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The civic development and political socialization of high school students: An in-depth look at one southern Illinois school district

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The Civic Development and Political Socialization of High School Students: An In-depth look at one Southern Illinois School District

By Jamie Bolander Weith

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Political Science

In the graduate school, Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, Illinois
2005.

I hereby recommend that this thesis be accepted as fulfilling this part of the graduate degree cited above

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Abstract

Is there a difference in the way students are socialized and the amount of political knowledge they have based on location and socio-economic status? This thesis looks at one rural Illinois high school (East Richland High School, Olney, Illinois) through a 2004 school wide survey and compares results with Richard Niemi's "The Civic Development of 9th through 12th-grade students in the United States," a 1996 nationwide survey of students.

To examine the political knowledge level of ERHS, student's overall political knowledge score was related to their parent's political party affiliation, grade level, gender, GPA, involvement in student council, involvement with community service, and participation in groups. .

Five main hypotheses are addressed and analyzed. The first hypothesis is that students simply do not care about political factors and this in turns affects their overall political knowledge and socialization. This hypothesis was found to be significant based on student's overall political knowledge and their attention to news media.

The second hypothesis states that students will have increasing political knowledge as they progress through school due to school curriculum. It was found that ERHS students do have higher levels of political knowledge as their grade level increases.

The third hypothesis says that students tend to be of the same political party as their parents. This was found to be significant as most students at ERHS did tend to associate themselves with the same political party as their parents.

The fourth hypothesis states that students are more likely to watch or listen to the news if their parent's have more education. This hypothesis was also proven to be correct at ERHS. While parental education did not affect how much parents discussed the news with their children it was found to affect the amount of news their children watched which in turn led to increased political knowledge and socialization.

The final hypothesis states that students who are more socially active in clubs and organizations will be more knowledgeable politically. This hypothesis was found to be only marginally significant in one test and insignificant in two other tests. Neither involvement in student council or involvement in community service played a role in political knowledge. Involvement in a general group only proved to be marginally significant in relation to political knowledge.

More research is needed in the area of adolescent political socialization to validate the findings presented.

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to all of my students – past, present, and future. May I inspire in you a love for political knowledge and an awareness of the world you live in.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

One high school history teacher in Southern Illinois tells of a student who did not understand why World War II was so named, having never heard of World War I. Another teacher from the same department tells you of a student who was puzzled that George Washington is sometimes referred to as “General” since the student had forgotten about the American Revolution.

Instances like these underline the need to thoroughly evaluate what young people know about history and government. Richard G. Niemi’s study “The Civic Development of 9th through 12th grade Students in the United States” provides a national assessment of high school students’ political knowledge.¹ After reading and analyzing this study, it quickly became clear that more studies in this subject are needed. If teachers are unaware of what students do not know it is impossible for them to teach effectively.

Studying students in all areas is important because the future of our society rests in the hands of these young people. Their political knowledge and civic involvement will determine the direction our country heads in the coming years. Using Niemi’s study as a base, this paper examines the political knowledge, civic development, and political socialization of students at East Richland High School (ERHS) in Olney, Illinois.

¹ Niemi, Richard G. “The Civic Development of 9th Through 12th Grade Students in the United States : 1996.” National Center for Education Statistics: Statistical Analysis Report. November 1998. US Department of Education. 79 pp.

Table 1: Olney versus United States comparison**(Source: 2000 Census data)**

	Olney	United States
Population	8,631	296,808,902
Households	3,755	105,480,101
Children under 18	28.2%	32.8%
Married couples	47.4%	51.7%
Female householders	10.6%	12.2%
Non-family households	38.7%	31.9%
Individuals	33.7%	33.7%
Individuals 65 and over	17.3%	9.2%
Average Household size	2.26	2.59
Average Family size	2.89	3.14
Median household income	\$28,084	\$41,994
Median family income	\$37,365	\$50,046
Male median income	\$29,547	\$37,057
Female median income	\$18,440	\$27,194
Individuals below poverty	17%	12.4%
Family below poverty	13%	9.2%
With children 18 and under below poverty	21.9%	10.9%
65 and older below poverty	8%	9.9%

Olney is a city located in Richland County, Illinois. As of the 2000 census, the city had a total population of 8,631. It is the county seat of Richland County and known for its population of white squirrels. According to the 2000 census, there are 3,755 households out of which 28.2% have children under the age of 18 living with them, 47.4% are married couples living together, 10.6% have a female householder with no husband present, and 38.7% are non-families. Thirty-three point seven percent of all households are made up of individuals living alone and of those 17.3% have someone living alone who is 65 years of age or older. The average household size is 2.26 and the average family size is 2.89.²

If you compare Olney's statistics with the national averages 32.8% of households have children under the age of 18 living with them, 51.7% are married couples living together, 12.2% have a female householder with no husband present, and 31.9% are non-families. Thirty-three point seven percent of all households are made up of individuals and 9.2% have someone living alone who is 65 years of age or older. The average household size is 2.59 and the average family size is 3.14.³

The median income for a household in Olney is \$28,084, and the median income for a family is \$37,365. Males have a median income of \$29,547 versus \$18,440 for females. Seventeen percent of the population and 13.0% of families are below the poverty line. Out of the total population, 21.9% of those under the

² No author given. US Census Bureau. Accessed via the web: www.factfinder.census.gov 22 June 05

³ No author given. US Census Bureau. Accessed via the web: www.factfinder.census.gov 22 June 05

age of 18 and 8.0% of those 65 and older are living below the poverty line also according to the 2000 census.⁴

The median income for a household in the United States is \$41,994, and the median income for a family is \$50,046. Males have a median income of \$37,057 nationwide versus \$27,194 for females. Twelve point four percent of the population and 9.2% of families are below the poverty line. Out of the total population, 10.9% of those under the age of 18 and 9.9% of those 65 and older are living below the poverty line also according to the 2000 census.⁵

This census data shows that Olney has a lower socio-economic status than the rest of the country which is associated with its more rural location. Therefore, it is especially important to replicate this study in a specifically rural area because rural students may have different political socialization than those in urban areas. In urban areas there is a different type of poverty and even the family unit appears to be stronger from the Census Bureau data. Suburban and urban areas also have different types of organizations and activities available to them such as organized sports leagues or even gangs, which could also play a role in socialization.⁶ Niemi's study analyzes the nation as a whole and does not distinguish between the rural and urban students. By focusing on a rural area this variable will be addressed.

