch the national news on television?). Other items explore political and social tolerance (e.g., Should certain books be banned from the public library? How would you feel about having close friends of another race?), as well as other factors of interest to the evaluation.

For the current study, we selected 21 measures covering civic behaviors, knowledge, skills, and attitudes, based on an evaluation model largely derived from

Gibson (2001) and the civic voluntarism model developed by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995). Based on her review of research on youth civic engagement, Gibson suggested that the desired long-term outcome of civic education is the development of adults who are involved in political and community issues and who have a sense of community. Verba et al.'s civic voluntarism model proposes that political knowledge, civic skills, and other "participatory factors" predispose persons to become engaged in political activity. We included in our evaluation model several participatory factors that might enhance civic involvement among students and that could be fostered through school participation. In the appendix we describe the construction of these 21 measures and present the questionnaire items they were derived from.

Sample. In the five surveys conducted during 2003-2007, 767 (89%) of the registered twelfth-graders completed questionnaires (Table 1). The resulting sample has a higher proportion of females (56%) than males. European Americans comprise the majority ethnic group (69%), with Portuguese/Brazilians constituting the largest ethnic minority (21%). The highest levels of education achieved by the mothers of the students are presented as a measure of SES. These figures indicate that half of the mothers had a high school education, 38% had a college education, and 12% had less than a high school education.

The results presented here are from all students who completed a questionnaire in their senior year. Students sometimes skipped items or sabotaged responses by writing numbers outside the range of values asked for (e.g., writing "8" when the item asked for values ranging from 1 to 5). The number of missing or sabotaged responses ranged from 0 to 15, depending on the survey year and item. If responses were missing or sabotaged, we imputed values when possible, assigning the modal value for responses involving Likert-like scales and the most conservative response for other types of items (e.g., imputing "no" when asking if respondents could speak at a public meeting). As a check

on this procedure for our interim report (McIntosh, Berman, & Youniss, 2007), we re-ran the basic calculations using a restricted sample that excluded cases with missing or sabotaged responses. All significant results found with the full sample were also found with the restricted sample.

Analyses. In a first round of analyses, we looked for significant changes on the 21 civic outcome measures among twelfth graders between 2003 and 2007. Because the interventions continued to evolve and, presumably, improve over the course of the evaluation (see below), we expected to find the largest changes (if any) between the first and last years of the study. In a second set of analyses we evaluated all significant first-round findings to determine whether the changes were spread broadly throughout the student population, or whether they were confined to particular groups such as females, Whites, high-SES students, or students highly active in the school. We identified high-activity and low-activity students using a 25-point scale created by adding scores for the extent of participation (1 = not at all, 5 = great) in each of six types of nonacademic school activities (e.g., school clubs, athletic teams, performing arts, student government). Participation scores less than 12 were considered "low" and those 12 or more were considered "high," a cut point that created approximately equal groups (51% and 49%, respectively) among the combined 2003 and 2007 classes of twelfth graders. In 2003, 55% of twelfth graders scored in the low-activity category and 45% scored "high." In 2007, the pattern was reversed, with 48% scoring in the low-activity category and 52% scoring "high."

Results

Analyses using the qualitative data examine how well the cluster/governance programs were implemented. The findings are drawn largely from the senior focus groups conducted in 2004-2007 and from the interviews with key informants in 2007. We highlight five top issues with implementation, as well as five important strengths. Analyses using the

quantitative data evaluate the impact of the programs on the civic development of twelfth graders. These quantitative findings are based on questionnaire data collected from the 2003-2007 senior classes.

Implementation Issues

Difficulty with clusterwide meetings. The cluster/governance system was designed to function somewhat like a New England town meeting, with each cluster meeting periodically to discuss school governance and other issues. This concept did not work as well as expected, in part owing to the size of the clusters. Students "didn't feel comfortable around 150 kids expressing their opinion," a twelfth grader explained. "So usually when we have to talk about governance or anything like that, we meet in a small group. That way they can express their opinions OK." The relatively large meetings also made it difficult to keep participants focused on the discussion topic. "Once you put students in a large assembly . . . I mean, you're bound to lose a lot of attention," a twelfth grader said.

Another factor working against clusterwide discussion of governance issues, as well as against governance generally, was a lack of substantive issues to deliberate. "On the whole, students are quite satisfied with their experience at the school," a teacher said. "Many, if not the vast majority, of our students don't see a great deal of benefit that can come out of participating in governance." Clusters now tend to meet as a whole only for a specific need, such as a schoolwide vote or an informational presentation, with more discussion taking place in smaller interest groups.

Misunderstanding about democratic processes in school. The governance program did not include formal training about how a high school is governed. Many students seemed not to understand the legal responsibilities and relationships among stakeholders such as the district school board, administration, teachers union, and state

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and federal governments. A teacher closely involved with the governance program described the issue this way:

> As a school, we have not made . . . a consistent effort to teach kids about how governance works. . . . We've got all these different stakeholders, . . . [and] the power of those different stakeholders is going to be different on different issues. . . . We deal with a lot of stuff here at the school where the state of Massachusetts and the federal government, they're not even there at the table. But then we've got other issues where not only are they there at the table, but they're ruling by fiat. . . . They give a directive and we need to execute.

