

# Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap

CERG's 2005-2007 study found that access to civic learning opportunities was inequitable.

Wealthy, white, and academically successful students had more access to the **effective civic learning opportunities** that best prepare young people to be effective, engaged citizens.



Low-income students, students of color, and young people not planning to attend college had access to fewer of these **effective civic learning opportunities**.



Courtesy of UCLA IDEA

## More Access

Students in higher income classrooms versus students in average income classrooms were:

- ▶ 2x more likely to report studying how laws are made
- ▶ 2x more likely to report participating in service learning projects
- ▶ 1 1/2x more likely to report participating in simulations of government processes
- ▶ 80% more likely to participate in political discussions and debates



## Effective Civic Learning Opportunities

- ◆ Discuss Current Events
- ◆ Study Issues of Concern to Students
- ◆ Classroom Discussions of Social & Political Issues
- ◆ Study Government, History, Social Sciences
- ◆ Interact with Civic Role Models
- ◆ Extracurricular Activities
- ◆ Learning about Community Problems & Strategies to Respond
- ◆ Service Learning Projects
- ◆ Simulations of Government Processes

These opportunities are strongly related to such civic outcomes as commitment to voting, engagement in politics, and volunteering.

## Closing the Civic Opportunity Gap

1. In order to close the gap schools first have to know where they are. **Collecting data** on access to existing civic learning opportunities is a critical first step.
2. Social Studies, History, and Civics teachers need tools. Targeted **professional development** could support integration of effective civic learning opportunities into their classes.
3. Schools and districts need **new initiatives** that expand access to class and extracurricular civic learning opportunities to all students, not just those already inclined to participate.
4. **Assessment** of civic learning expansion strategies by collecting data on the students that are and aren't being reached is critical to sustained civic learning equity.

## Less Access

African American students were less likely than white students:

- ▶ to have government classes that taught them to stay informed and how to act on political issues that affected them
- ▶ to be in classrooms where they could freely express their opinions



Latino students had fewer opportunities:

- ▶ to do service learning projects integrated into classroom work
- ▶ to participate in simulations of government processes

## Full Citation:

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[http://www.civicsurvey.org/democracy\\_some\\_circle.pdf](http://www.civicsurvey.org/democracy_some_circle.pdf)