This study has five main hypotheses, which are all based on Niemi's findings in his 1996 publication. The first hypothesis is that students lack political

⁴ US Census Bureau data.

⁵ US Census Bureau data.

efficacy, meaning they do not care about the political aspects of the world. Many teachers, parents, and others feel that teenagers simply do not care what goes on outside of their own personal spectrum. It is important to examine why teens are not politically aware while looking at ways that teachers, parents, and others can enhance the efficacy of future generations through greater socialization.

The second hypothesis is that a student's civic development increases as they progress through the grade levels at school in rural areas. Students in their senior year of high school should be more knowledgeable politically than their younger peers due not only to their education in the area but also due to other factors such as the influence of family and peers. This hypothesis predicts that the school system has a significant impact on student's political knowledge and their amount of political participation. The main issue addressed here is whether or not teachers and parents are doing their job to educate students regarding political issues. While examining this hypothesis, it is important to discuss the reasons a student's political knowledge is limited, at all grade levels, and what can be done to ensure that their political knowledge will be higher in the future.

The third hypothesis is that students tend to associate with the same political party as their parents, especially if political topics are frequently discussed in the home. Both political socialization and civic participation by students will be analyzed in this hypothesis. Parents are a key factor in any adolescent's environment, and how parents were socialized politically and their own political beliefs most likely greatly influence many teenagers' views.

⁶ Jushchuk, Richard. "Urban vs. Rural Impact on Adolescents." Accessed via the web: <http://www.gwu.edu/~psyc112/rjushchuk/> 17 July 2005

The fourth hypothesis is that students are more likely to watch or listen to the news if their parents have higher amounts of education. Students who are more aware of the world around them (through media based factors) should also be more likely to participate in more aspects of both the civic life and politics. This research will examine if students watch the news at all and then correlate that with their civic development.

The final hypothesis is that students who are more socially active in clubs and organizations will prove to be more knowledgeable politically. This includes determining what role group and community involvement in organization plays in overall socialization and civic participation.

This thesis will assess the political weaknesses and strengths of students at ERHS and propose possible ways to increase the political efficacy of these same students at ERHS and throughout the nation. While it will focus directly on ERHS and the rural sector of the community to fully examine this topic more research will need to be completed. A possible topic for further research could include a study of a more urban area and compare the data gathered to both the ERHS and Niemi's study to show a more comprehensive view of the rural versus urban differences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Political socialization, according to Webster's dictionary, is the process by which a person establishes set political behaviors. It includes changes over time in these behaviors as the person matures. Political socialization is an ongoing process in which the individual is repeatedly exposed to the acceptable political norms through a mixture of indoctrination and learning. The factors that affect this socialization can vary greatly. One naturally thinks of learning as a way to socialization and therefore this implies education and teachers are the main agents for the socialization of teens. Scholars, such as Niemi, also examine peers, parents, environment, media, and several other factors to attempt to determine which has the greatest influence.⁷

One of the earlier studies of political socialization was completed in the late 1930s by Theodore Newcomb and became known as the Bennington study. This study finds that political beliefs instilled during childhood and adolescent stages of development may be overturned as their lives and attitudes change. This finding derived from a longitudinal study that argues strongly that political socialization continues into young adulthood and that education serves a powerful catalyst, reshaping and changing beliefs put in place by other agents of socialization such as the family.⁸

It was thought that the most influential agent of political socialization operating on the young women were their teachers and peer groups that had predominantly liberal views. From the perspective of this 1930's study, this

⁷ Niemi, pg. 18.

conclusion was probably correct.⁹ The findings, however, in this study were limited to young, elite women at the college level.

Many studies have also been completed that focus on the socialization of young children and the effects that early socialization can have. Researchers such as Kenneth Langton look at the difference between socialization from a young age through adolescence. Other studies have been done focusing solely on young children such as Chris Garcia's study of how Hispanic children in California become politically socialized.¹⁰ Currently, more and more work is being performed on the adolescent age group as scholars learn more about the socialization process.

Studies concerned with the influence exerted by the family and peer groups tend to give an overview of both childhood and adolescence. Kent Jennings and Richard Niemi concluded in 1981 that although many previous studies had been weak in the area of adolescent socialization they do not support an interpretation of a turning away from parents or that adolescents develop independently of parental attitudes and ideas.¹¹

Even more recent research, from 1997, indicates that parents have a continuing influence over their offspring. Marvin Resnick looks at the potential conflict between parents and peers and concurs with Jennings and Niemi's findings that throughout adolescence parents have an innate influence over their

⁸ Newcomb, T.M. Personality and Social Change: Attitude formation in a Student Community. John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1943.

⁹ Newcomb, T.M. et al. Persistence and Change: Bennington College and Its Students after Twenty-Five Years. John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1967.

¹⁰ Garcia, F. Chris. "Political Socialization of Chicano children: a comparative study with Anglos in California schools." Praeger special studies in U.S. economic, social, and political issues. New York, Praeger, 1973. 255pp.

children. It is after their teenage years that Resnick feels students turn more towards peer groups for guidance in all areas of life.¹²

Dawson and Prewitt focus on four main categories: family, peers, education/schools, and social groupings. They feel these are the factors that need attention with regard to the political socialization of our young people. Families are one prime example of a type of nonpolitical group that passes on political norms while engaged in other activities. Families are neither instituted nor organized specifically for transmitting political values; yet almost universally the family serves as a major agent of political socialization because it is the primary source of relationships for most people in all societies.¹³

This thesis uses four main agents of political socialization; family, peers, education, and outside factors.