A few students who sat on the Community Council did come to understand the complexities of school governance and the power that different stakeholders wield. Many other students, however, seemed to miss the lesson. For example, after the school board refused to accept an overwhelming "no" vote by students on an administration-sponsored proposal to enact a student accountability policy, the Community Council hammered out a compromise that eventually won approval from the school board, teachers' union, and a majority of students. While administrators, faculty, and a few students saw this process as democracy in action, many students came to view democratic governance at the school as a sham "We got shot down," said a twelfth grader, referring to the school board's rejection of the students' initial "no policy at all" vote. "We played by the rules and it just didn't work."

Student and teacher disengagement. Although many students participated in clusters, a relatively large number did not. The rate of nonparticipation varied among clusters and over time. In one cluster, an estimated 50% of students did not participate at some time. Another estimate suggested that, overall, 25% of students were whole-heartedly involved, 50% were involved only to the extent required, and 25% were disengaged. "I really don't care about, like, governance or anything like that," reported one senior. "I want to go to school, do a sport or whatever, and go home." Teachers are required to participate in clusters, helping run the overall cluster or one of its interest

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groups. However, it was estimated that about 25% of the faculty were disengaged from the programs. Said a teacher who helped develop clustering: "We haven't found the magic invitation to bring them on board."

Lack of training for teachers. Clustering was developed on the assumption that, given an hour of the school day to structure as they wished, students would spontaneously generate their own ideas and activities. In practice, however, students wanted more guidance from their teachers, many of whom had little or no experience leading students through group-building exercises and collaborative, decision-making processes. "What we learned was that we needed more scaffolding," said a teacher involved with developing the programs. "We didn't do a good job … of doing the kind of professional development training that was necessary."

Lack of funding. In addition to more training, teachers working with the clustering and governance programs reported that they needed more time to prepare for these activities and to meet with cluster colleagues. "Probably the biggest shortcoming that we have with the clustering is it needs more faculty time in order for things to be successful," a teacher said. However, funding to compensate most teachers for their additional work was not included in plans for the programs, and lack of funding for it remains an issue.

Program Strengths

Community Council. Community Council is working well in terms of both process and product. Because the council includes not just students but numerous adults—faculty, staff, a vice principal, and representatives from the town—a major process task involved students and adults learning to interact as equals. The issue arose soon after creation of the council, with the question of what to write on the name cards that were set out at council meetings. Initially, the name cards for faculty were written with "Mr.," "Miss," "Mrs.," or another title, whereas the name cards for students had just first and last

names. After a student pointed out the inequality symbolized by the name cards, the council agreed that each member's name would be written the way he or she wanted it. Some faculty decided to keep their titles, and some chose to use only their first and last names. Some students used just their first name, and at least one student opted for "Mr. …" on his name card.

In regard to product, the Community Council has dealt with issues such as the quality of food in the cafeteria, school dress code, and the nature of the "firewall" that filters Internet access on school computers. A major accomplishment of the council was working with the district school board to create the above-mentioned accountability policy addressing student nonparticipation in clusters. The deliberations stretched over the better part of a school year, with student members of the council working to balance the interests of students (who generally wanted no policy), the administration (who suggested the policy), the school board, and the teachers' union. "For the kids on Community Council, they've got an exceptional . . . learning experience in civic education, one that I think is, in many ways, much more powerful than the traditional student council model of governance," a teacher said. Added a student member of the council: "It was so much more than I ever thought actual students could be doing. . . . It was like democracy in action. It's something you can't really learn in a classroom."

Interest groups. While clusterwide meetings have proved impractical for many cluster activities, smaller "interest" groups have emerged to become a driving force in the cluster/governance programs. These groups are organized around student interests related to the cluster theme and often focus on community service activities, such as raising funds for charity. A Save the Animals interest group, for example, raised money for the World Wildlife Fund. Another group organized a "battle of the bands" to raise money for a cancer foundation. An auto technology group was organized to repair automobiles. As mentioned above, much of the discussion about governance issues now

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takes place in these groups, where students feel more comfortable deliberating with each other. These groups have evolved to embrace some governance activities originally intended for clusterwide meetings.

Student leaders. The cluster/governance programs have created new opportunities for students to assume leadership roles. Students have an advisory representative on the district school board. Each of the clusters sends three or four student representatives to the Community Council and elects leaders to run the cluster. The numerous interest groups within clusters select their own leaders and provide leadership opportunities to many youth who would not otherwise have them. "Clustering has really opened up the school for kids who aren't necessarily born leaders or natural leaders or your popular kids, [who] tend to be the leaders in the schools," a teacher said. "Some of the more disenfranchised kids can become leaders. And, you know, we've seen that across the board."

The story of the interest group that put on the above-mentioned battle of the bands fund-raiser illustrates how clustering can nurture leadership in initially disengaged students. The group organized itself under the name of "We Don't Want to Do Anything" because the students were generally uninterested in school, thought clustering was "stupid," and refused to do anything during cluster time. The teacher leading the group, though, continued asking the students what they would do with the time if they were allowed to, until one boy finally said he'd like to practice with his band. That opening eventually led the group to use their cluster time to organize a band competition to raise money for charity. "There wasn't a kid in the battle of the bands [interest] group who anybody in the high school would have called a leader," recalled a teacher. "But they pulled off an evening . . . [and] they made $800 or $900 for the charity of their choice."

