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The Effects of Discourse-Based, Non-Partisan Civic Activities on Student Civic Engagement, Polarization and Understanding of Political Issues

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ABSTRACT

School often serves as the first opportunity for students to learn about civics. However, current systems of civics education may not be preparing students to be civically engaged citizens given the growing civic disengagement and political polarization in American politics, suggesting the need for educational solutions to stimulate civic engagement and unity. This prompted researchers at the Institute for Youth in Policy (YIP) to research the effectiveness of non-partisan, discourse-based civics education that promotes civic engagement and unity. Previous research has found that "interactive civic activities" have helped students gain interest in learning about American civics. However, it does not focus on the productiveness of non-partisan, discourse-based civic techniques in promoting open-mindedness and complete, round comprehension of political issues. Researchers found that discourse-based methods are effective in depolarization, increasing topic comprehension, and promoting civic engagement among youth. Researchers utilized statistical analysis of pre- and post-workshop data from a virtual workshop (n=36) to analyze if discourse-based civics programs have quantifiable positive effects on participants' engagement, depolarization, and topic comprehension. This research may help solve the polarization and civic disengagement crisis, especially among young Americans.

Keywords: Polarization, Civics, Education, Young People, Discourse, Non-Partisan