

Youth Vote Up in 2008, but it's still not enough....

Our Colleagues at the Center for Research & Information on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE – www.civicyouth.org) have a superb analysis of the 2008 Youth vote up on their website. According to preliminary figures somewhere between 22 and 24 million citizens between the ages of 18-29 voted on November 4th, as much as 18% of the total vote. This represents an increase over the 2004 youth vote and would be the third highest turn out for the age group since 18 year olds were granted the vote in 1972.

If these figures hold up it means somewhere between 49-54% of all Americans aged 18-29 voted, an impressive figure but no where near high enough. The reasons for an increase in youth voting are clear, historic candidacies that used new technology to reach young voters in a political atmosphere where most of this age group were demanding change.

Two major questions loom, will these young Americans become habitual voters and have they received the knowledge, honed the skills and developed the disposition for life long informed and engaged citizenship?

The answer is most likely no. As research on this website will show, the vast majority of our youth are not receiving relevant sustained civic education which includes opportunities to learn in the classroom, through service learning connected to the classroom, through simulations of democratic processes, even the opportunity to have classroom discussions of issues young citizens view as most relevant to their lives.

How can we expect our young citizens to be knowledgeable and committed voters if they are not receiving the necessary civic learning experiences in school? Being civically engaged is much more than just voting every four years, its also caring about what happens in your community and becoming involved to fix what needs to be fixed and to tend what needs to be tended to in our communities. Its about keeping informed about current events; its about being willing to serve on juries and its about being a responsible caring citizen.

On the front page of this website are two articles that discuss the fact that citizenship is about a lot more than just voting....the first is a piece written by nationally known columnist Nat Hentoff entitled “The Still Missing: Millions of Young Voters.” The second is by Campaign Executive Director entitled “Not by Votes Alone.”