Family

An important agent of the political socialization process is the family. The early literature, which focused upon childhood, indicates that the political socialization process begins at a relatively early age. Typically the child acquires an attitude or opinion about something political and if these experiences have been positive and their views have been reinforced by their parent(s), then it is likely that they will have a positive attitude toward politics in general.¹⁴ Fred Greenstein found that when studying young children affect precedes information;

¹¹ Jennings and Niemi pg. 384.

¹² Resnick, M.D. et al. "Protecting Adolescents from Harm. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 278, 823-832.

¹³ Dawson, Richard E. and Prewitt, Kenneth. Political Socialization. Little, Brown, and Company; Boston; 1969. 226 pp. pg. 105.

¹⁴ Easton, D. and Dennis, J. Children in the Political System. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1969.

meaning that liking or disliking a political object takes place before the child has in-depth information about it.¹⁵

One recurring finding in the literature is that parents have an influence over their children's sense of party identification, political ideology and a generalized orientation toward politics.¹⁶ This especially tends to be the case when parents agree on political matters and they discuss their opinions with or in front of their children. This is based on the primacy principle that what individuals learn during the childhood stage of development tends to have an enduring influence over the rest of their life. Inglehart has been more specific in this area, hypothesizing that the socioeconomic conditions present during one's youth will have an enduring influence over the individual.¹⁷

The family is the most important factor during the childhood stage of development and it is thought to exert a powerful influence that has a lasting impact on the child. In order to exert political influence over a child a socializing agent must communicate clearly to the individual and the individual must be receptive to the message being given.¹⁸

Herbert H. Hyman views "politics as a consequence of socialization" or that without socialization there would be no politics. Through this it is easy to infer that political and civic participation in his writing is a learned behavior and the result of the person's exposure to factors such as environment and

¹⁵ Greenstein, F.I. Children and Politics. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1965.

¹⁶ Dawson, Richard E. and Prewitt, Kenneth. Political Socialization. Little, Brown, and Company; Boston; 1969. 226 pp. pg. 105.

¹⁷ Inglehart, R. Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ; 1990.

schooling.¹⁹ Additional factors that contribute to the influence of the family over their offspring include the amount of time spent together and the bonds that tie parents and children together. If these bonds are strong it is likely that the offspring will attempt to please the parents by mimicking their political attitudes.²⁰

Kenneth P. Langton studies national samples of secondary school students from the Caribbean (U.S. Virgin Islands) and the United States. His study focuses on two main questions; how parents and family structure influence their children politically and what role the school plays in developing a child's political ideology.²¹

Langton looks at the different types of families to examine how parents influence their children politically. He found that males and females respond differently, and that their responses are different based on the type of family structure they live within.²²

Males had the most political interest (75%) when they came from a female headed, working class family. Middle class males from female-headed families showed the lowest amount of political interest (27%).²³

Political efficacy at the 12th grade level was also studied by Langton. Students tended to care the most about politics at this level when they came from a nuclear family or a family where both a mother and father are present. Students

¹⁸ Williams, C.B. and Mimms, D.R. "Agent Credibility and Receptivity Influences in Children's Political Learning." *Political Behavior*, Vol. 8, Issue 2, pgs 175-200.

¹⁹ Hyman, Herbert H. Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behavior. The Free Press; New York; 1959. 140 pp.

²⁰ Davies, J.C. The Families Role in Political Socialization: It's Role in the Political Process. American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, 1965.

²¹ Langton, Kenneth P. Political Socialization. Oxford University Press, London, 1969. 214 pp.

²² Langton pg. 36.

²³ Langton, pg. 37.

tended to increase their political interest and sense of political efficacy as they moved from 8th to 12th grade with the greatest increase in children from nuclear families. Students from female-headed families tended to have more authoritarian personalities, be less politically interested and have less political efficacy than those from a nuclear family.²⁴

With regard to political parties, Langton found the students studied tended to have the same political party as their mother forty-seven percent of the time, while they had the same political party as their father thirty-seven percent of the time, and fifteen percent did not share their political affiliation beliefs with either parent.²⁵

Overall, most of the literature regarding family dealt with students at a very young age and found that parents do play a significant role in their socialization. Most children tend to like whatever their parents like at young ages for various reasons and this could factor into their overall development. Because the research is mostly focused at a young age it is hard to determine if family is the main influence during adolescence due to the other factors that are present during adolescence that are not present during younger childhood years such as peer groups and organizational activities.

Peer Group

The peer group is the second factor that nearly all scholarly literature on this subject discussed. Asch conducted one of the earliest empirical studies on peer group pressure and its influence. He demonstrated the potency of peer

²⁴ Langton pg. 42.

²⁵ Langton pg. 29.

group pressure in an experimental setting by designing a study in which the subjects were placed in a conflict between trusting their own judgment and accepting the incorrect judgment of peers. The experiment was rigged so that each person in the experiment openly expressed his or her views to the group prior to the subject. When faced with clearly false judgments the majority of the subjects expressed views consistent with their peers. This supports the argument that the peer group is very influential and has more influence even than the family.²⁶

As individuals begin to spend more time away from their family, their peer group can and does take on an important role as a socializing agent. Pressures to conform to group norms can be very powerful and have an impact upon students' political attitudes and values. As previously indicated peer group pressure is very powerful and may well overcome students' prior attitudes and values. According to Dey, the peer group agent of political socialization influences students to change in the direction of institutional peer norms irrespective of the current social era.²⁷

Peer groups also influence political socialization a great deal. Co-workers and close friends are the next most important aspect in most people's lives next to family and therefore their influence tends to be the second most valuable. It is also important to note that the family structure is very different from that of a peer

²⁶ Asch, S.E. "Studies of Independence and Conformity: A minority of One Against a Unanimous Majority." *Psychological Monograph*, Vol. 70, Issue 9, 1956.