Community. Some students and teachers reported a growing sense of community in their clusters, especially in interest groups with disenfranchised students.

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Some of that effect can be linked to friends joining the same cluster or to the camaraderie resulting when youth pursue common interests. Often the sense of community depended on the teacher leading the group. Students reported that some teachers did nothing to create a sense of community or enthusiasm, whereas others were quite successful at it. "If [teachers] are nice and like helpful but not take charge of the group, then you like them a lot and it's fun," a twelfth grader explained.

One interest group made up largely of boys for whom clustering wasn't working, for example, focused their group activity on creating community. They went on walks with their interest group teacher, played board games in the cafeteria when the weather was bad, and talked about issues the students were facing at school—completing homework, difficulties with teachers, challenges with clustering—as well as other issues ranging from the news to dating to how to get into college. "We'll have conversations about [issues], but not necessarily conversations that then lead to policy change or to involve [the students] in governance. … It's more about individual behavior modification," the interest group teacher explained. "My kids don't skip clustering, so obviously they have created something that works for them."

School culture. The growth in community is part of a broader transformation of the school culture that has occurred since implementation of the programs. Other noticeable changes include a trend toward more-egalitarian relationships between students and faculty and an expansion of student focus to include more community issues, as well as traditional student-focused concerns.

The structure of clustering puts faculty and students on relatively equal footing during clustering—teachers and students each have only one vote in cluster matters. In addition, the role of faculty in cluster activities is less about teaching and more about supporting and advising. "Having the vast majority of the students in school feel comfortable in having discussions with teachers is probably the biggest advantage [of

clustering] right now," an administrator said. "The fact that teachers and students can work on something, either as learners together or participants together, you know, has been a big help to the school."

The change in culture is also evident in a refocusing of many student activities. In the years prior to clustering/governance, two major objectives of student fund-raising were to pay for proms and to defray costs for students going on international trips, a teacher said. Since the programs were implemented, there has been "an explosion of connections of service and fundraising and support for real-life problems in the immediate community and the broader community, whether it's breast cancer, Andrew's Helpful Hands [support for children undergoing bone marrow transplantation], environmental questions, [or] Save Darfur." Students still put on major traditional high school events such as proms and dances. But other activities related to high school classes (e.g., the senior class) have tended to be de-emphasized.

Civic Outcomes

Results of our quantitative analyses of the 21 civic outcome variables showed significant difference between twelfth graders in 2003 and 2007 on six measures (Table 2). Three of the measures (community service, political knowledge, and community concern) showed increases, while three (OK to speak against religion, social tolerance, and external political efficacy) showed declines.[1]

Community service. Participation in community service activities rose by more than 50% among twelfth graders over the course of the study, increasing from 42% of twelfth graders in 2003 to 65% in 2007 (Figure 1). Analyses by student groups show significant ($p<.05$) increases for all evaluated groups: males and females, Whites and non-Whites, high- and low-SES students, and high- and low-activity students (i.e., students

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[1] Given the increased probability of Type I error with 21 analyses, we also calculated a Bonferroni correction ($p < .002$). Using this criterion, only community service and political knowledge showed significant differences between 2003 and 2007, and we emphasize these findings in our conclusions.

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with high and low levels of participation in nonacademic school activities) (Table 3). Also, 28 of the 110 seniors who performed service in 2007 reported that the only service they did was through their cluster, indicating that clustering was directly responsible for 25% of the service done by seniors.[2]

Political knowledge. The average level of political knowledge among seniors, measured on a scale of 0-5 points, increased from 1.99 in 2003 to 2.37 in 2007 (Figure 2). Scores increased significantly in all student groups; however, the increase among highly active students (who had the highest average level of political knowledge in 2003) was only marginally significant ($p<.10$) (Table 4).

Community concern. Scores on the community concern scale rose slightly (8.4%) over the course of the study, from an average of 6.44 in 2003 to 6.98 in 2007 (Table 2). The increase, though small, was not surprising, given the rise in levels of community service. The increase, however, was not widely distributed among student groups, with only females and Whites showing significant gains between 2003 and 2007 (data not shown).

External political efficacy. The belief that government is responsive to citizens (external political efficacy) declined slightly (7.6%) among twelfth graders from 2003 to 2007 (Table 2). The decline was spread unevenly among students, with significant declines among males, Whites, high-SES students, and highly active students (data not shown). By contrast, no significant changes occurred among females, non-Whites, low-SES students, and students with low rates of participation in nonacademic activities.

OK to speak against religion. Political tolerance, as measured by the variable "OK to speak against religion," declined slightly among twelfth graders over the five years of the study. In 2003, 87% of seniors said that if a person wanted to make a speech in this community against churches or religion, that person should be allowed to do so (Table 2). In 2007, the proportion who said it is "OK to speak against religion" dropped to 78% of

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[2] This measure was available only in 2007.

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seniors. The decline in political tolerance appeared in most groups of students but was significant only in three: Whites, highly active students, and students from low-SES families (data not shown).

Social tolerance. Social tolerance among twelfth graders declined a small but statistically significant amount between 2003 and 2007, dropping from an average score of 9.74 in 2003 to 9.26 four years later (Table 2). Although scores dropped slightly in all groups of students, the decline was significant only among Whites (data not shown).

