

## **Evaluation Summary**

### **CITY YOUTH 1995-96 Constitutional Rights Foundation**

by  
Joan L. Herman  
Audrey E. McEvans  
UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation

The Constitutional Rights Foundation created CITY YOUTH in 1992 in collaboration with the Los Angeles Unified School District as a multi-disciplinary civic participation program rooted in the principles of middle school reform. The study reported here is the fourth of a series of annual independent evaluations assessing the program's implementation and impact. This year's evaluation addressed two primary questions:

1. How is CITY YOUTH operating?
2. What are CITY YOUTH effects on students?

A pre-test, post test, comparison group design was used to examine program effects. The study utilized direct measures of student knowledge and end of program surveys of students and teachers.

Results reveal that CITY YOUTH has been successful in meeting its primary aims. Program operations are very well regarded, and there is evidence of impact on student performance in areas at the heart of program goals.

#### **Background on CITY YOUTH**

CITY YOUTH is designed to foster adolescent students' communication and problem solving skills, to enrich their community understanding, and to encourage their social responsibility, efficacy, and positive attitudes toward school and learning. The CITY YOUTH model features team teaching; active, authentic learning opportunities; and the implementation of specially developed multi-disciplinary units, incorporating community and service learning. Students learn about their communities and explore community issues through interactive classroom units taught in math, social studies,

language arts and science. Students also participate in school and community service projects, field trips, and special program-wide events and learn steps to create their own actions projects.

CITY YOUTH has grown from an pilot project involving four schools and 300 students in 1992 to a highly regarded program which was implemented in 15 schools, influencing over 2000 students, during the year of the current study. Mirroring the Los Angeles Unified School District, CITY YOUTH schools and their students are ethnically diverse and their urban communities reflect the problems and challenges of poverty.

### **How is the Program Operating?**

Based on survey responses, teachers continue to be enthusiastic about the organization, structure and delivery of the program and the support they receive from CITY YOUTH staff. They feel well supported by program materials and are highly complimentary about the technical assistance they receive from program staff. That high levels of satisfaction have been maintained as the program has been expanded to additional sites and has taken on additional national responsibilities is noteworthy.

Although support from school principals and other teachers has been uneven across school sites, CITY YOUTH teams themselves are cohesive and appear to be working well. This year's rise in leadership and coordination within teams suggests an increasingly mature infra-structure to support program continuation and institutionalization. Building stronger relationships between school programs and community agencies and resources is a continuing challenge.

Teachers also are very positive about the value of the CITY YOUTH curriculum. They give high marks to the quality of instruction and the motivation it provides middle schools students and to CITY YOUTH's fit with the regular classroom curriculum. Teachers view the CITY YOUTH program as supporting required curriculum goals and are able to integrate program activities into their classroom schedules. Their comfort in program implementation again suggests a maturing program, capable of institutionalization.

## **What Are CITY YOUTH Effects on Students?**

Teachers continue to be positive about the effects on CITY YOUTH on student outcomes. They report moderate to substantial impact in all targeted student outcome areas: community understanding, problem solving, efficacy, and attitudes toward school. They are particularly positive about the program's effects on students' understandings of their communities. Student self reports mirror those of teachers, but are more moderate.

Analysis of program and comparison student responses, furthermore, document statistically significant program effects on students outcomes: CITY YOUTH students report more growth in their knowledge of their communities than do comparison students, including knowledge of community problems and of where to get help in the community. Similarly with regard to efficacy and community engagement, CITY YOUTH students report greater growth in their ability to plan and get things done and in their willingness to work to help their school and community than do comparison students.

Flaws in the realization of the design and the timing of the post test for program and comparison students preclude any conclusions about the evaluation's direct measures of student performance. All students tended to decline, a tendency which no doubt reflects student motivation at the end of the school year, and the absolute level of performance deserves continuing attention. However, pre-post comparisons for one of three assessment tasks does show that program students outperformed comparisons students. This one task asked students to identify, analyze and propose solutions to a community problem. Because the task elicits community knowledge and problem solving capability, as well as communication skills, it really represents the heart of CITY YOUTH goals for student performance.

In the summary, results show that the program is operating well and achieving success in creating a teacher-friendly program that can be implemented in urban schools. Analysis of program and comparison student responses, furthermore, suggests that the program is having measurable impact on student performance in key goal areas.