²⁷ Dey, E.L. "Undergraduate Political Attitudes." *Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 68; 1997, pgs. 398-413.

group and thus the socialization that results from these differs greatly. Peer groups do not typically have the same rigid relationship roles as a family.²⁸

Education

Education is also a factor that many scholars discussed. Education and teachers in particular are believed by some to have influence over their students' political beliefs.

Education is the third significant aspect of political socialization. The main goal of education in all societies across the world is to prepare children for adulthood by teaching the skills and values that they will need. Dawson and Prewitt break this category down to look at education through two separate lenses. The first lens focuses on the formal curriculum, the teacher, and the day-to-day ritual that school provides. The second lens focuses on aspects of the school outside the formal classroom such as extracurricular activities and the overall social climate that the school provides.²⁹

The formal classroom is where a majority of a student's political learning takes place. The curriculum includes subjects such as civics and government at to instill the values of good citizenship. Secondary classes such as government and U.S. History work to continue to facilitate this same citizenship role.³⁰

Langton did not find the school curriculum itself to play any role in a student's political socialization. Civics curriculum was not significantly associated with student's political orientation within any case he examined. He instead found

²⁸ Dawson and Prewitt. Pp. 106.

²⁹ Dawson and Prewitt. Pg. 146.

peer groups and extra curricular groups to have the greatest measurable impact.³¹

Jennings and Niemi completed a more comprehensive study regarding how teens relate to politics based on many different variables in 1974. They examine how one becomes attached to political parties, the relationship of political knowledge between parents and their adolescents, citizenship roles and their influence, the impact of the educational system, political development, and more. One chapter is devoted solely to the relationship that social studies teachers have on teens and their eventual political character.³² Their overall finding also does not point to formal education as the main factor, but instead focuses a great deal on the effect that extra curricular participation, such as membership in clubs, organizations, and other types of group activities, has on young people.

Other Factors

There are also other factors that may influence the student. One such factor that will be examined in this study is the effect that extra curricular activities have on a student's political knowledge and the impact that the media may have on a student's political socialization.

Niemi has completed the most work in this research area not only in quantity, but also in significance. One of his articles assesses how American society has seemingly become more and more lethargic when it comes to "citizen

³⁰ Dawson and Prewitt. Pg. 147.

³¹ Langton pg. 115.

³² Jennings, M. Kent, et al. The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools. Princeton University Press; 1974. 357 pp.

participation in politics and civic society.” A main theme throughout the work is the question of whether requiring students to participate in a set number of hours of community service would increase their civic participation later in life.

Extra Curricula

The methodology of this thesis focuses on the case study that Hyman presents as direct questions on political involvement and interest. Holding both opportunity and intellectual capacity to absorb knowledge equal it is reasonable to expect that there would be varying levels of political knowledge based on extra curricular involvement.³³ Obviously it is impossible to hold opportunity and a person’s intellectual capacity as controls.

It was argued in the late 1950s (and questionably still today) that politics had become something that children were not exposed to and therefore became an abrupt life event that adults were suddenly faced with at maturity with no significant knowledge. Hyman tries to establish a single point in time in which variations in the behavior of children appear based on their group memberships. He notes that there are four distinct types of studies that are found: choice of ego ideals, media behavior, level of political knowledge and responses to direct questions on political involvement and interest.³⁴

Langton found that formal curriculum overall has little effect on political socialization. However, the acquisition of conceptual skills, social climate of the school, and the presence of peer groups may all play a role in socialization that

³³ Hyman. Pg. 23.

accounts for the shift to higher political knowledge and interest in some students as they progress through the grade levels.³⁵

Jenning's and Niemi's research provides a comparison that enables one to see the changes that have taken place over the last 30 years and their impact on the students and their political culture where the social composition of the school is also examined. The authors find that this has an even more significant impact on the students than the more formal classroom setting supplied by the school. Interactions with their peers affect their way of viewing the political world. Extracurricular activities were also studied and it was found that clubs, athletic groups, performance groups and student government had a significant impact on a students "political integration into the pluralistic adult world."³⁶ Extra curricular activities train students for political participation and teach the cultural values associated with it.

The specific organization that tends to have the most direct impact on a students future political participation and current political interest was found to be student government. These types of programs are set up to teach self-government and to familiarize them with the types of forms and procedures government entails.³⁷

³⁴ Hyman. Pg. 21.

³⁵ Langton pg. 115.

³⁶ Dawson and Prewitt pg. 170.

³⁷ Dawson and Prewitt pg. 172.

Media

Hyman states that media is efficient and vast enough to cover huge populations and that is why it is such an important aspect of political socialization in today's society. In moments the entire world can become aware of events (such as Kennedy's assassination) and react to them. The media is capable of producing widespread national uniformities in patterns of behavior and produces outcomes that are not as flexible as those of the more typical agents of socialization such as parents, teachers, and peers. Typical agents can be specifically tailored to an individual learner, meaning that specific people can adjust and present you with information that is important to you and that you need to know, whereas with the media one message is displayed for all.³⁸

While Dawson and Prewitt feel that newspapers, radio, television, magazines and all other communication that media transmit all affect political orientation to a certain degree it is becoming even more of a factor as the family structure weakens and technology improves. They disagree, however, with Hyman's view regarding media as a political socialization agent.³⁹ Dawson and Prewitt feel that the media's potential capacity is easily overrated because it can only influence more modern societies. Third World countries do not have access to the media advances that the United States and other countries have. Media is transmitter of political cues, which are originated by other agencies, and tends to reinforce existing political orientations rather than create new ones.

³⁸ Hyman. Pg. 143.

³⁹ Dawson and Prewitt pg. 172

For example, in a developing country the average citizen will have little to no access to any type of mass communication. They do not have televisions, radios, or computers to update them with news and information. What information they do receive is first filtered through the leaders in the government of the country they live. This means the information they receive is most likely tainted or slanted to the government's needs.