National Trends

Results from nationally representative surveys suggest that the increases in community service and political knowledge in students at Hudson High School are specific to the school and are not part of national trends in youth civic engagement. National data from Monitoring the Future (MTF) surveys indicate that the proportion of twelfth graders participating in community service increased by about 1% between 2003 and 2007 (MTF data not shown), compared with an increase of more than 50% among twelfth graders in Hudson over that time. Results from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation surveys show that between 2002 and 2006, political knowledge scores among U.S. high school students age 15–18 years increased about 19% (McIntosh, Berman, & Youniss, 2007) versus 37% among Hudson High School seniors at approximately the same time (2003–2007). Increases in community concern between 2003 and 2007, however, were roughly the same in Hudson (8%) as across the country (6%) (MTF data not shown).

Discussion

This study assesses the implementation of the clustering and schoolwide governance programs at Hudson High School and looks at their possible effects on the civic development of twelfth graders. The qualitative findings suggest that the programs have been generally implemented as planned but that issues have arisen in regard to the effectiveness of clusterwide meetings, student and teacher disengagement, and

lack of resources, including both time and money. Changes have been made to address some of these issues. For example, deliberation has evolved away from clusterwide meetings to small groups, where students feel more comfortable expressing their opinions. In addition, a policy has been developed to hold students accountable for using their time productively during cluster meetings. However, lack of resources to fund additional teacher training and preparation time remains an issue unlikely to be resolved in the near term, owing to the current funding shortfalls facing schools generally. Because clustering and schoolwide governance are still evolving and face unresolved issues, they cannot yet be considered mature programs.

The qualitative findings also point to several important program strengths. Interest groups have emerged as the locus of student activity and student-teacher interaction in cluster groups. The Community Council is functioning well and has dealt with substantive governance issues such as the student accountability plan. The programs have created numerous opportunities for student leadership, and many students have stepped into these roles. In some interest groups, a sense of community has begun to develop. Overall, the programs have helped change the culture at the high school by building better relationships between students and faculty and by fostering student participation in the community beyond the school.

The quantitative findings suggest that the cluster/governance programs, though not yet mature, are nonetheless associated with major improvements in the political knowledge, community service, and schoolwide civic engagement of twelfth graders.

Community Service

Opportunity for community service was built into the design of the clustering program, and the proportion of twelfth graders doing community service in 2007 was 23 percentage points higher than in 2003 (Table 2). Results suggest that most of this increase was due to clustering, since 17% of all seniors (28 of 169) in 2007 reported that the only

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service they performed was in their cluster. Moreover, these increases were not confined to particular groups of students but were spread widely throughout the student population, including males and females, Whites and non-Whites, high- and low-SES students, highly active students, and students who seldom get involved in nonacademic school activities (Table 3).

Given the relatively large increase in community service among twelfth graders, one could reasonably expect to see a similar increase in measures of community concern. Community concern did, in fact, increase significantly between 2003 and 2007 (Table 2). The increase, however, was comparatively small (8%), raising questions about the types of service being performed. In their study of community service in a public high school, Metz, McLellan, and Youniss (2003) found that students who did social-cause types of community service showed significant increases in social concern, compared with those involved in standard service. Social-cause service placed students in direct contact with the needy (e.g., persons in homeless shelters, the elderly in nursing homes) or involved students in causes to correct particular social problems such as hunger, drug abuse, and drunk driving. Standard types of service included tutoring other students at school, doing administrative tasks (data entry, filing), and performing manual labor (raking leaves, shoveling snow). The relatively small increase in community concern among Hudson twelfth graders may reflect a tendency of students to opt for standard service rather than social-cause service.

Community service is an important building block for future political engagement (Keeter, Jenkins, Zukin, & Andolina, 2005). In fact, an earlier study at Hudson High School found that twelfth graders who performed any community service were significantly more likely than those who did none to report that they have done or probably would do all six of the political behaviors (vote, contact public officials, contribute money, work in a political campaign, demonstrate, boycott) evaluated in the study (McIntosh, Berman,

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Youniss, 2007). That study, however, was unable to determine whether performing community service led to increased political involvement or whether politically active youth chose to do service.

Political Knowledge

The quantitative analyses indicate that the clustering and governance programs are strongly linked to increased levels of political knowledge among twelfth graders. The average level of political knowledge was not only higher among seniors generally in 2007 than in 2003 (Table 2) but also showed significant increases in seven of the eight groups of seniors evaluated (Table 4) and a marginally significant ($p<.10$) increase in the remaining group.

Unlike the findings on community service, those on political knowledge could not be directly linked to either the clustering or the governance program. One idea behind the schoolwide governance program is that giving students the opportunity to deliberate about governance issues in their school might increase their knowledge about politics and government generally. Because clusterwide deliberation did not work well, governance discussion has for the most part devolved to the Community Council and interest groups. There is ample qualitative data indicating a high level of deliberation in the Community Council, where a relatively few students are involved. We know much less about the quality of such deliberation in interest groups, where the vast majority of students are involved. Also, other initiatives undertaken at the school (e.g., the First Amendment Schools project) or improvements in existing courses (e.g., the core ninth-grade civics course) might also boost levels of political knowledge among students. Even though causality cannot be determined, increased levels of political knowledge are what we would expect to see associated with the clustering and schoolwide governance programs.

