Civic Engagement for African American and Latinx Youth: Obstacles for 'Students Taking Action Together' in Urban School Districts

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Research Questions

- How does **community context** affect tools used to foster civic engagement and social action for youth of color?
- How is the effectiveness of the **social action** program, Students Taking Action Together (STAT), perceived within historically disempowered, **predominantly African American and Latinx schools**?
- What are unique **challenges** during early implementation within these school districts, and how may they be linked to these group's community context and disempowerment?

Background

- Systemic disempowerment and poverty within African American and Latinx communities has excluded these demographics from social and political American systems, limiting their civic engagement. (Shaw, Foster, & Harris-Combs, 2019; Sánchez-Jankowski, 2010)
- This exclusion leads urban youth of color to lack civic engagement opportunities and interpret their roles in social action poorly. (Zaff, Kawashima-Ginsberg, & Lin, 2011; Hughes, Newkirk, & Stenhjem, 2010; Faison and Flanagan, 2003).
- Social emotional learning programs, such as STAT, inform youth's civic engagement and social action by encouraging shared purposes with others, awareness for community context, and contribution skills (Elias et. al. 1997)

Methodology

Participants

Teachers in urban school districts, from varying backgrounds and levels of teaching experience, who have implemented STAT tools into their classroom instruction.

Measures

Voluntary Surveys conducted at the end of each academic marking period exploring questions about STAT's effectiveness in the classroom and overall teacher acceptability.

Data Analysis

- Survey data will be **tabulated** and **deductive coding** dimensions
- School districts will be coded according to their **district factor groups.**
- School districts will be grouped for their socioeconomic status and will be assessed for their **success, challenges, and overall acceptability of STAT.**

Anticipated Findings

- Predominantly African American and Latinx urban school districts **will take longer** to see improvements in children's behaviors and improved civic engagement skills **due to structural inequalities that under-serve and overburden students,** and contribute to behavioral and learning problems.

- Teachers within urban schools will share more **dislikes, recommendations, and challenges** in the early implementation of the program, but will enjoy the program overall more.

Discussion

- Though preliminary community research may be considered to create and implement social-emotional learning programs, these **programs, current community environments**, and the relationship between the two must be **continuously revisited.**

- Furthermore, ongoing and deep-rooted **structural inequalities** within **African American and Latinx** communities inform students and school environments and, subsequently, **classroom and program instruction**.

- Factors that may contribute to program instruction and effectiveness include: African American and Latinx **student's self-perceptions** and under-resourced **life circumstances**, as well as **school climate** and **teacher's unresolved biases**.

Conclusions/Significance

- Historically disempowered youth, such as African Americans and Latinxs, must receive social-emotional school interventions that are adaptable and practice contextual awareness.

- STAT must consider methods for fostering social action and civic engagement tools that are unique to each urban, predominantly African American and Latinx school districts' context.

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