The social aspect of the media also plays a role in Dawson and Prewitt's study. They state that media is received and interpreted in a social setting and that place sits within the context of socially conditioned predispositions.⁴⁰ This means that although people may hear about world events such as 9/11 or the tsunamis it is within a controlled environment and we have been trained to process information in certain ways. For example, although someone may find the tsunami to be devastating, most simply read or hear about it and do not act upon that idea.

While media may be overrated in Dawson and Prewitt's eyes this is most likely due to the fact that their study was completed in 1969. Media is very different in 2005 than it was in 1996 but their work still lays the foundation for much of the work done with socialization and the media today.

Summary of Literature

It is apparent, by the very nature of this task, that the studies cited are diverse in contents, in methods employed, in the variables of political behavior that were measured, in the specific determinants of behavior that were tested, and most importantly in the quality of the findings. These works were

specifically selected due to their impact on the specific socialization areas being researched: family, peers, education, and other factors. All of the above mentioned scholars have looked at the case of adolescent civic development in different lights and it is through a combination of these past works that the methodology and therefore the results of the study shall be based and applied to the ERHS student body.

The study of ERHS will add both updated information regarding the current media and lifestyle as well as a rural viewpoint to the research that has already been completed in the adolescent political socialization field.

⁴⁰ Dawson and Prewitt pg. 197.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Niemi's study of political socialization of high school students focuses upon ideological change and the persistence of this change over time. By contrast, the central concern of this study is the major agents of political socialization and how these agents are associated with the student's political knowledge.

This research is a quantitative study because it uses survey analyses to examine the political knowledge of high school students. This paper also seeks to be qualitative through addressing major questions that can have an impact on society and proposing possible solutions to problems identified within the research such as what teachers can do to improve the political knowledge of their students at the high school level.

There is currently a battle within political science as to how much science should be involved in the discipline. This paper uses both the "hard" science and the "soft" science to contribute on an academic level. The hope is that the paper will influence the general population as well by raising awareness and increasing knowledge of students' political socialization and civic participation. One could say that this research is part of the Perestroika movement to try to not only provide hard evidence, but also influence the masses.⁴¹

The methodology of this research also attempts to be unbiased through presenting the data in the fashion that it was collected. The author, as a social science teacher herself, hopes that students have an abundant knowledge about

⁴¹ Smith, Rogers M. "Putting the Substance Back in Political Science." Chronicle of Higher Education. 4/5/2002, Vol. 48, Issue 30. pp. 10.

the genre and therefore will have perfect political knowledge scores. As the data will show, it is apparent that students do not have the political knowledge that they need. Instead of framing East Richland High School in a positive light the data will show the true weaknesses not only of teachers but also of parents, the media, and other environmental factors.

The survey research is based on a Niemi study completed in 1996. It is important, after events such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack and the 2000 presidential election, to analyze the awareness by young people of current events and to assess their political knowledge. For example, the 2000 presidential election was the closest election to date and involved a candidate who won the majority vote but not winning the popular, due to the Electoral College. It is circumstances like this, which push the limits of society, which should force a deeper examination of what young people know about current events and how they are being politically socialized. These people will be the leaders of tomorrow and if trends continue and voter apathy increases society will be forced to change drastically.

The study will be replicated in a rural area, which will give a different perspective than Niemi's nationwide study, as mentioned in the introduction. Niemi's survey looks at five main areas under civic development: political knowledge, attention to politics, political participation skills, political efficacy, and tolerance to diversity. To be able to compare this research to Niemi's research that was based on the entire United States, the survey will be worded as closely as possible to his. It is important to mention that Niemi's survey was completed

in 1996 and this one was completed in 2004. This means that many of the questions that ask about specific people will have different people than before. With Niemi's survey the Speaker of the House was Newt Gingrich who many would say was much more popular and well known than our current speaker, Dennis Hastert. This may affect the results in a way that will need to be considered when analyzing the results.

A pre-test of the survey was completed on a group of 30 junior level high school students to assure that the survey was easy to understand and read. The survey was distributed to the entire student body of East Richland High School on March 1, 2004. Permission was received from the administration to distribute the survey during the first of four blocks into which the school day is divided, which allowed the whole school to be surveyed. East Richland High School consisted of approximately 700 students during the 2003-2004 school year. A disclaimer at the top of the survey allowed students to decline participation; therefore, a total of 80% of the student body (512 students) attempted the survey.