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For young persons, having a relatively high level of political knowledge represents an important step toward political involvement in the future. Verba et al. (1995), for example, found in their research on civic engagement that political information predicts voting behavior and participation in time-based political activities such as demonstrating and working in a political campaign. Also, based on their study of national political data, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) concluded that political knowledge is the most reliable predictor of "good citizenship."

Schoolwide Effects

A major rationale undergirding the development of the clustering and schoolwide governance efforts was to develop programs that are effective for all students, not just a select few. The programs were to accomplish this goal by breaking a large student population into smaller, more cohesive communities of students and by providing all students with opportunities for deliberating about school-related issues. Although the program structures have evolved into somewhat different forms than intended, the aims of the program in regard to inclusiveness have largely been successful. Over the five years of the evaluation, community service among twelfth graders increased significantly in males and females, Whites and non-Whites, high- and low-SES students, and high- and low-activity students (Table 3). Moreover, the increases were proportionally largest among groups that initially scored lowest. In 2003, males, non-Whites, low-SES students, and low-activity students were participating in community service at lower levels than their counterparts. But over the next four years, these initially low-scoring groups increased in community service participation by larger percentages than did their counterpart groups (Figure 3).

Increases in political knowledge scores among twelfth graders were similarly widespread throughout the student population. As noted previously, political knowledge scores showed significant or marginally significant increases in all eight student groups

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evaluated (Table 4). In three of the four group pairs (gender, ethnicity, SES, and participation in nonacademic activities), the group with the lowest political knowledge score in 2003 showed the largest percentage gain (Figure 4).[3] Overall, the group-related findings on community service and political knowledge indicate that in those areas of civic development where the clustering and governance programs are linked to significant gains, those gains are not only widespread among major demographic groups in the school but are also especially large in those groups of students who previously scored lowest on these measures.

Scaffolding

Examples from the current study support the idea that adult scaffolding—support that helps youth achieve at higher levels than they could without it—can play an important role in building youth civic engagement. McIntosh and Youniss (in press) suggest that in the realm of real-world politics, adult scaffolding of youth involves at least three major components: training, access to a political system, and support while participating in that system. Larson and Hansen (2005), for example, describe how this three-phase type of scaffolding helped adolescents in a civic activism program in Chicago engage the political system to effect changes at their school and elsewhere in the community.

At Hudson High School, these scaffolding components were evident in the process developed to engage students in community service, though not necessarily elsewhere. Training is provided in the required ninth-grade civic course, which formally leads students through steps needed to complete a community service project. Access to real-world community service via the clustering program provides opportunities to put that training into practice. And support for students while they are performing community service is provided through feedback and other means by the teachers leading the

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[3] The exception to this pattern was gender, where males had higher scores in 2003 and 2007 than females did.

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clusters and interest groups. Conversely, the absence scaffolding, in terms of formal training on how a school district is governed, may have contributed to the relative lack of engagement in schoolwide governance among students not sitting on the Community Council. These findings suggest that the type of adult scaffolding that has been successful in helping youth in community programs engage the political system may also work in schools to help students engage in community service and other forms of civic activity.

Declines in Measures

The declines in external political efficacy, political tolerance (OK to speak against religion), and social tolerance among twelfth graders from 2003 to 2007 (Table 2) are baffling in light of the increases in community service, political knowledge, and community concern. The decrease in external political efficacy scores may be related to resentment over the accountability policy mentioned above. Students said they voted against having a system of accountability for how they used their cluster time but were then told by the school board to either come up with their own accountability plan or accept one developed by the board. Ultimately, the students developed their own plan. But many students expressed frustration over their apparent inability to effect change in school governance.

An alternate explanation suggests that the lower external efficacy scores in 2007 may represent the bottom of a "despair-empowerment curve" experienced sometimes by students studying social and political controversies. According to Berman (1997), as students gather more information about a problem and perceive its contentiousness and difficulty, they may develop a sense of "despair" about being able to resolve the issue. But if they develop the civic skills (e.g., resolving conflicts, dialoguing) needed to reach agreement on solutions and take action, then they ultimately arrive at a sense of "empowerment." Thus, measures of external political efficacy among twelfth graders

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may rise in the future as the programs evolve to help students develop the expertise and confidence to resolve controversies such as the cluster accountability issue.

The decrease in scores on measures of political tolerance (OK to speak against religion) and social tolerance from 2003 to 2007 are not readily explained (Table 2). It seems unlikely that the changes are direct side effects of clustering and governance, given the democratic and egalitarian underpinnings of these programs. Nor do the changes appear to be the result of demographic changes, since the proportions of various demographic groups remained essentially stable over the course of the study (Table 1). The decline in political tolerance may be related to the move from the old to the new school building (2003). The largest change occurred immediately after the move (2004), with the proportion of seniors answering "yes" to this political tolerance item dropping eight percentage points, whereas over the next three years of the study, scores on the measure declined by only one percentage point overall. However, it is not immediately apparent how disruptions caused by the move would translate into a decline in political tolerance.

Social tolerance dropped significantly among White twelfth graders and to a lesser, nonsignificant extent among other student groups. The social tolerance measure indexes student feelings about persons of other races, and it may be that a low level of racial intolerance has arisen among White students. However, the decrease (5%) in social tolerance is small, and other explanations are possible, including statistical fluke.

Conclusion

The Civic Mission of Schools states that "it is crucial for the future health of our democracy that all young people, including those who are usually marginalized, be knowledgeable, engaged in their communities and in politics, and committed to the public good" (Carnegie Corporation & CIRCLE, 2003; p. 5). Results from our five-year evaluation of clustering and schoolwide governance at Hudson High School suggest that

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these programs, though not yet mature, have taken important steps in that direction. Successive classes of twelfth graders have shown improvements on measures of community service and political knowledge, and the improvements have been widespread in the student population. In addition, these positive changes were relatively larger for disenfranchised youth and other groups of students who initially scored lower than their counterpart groups on these civic measures, indicating that the programs are reaching the students they were designed to reach.

These results augur well for the future of the clustering and governance programs at Hudson High School, provided sufficient resources can be mustered to address shortcomings noted here. The findings also demonstrate, albeit in limited fashion, that all students—not just a select few—can and will engage in civic activity in their schools when given appropriate opportunity.

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Appendix

Below is the original language of the questionnaire items used in our 21 measures of youth civic development.

Have you ever done, or do you plan to do, the following things?

1. Vote in a public election

2. Write to public officials

3. Give money to a political candidate or cause

4. Work in a political campaign

5. Participate in a lawful demonstration

6. Boycott certain products or stores

    1=Have done/Probably will, 2=Probably won't/Don't know

7. A community service variable was created from answers to the two items below, with the following values: 1=Any service (yes to either item), 2=No service (no to both items).

    *   This past school year (including the previous summer) did you perform any community service as part of your school's service-learning program?

    *   This past school year (including the previous summer) did you perform any voluntary community service (service NOT done as part of a school course)?

8. A political knowledge variable with a summed scale of 0-5 points was created from five questions about U.S. politics and government. One point was awarded for each correct answer. Cronbach's alpha for this scale in 2003-2007 was .70, .82, .79, .77 and .78, respectively.

    *   Which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Congress: (a) Democrats, (b) Republicans, (c) some other party, (d) don't know or unsure?

- What job or political office is now held by Dick Cheney: (a) Secretary of State, (b) Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, (c) Speaker of the House of Representatives, (d) Vice President, (d) don't know or unsure?

- Which political party is more conservative at the national level: (a) Republican Party, (b) Democratic Party, (c) neither one, (d) don't know or unsure?

- How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto: (a) one quarter (25%), (b) one half (50%), (c) two thirds (66.7%), (d) three quarters (75%), (e) don't know or unsure?

- Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not: (a) president's, (b) Congress's, (c) Supreme Court's, (d) don't know or unsure?

9. Imagine you went to a community meeting and people were making comments and statements. Do you think you could make a comment or a statement at a public meeting? 1=Yes/Depends on meeting, issue, etc.; 2=No/Would never want to make a statement

10. Suppose you wanted to write a letter to someone in the government about something that concerned you. Do you feel that you could write a letter that clearly gives your opinion? 1=Yes, 2=No

11. Suppose there was some issue you felt needed action in our community. Do you think you would be able to call someone on the phone you had never met before to explain the problem and ask for help? 1=Yes, would be comfortable/Yes, but would be uncomfortable; 2=No, would not want to make a statement/Don't know

12. How often do you usually talk about politics or national issues with your parents or family? 1=Seldom (Hardly ever/At least once a month), 2=Often (At least once a week/Almost every day)

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We selected the following two variables to measure political tolerance. Because the scale created by combining these variables had low internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .25 to .52), we evaluated the measures individually.

13. Suppose a book that most people disapproved of was written, for example, saying that it was all right to take illegal drugs. Should a book like that be kept out of a public library? 0=No, 1=Yes

14. If a person wanted to make a speech in your community against churches and religion, should he or she be allowed to speak? 0=No, 1=Yes

15. A social tolerance variable with a summed scale of 3-12 points was created from the three items below. Cronbach's alpha for this measure in 2003-2007 was .81, .85, .91, .86, and .85, respectively.

    How would you feel about …

    • Having close personal friends of another race?

    • Having a family of a different race (but same level of education and income) move next door to you?

    • Having your (future) children go to schools where most of the children are of other races?

    1=Not acceptable, 2=Somewhat acceptable, 3=Acceptable, 4=Desirable

16. A community concern variable with a summed scale of 3-12 points was created from the three items below. Cronbach's alpha for this measure in 2003-2007 was .72, .78, .70, .76, and .82, respectively.

    How important is each of the following to you in your life?

    • Making a contribution to society

    • Being a leader in my community

    • Working to correct social and economic inequalities

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1=Not important, 2=Somewhat important, 3=Quite important, 4=Extremely important

17. A political interest variable with a summed scale of 0-6 points was created from the following two items. Cronbach's alpha for this scale in 2003-2007 was .56, .62, .57, .55, and .59, respectively.

How often do you …

- Read about the national news in a newspaper or newsmagazine like Newsweek, Time, or U.S. News and World Report?

- Watch the national news on television or listen to the national news on the radio?

0=Hardly ever, 1=At least once a month, 2=At least once a week, 3=Almost every day

18. The internal political efficacy variable is a single-item scale of 1-5 points.

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement below?

- I feel that I can do very little to change the way the world is today.

1=Disagree, 2=Mostly disagree, 3=Neither, 4=Mostly agree, 5=Agree (reverse coded)

19. An external political efficacy variable with a summed scale of 2-10 points was created from the following two items. Cronbach's alpha for this scale in 2003-2007 was .50, .71, .69, .76, and .68, respectively.