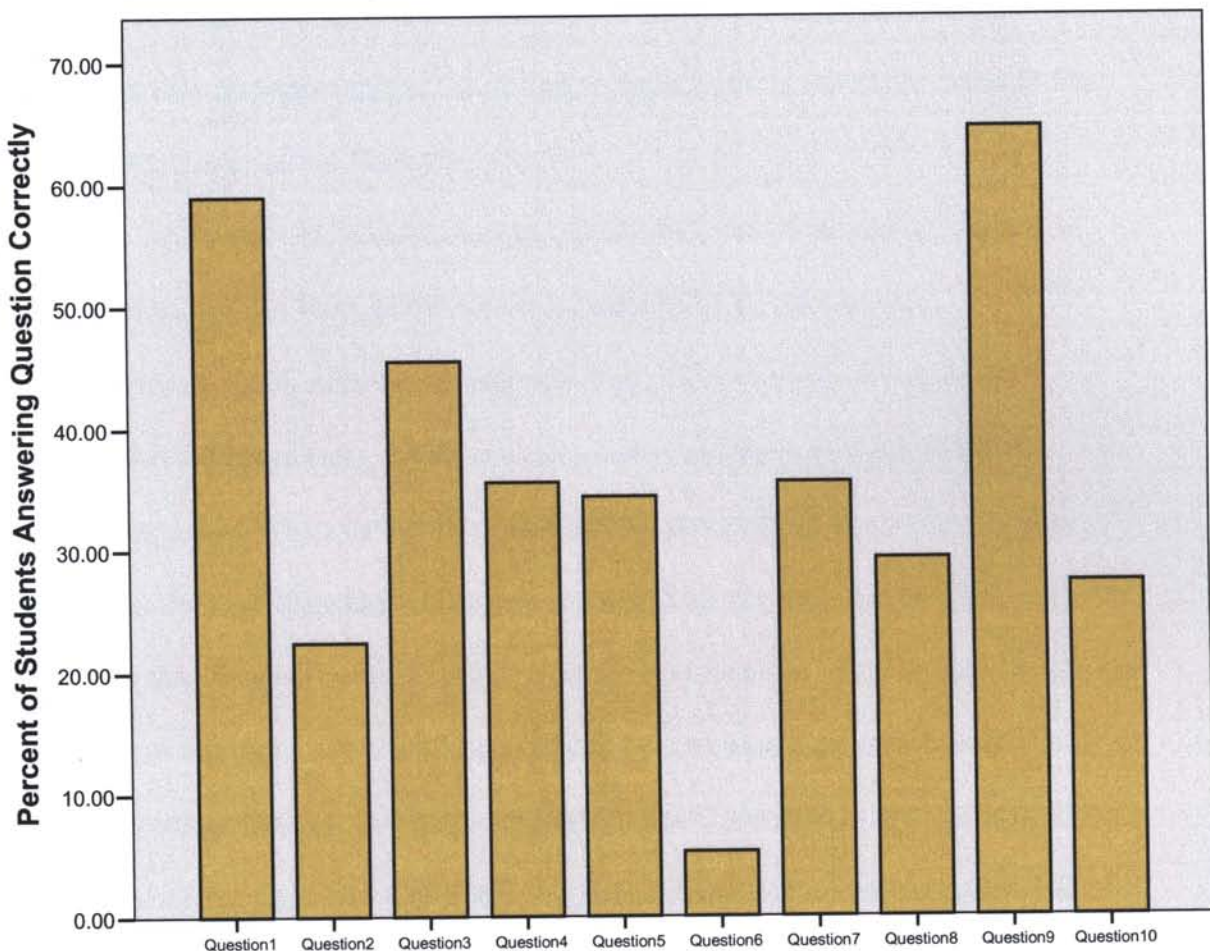
The survey consists of a short political knowledge quiz and asks about the student's attention to the news as well as the involvement of their parents with regards to politics and the news. Student's participation will be assessed based on how confident they feel about writing letters or speaking to public officials or at public meetings.

After the surveys were completed a data set was formed using SPSS to test various hypotheses to analyze and answer the five main questions that this paper presents.

Chapter 4: Findings

Using Niemi's study as a base, the students at East Richland High School were surveyed. The results were very disheartening for social science teachers in the district. The overall political knowledge of the students is quite low. The graph below shows the percent of students answering each of the 10 basic political knowledge questions correctly.

Figure 1: Political Knowledge of ERHS Student Body



- Question 1: What job or political office is held by Dick Cheney?
 Question 2: Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional?
 Question 3: Which party has the most members in the House of Representatives?
 Question 4: What majority is needed to override a presidential veto in both the Senate and the House of Representatives?
 Question 5: Which party is more conservative at the national level?
 Question 6: What position does Dennis Hastert hold?
 Question 7: Whose jobs is it to nominate judges to the federal courts?
 Question 8: Which party has the most members in the Senate?
 Question 9: What are the first ten amendments to the Constitution called?
 Question 10: Which of the two parties favors a larger defense budget?

The first question asked what political office Dick Cheney holds. Only 59% or 302 of the 512 students surveyed responded correctly by answering vice president to this question. In the spring of 2004 when this survey was given Mr. Cheney had served as Vice President for a little over three years. Students with any knowledge about current events or government should have been able to correctly respond to this question.

The second basic knowledge question that was presented in the survey asked whose responsibility it is to determine if a law is constitutional. In response to this question only 23% of the student body correctly answered the question with the answer, Supreme Court.

The eight other basic knowledge questions follow a similar pattern with 46% knowing that the Republicans had a majority in the House of Representatives, 36% with the knowledge that a 2/3 majority is required to override a presidential veto, 34% realizing that Republicans are the more conservative party, 5% naming Dennis Hastert as the Speaker of the House, 36% realize that the President nominates judges for federal courts, 29% with the knowledge that Republicans hold a majority in the Senate. The basic knowledge question that students answered correctly the most was question number nine dealing with what the first ten amendments to the Constitution are called. Sixty-five percent of the students surveyed responded with the correct answer, Bill of Rights. Whereas only 27% of students surveyed realized that the party that favors a larger defense budget is Republican.