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement below?

- The way people vote has a major impact on how things are run in this country.

- People who get together in citizen action groups to influence government policies can have a real effect.

1=Disagree, 2=Mostly disagree, 3=Neither, 4=Mostly agree, 5=Agree

Two variables were selected to measure active citizenship. Because the scale created

by combining these measures had low internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha =.34

to .50) we evaluated the measures individually.

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement below?

20. I feel good citizens should go along with whatever the government does even if they

disagree with it.

21. I feel good citizens try to change the government policies they disagree with.

1=Disagree, 2=Mostly disagree, 3=Neither, 4=Mostly agree, 5=Agree

Table 1
Characteristics of responding twelfth graders, 2003-2007

	2003		2004		2005		2006		2007		All	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Number in class	184		176		154		168		175		857	
Number of responses	168	91	135	77	136	88	159	95	169	97	767	89
Gender												
Male	70	42	61	45	60	44	74	47	75	44	340	44
Female	98	58	74	55	76	56	83	53	94	56	425	56
N	168		135		136		157		169		765	
Ethnicity												
Latino/Hispanic	5	3	5	4	7	5	11	7	12	7	40	5
Portuguese/Brazilian	34	20	31	23	25	19	32	20	36	21	158	21
Other European American	122	73	92	68	96	71	105	66	114	67	529	69
Other ethnicity	7	4	7	5	7	5	11	7	7	4	39	5
N	168		135		135		159		169		766	
Mother's education												
Some grade/high school	17	11	15	12	11	9	19	13	20	13	82	12
High school graduate	44	13	32	26	35	29	36	25	44	28	191	27
Some college	40	24	30	24	26	21	34	24	35	22	165	23
College graduate	57	36	47	38	49	40	55	38	57	37	265	38
N	158		124		121		144		156		703	

Table 2
Civic outcomes among 12th graders

	2003		2007		Difference		
	#	%	#	%	(%)		
Voted or plan to vote in a public election	131	78.0	132	78.1	0.2		
Wrote or probably will write to public officials	51	30.4	38	22.5	-25.9		
Gave or probably will give money to a political candidate or cause	21	12.5	34	20.1	60.9		
Worked or probably will work in a political campaign	13	7.7	19	11.2	45.3		
Participated or probably will participate in a lawful demonstration	40	23.8	46	27.2	14.3		
Boycotted or probably will boycott certain products or stores	45	26.8	61	36.1	34.8		
Participated in any community service (voluntary/required) during past year	70	41.7	110	65.1	56.2	***	
Could make a comment or statement at a public meeting	142	84.5	127	75.1	-11.1		
Could write a letter to a government official about an issue of concern	128	76.2	118	69.8	-8.4		
Could call someone I have never met to explain a problem and ask for help	111	66.1	113	66.9	1.2		
Often discuss politics or the national news with my parents or family	65	38.7	65	38.5	-0.6		
OK to ban books most people disapprove of from the public library	30	17.9	35	20.7	16.0		
OK to speak against churches and religion in my community	146	86.9	132	78.1	-10.1	*	
	M	SD	M	SD			
Political knowledge (scale of 0-5 points)	1.99	1.65	2.73	1.80	37.1	***	
Social tolerance (scale of 3-12 points)	9.74	1.72	9.26	2.01	-4.9	*	
Community concern (scale of 3-12 points)	6.44	2.01	6.98	2.44	8.4	*	
Political interest (scale of 0-6 points)	2.90	1.82	2.79	1.91	-3.9		
Internal political efficacy (scale of 1-5 points)	2.93	1.21	3.14	1.16	7.1		
External political efficacy (scale of 2-10 points)	7.23	1.69	6.68	1.85	-7.6	**	
Good citizens go along with whatever government does (scale of 1-5 points)	4.20	0.98	4.04	1.17	-4.0		
Good citizens try to change policies they disagree with (scale of 1-5 points)	3.60	1.14	3.66	1.24	1.9		
N	168		169				

Note. *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation. Pearson's chi-square statistic was used to compare frequencies. The *t*-test for independent samples was used to compare means.
* = *p* < .05, ** = *p* < .01, *** = *p* < .001.

Table 3
Community service among 12th graders, by group

	2003			2007			Difference
	n	#	%	*n*	#	%	(%)
Gender							
Male	70	21	30.0	75	37	49.3	64.4 *
Female	98	49	50.0	94	73	77.7	55.3 * * *
Ethnicity							
White	122	56	45.9	114	79	69.3	51.0 * * *
Non-White	46	14	30.4	55	31	56.4	85.2 * *
Mother's level of education							
HS grad or less	61	17	27.9	64	38	59.4	113.1 * * *
More than HS grad	97	51	52.6	92	66	71.7	36.4 * *
Level of participation in nonacademic school activities [a]							
Low	91	23	25.3	78	36	46.2	82.6 * *
High	75	47	62.7	85	70	82.4	31.4 * *

Note. Pearson's chi-square statistic was used to compare frequencies.

[a]Participation is indexed by a 25-point scale (6-30) constructed by adding scores for the extent of participation (1 = not at all, 5 = great) in each of 6 different types of nonacademic school activities. Participation scores less than 12 were considered "low" and those more than 11 were considered "high," a division that created approximately equal groups (51.4% and 48.6%, respectively) among T1 and T5 students.