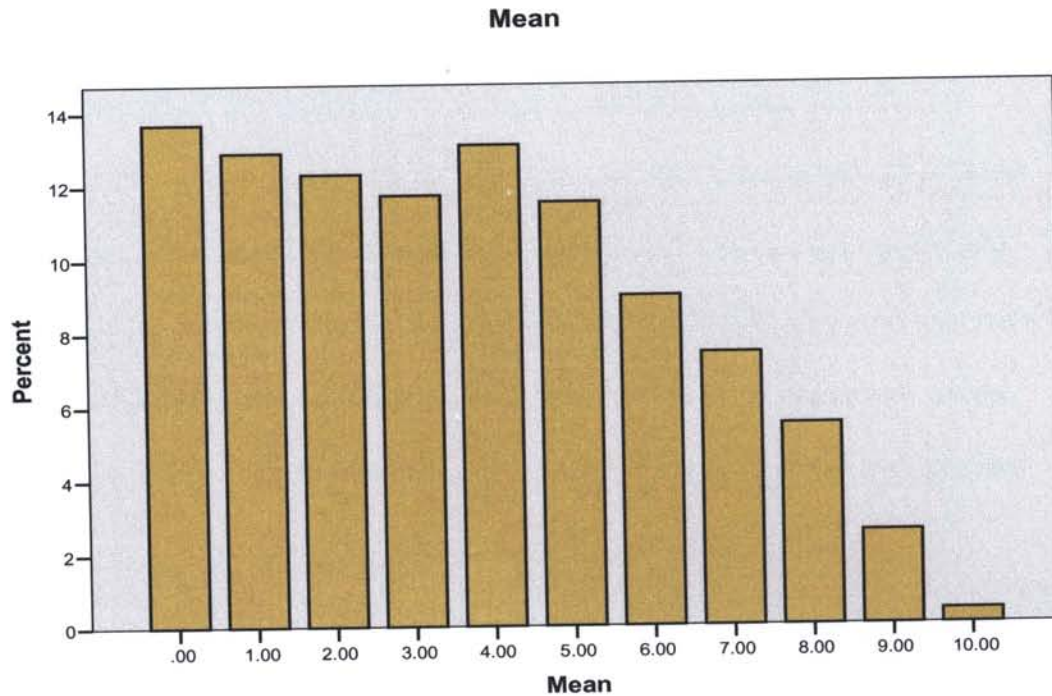
Niemi (1998) used two different sets of five questions on students in his survey to attain their political knowledge.⁴² This survey instead uses all ten of his questions on all of the ERHS students surveyed because parents were unable to be surveyed. Niemi (1998) found that 8% of the students he surveyed were able to answer all five of the questions presented to them correctly. Parents were given the five questions opposite to those their son or daughter answered and 16.5% of the parents studied were able to answer the five questions presented to them correctly. It should be noted that six of the ten questions ask students to address more contemporary issues (current events) such as which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives. The other four questions focus more on constitutional provisions such as whose responsibility it is to determine whether a law is constitutional, which would be learned in a government class.

Niemi (1998) set up his analysis in a different way because he factored in the parental variable in a different way than the ERHS survey is able to given the fact that parents were unable to be surveyed. Niemi looked at political knowledge of students based on the five questions that were given specifically to them and how many the students were able to answer correctly of the five. Eight percent of the students surveyed were able to answer all five of his questions correctly while 24% answered none of the questions correctly, 25% answered one question correctly, 17% answered two questions correctly, 15% answered

⁴² Niemi, pg. 12.

three questions correctly, and 12% answered four questions correctly, respectively.⁴³

Figure 2: Overall Political Knowledge (Number of questions answered correctly)



Three percent of students answered nine questions correctly while 6% answered eight questions correctly. Seven percent answered seven questions correctly, 9% answered six, 12% answered five, 13% answered four, 12% answered three, 12% answered two, and 13% answered one question correctly.

Because Niemi's study used a different number of questions the ten questions used can be grouped to compare the percentage of students who were able to answer all ten questions correctly verses all five of Niemi's. In Niemi's

⁴³ Niemi, pg. 15.

study 8% of students answered all five of his questions correctly and 24% answered none of the questions correctly. In the ERHS survey 2.9% of the students answered nine or ten questions correctly and 27% answered none or one of the questions correctly. It is important to note that Niemi's study did ask significantly more students and was nationwide with only five questions while this survey asked ten questions and was focused on 512 students at ERHS. Students at ERHS answered all ten political knowledge questions, unlike Niemi's five. Of the 512 students surveyed only .4% or two of the students were able to answer all ten questions correctly. This implies that ERHS students are less politically knowledgeable overall than students throughout the United States and that rural student's socialization may be different than it is in urban and suburban areas. The reasons for these differences will be explored more fully in the hypotheses below.