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$.

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Table 4
Political knowledge among 12th graders, by group

	2003			2007			Difference
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	(%)
Gender							
Male	70	2.10	1.65	75	2.97	1.83	41.6 * *
Female	98	1.92	1.66	94	2.54	1.76	32.5 *
Ethnicity							
White	122	2.29	1.69	114	3.08	1.72	34.6 * * *
Non-White	46	1.22	1.28	55	2.02	1.76	65.8 *
Mother's level of education							
HS grad or less	61	1.54	1.53	64	2.34	1.86	52.1 * *
More than HS grad	97	2.39	1.69	92	3.18	1.62	33.2 * *
Level of participation in nonacademic school activities [a]							
Low	91	1.66	1.49	78	2.68	1.85	61.5 * * *
High	75	2.40	1.77	85	2.91	1.74	21.1 ~

Note. Political knowledge is measured on a scale of 0-5 points. M = mean, SD = standard deviation. The t-test for independent samples was used to compare means.

[a]Participation is indexed by a 25-point scale (6-30) constructed by adding scores for the extent of participation (1 = not at all, 5 = great) in each of 6 different types of nonacademic school activities. Participation scores less than 12 were considered "low" and those more than 11 were considered "high," a division that created approximately equal groups (51.4% and 48.6%, respectively) among T1 and T5 students.

~ = *p < .10,* * = *p < .05,* ** = *p < .01,* *** = *p < .001.*
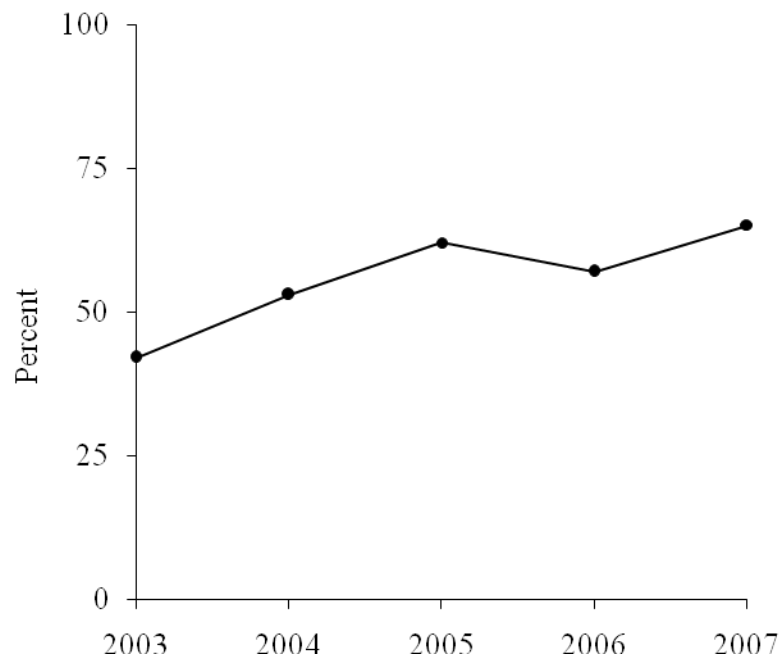
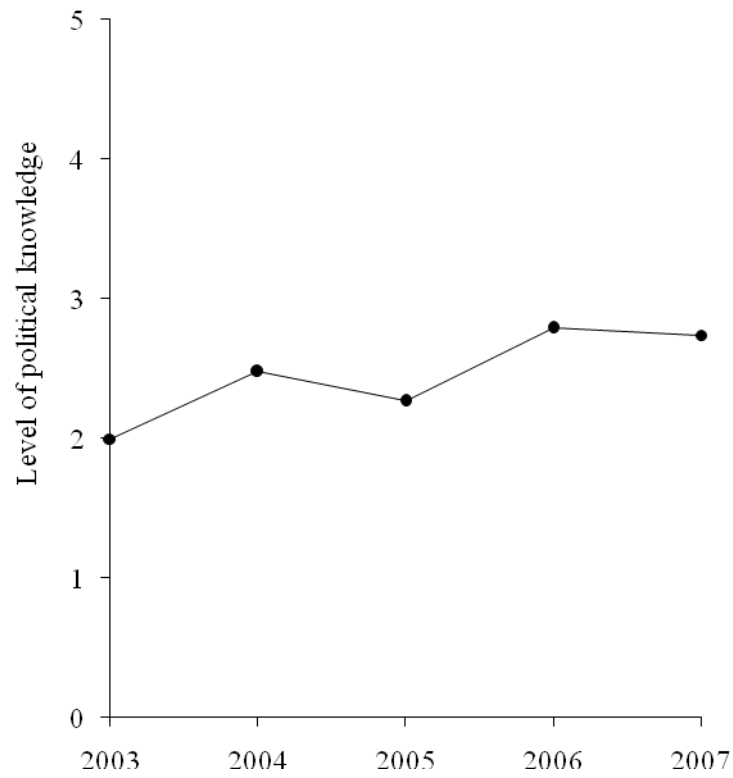## Figure 1. Community service.

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Figure 2. Political knowledge.

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Figure 3. Community service by groups.

Figure 4. Political knowledge by groups.