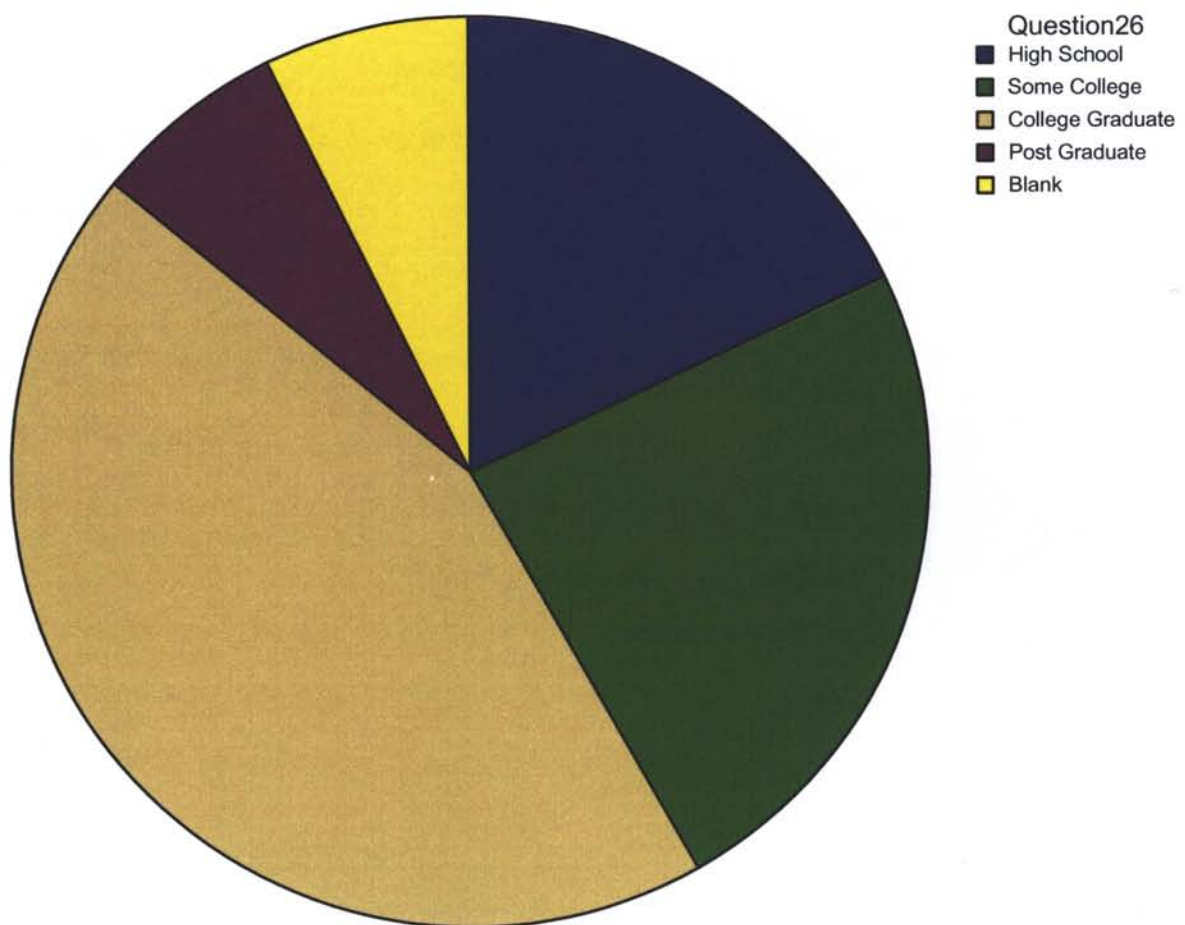
Family

Niemi (1998) uses his parental/student study to say that students pay less attention to politics than their parents do and this therefore reflects why in his study parents were more knowledgeable. Niemi is able to do a great deal more with his study involving parents and families since he was able to survey parents and students together. In this section of the paper the same idea is taken that family plays a role, but with the argument that students who discuss and interact with politics with their parents or guardians more will be more knowledgeable. It

is also thought that the more education a parent attains the higher the student's overall political knowledge score will be.

Only five questions asked directly addressed the impact that parents and family have on students' political socialization and civic knowledge.

Figure 3: Parents level of education attained.

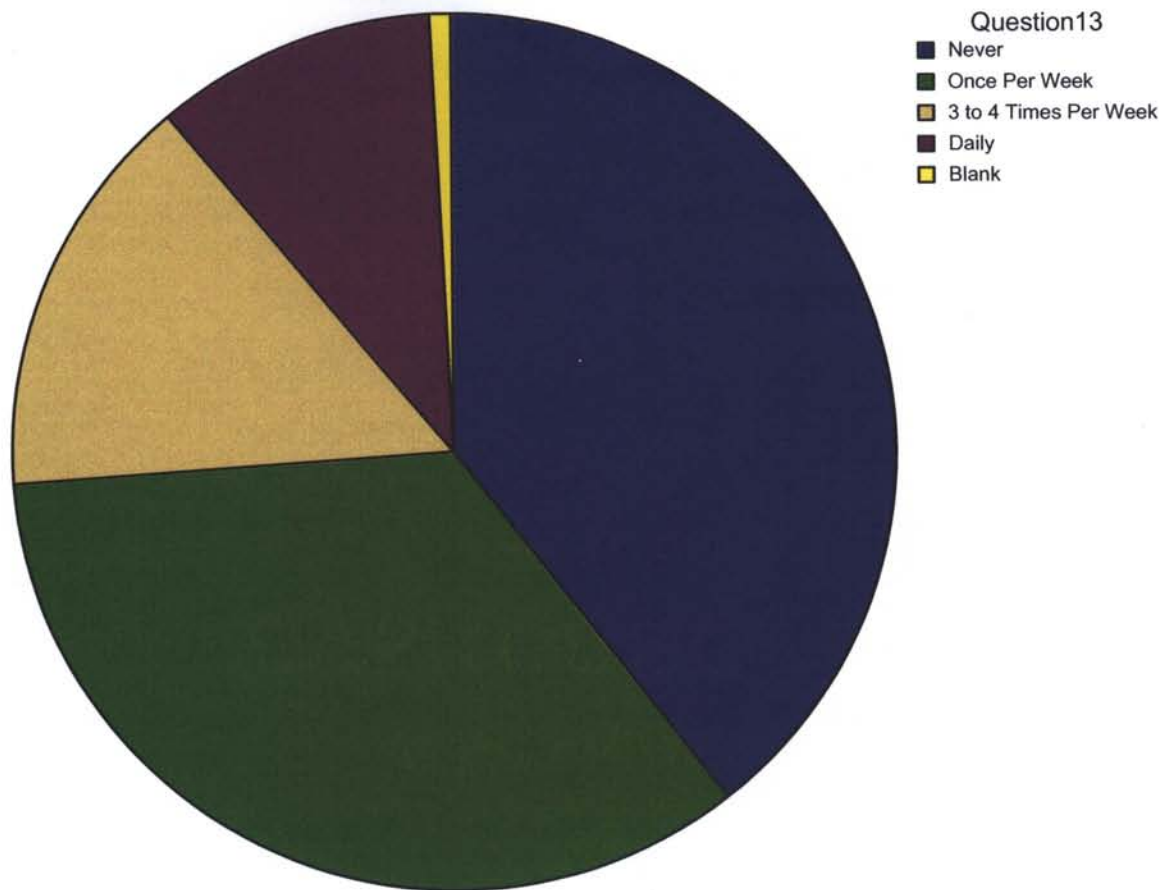


As the graph above of question 26 shows most students' parents have pursued higher education. Only 7% of the ERHS population's parents have obtained any post-graduate education but 44% of students responded that their

parents do have a college degree. Twenty-four percent of parents have some college and 18% have a high school education. Seven percent of students left the question blank. Overall these numbers are high, especially for a rural area even though students have low political knowledge scores overall.

Question number thirteen asks how often students watch or listen to the news with their parents. As shown in the graph that follows, 40% of the students surveyed responded that they never watch or listen to the news with their parents. In addition, 34% responded with once per week, 15% with three to four times per week, and ten selected daily with one percent of students leaving the question blank entirely.

Figure 4: Number of times per week students watch or listen to the news with their parents.



Considering the fact that nearly 40% of students surveyed never watch the news with their parents this could be a significant factor that in turn results in the low overall political knowledge that high school student possess.

In Niemi's study, 39.6% of students surveyed watch or listen to the news everyday, 31.9% at least once a week, 11.7% at least once a month, and 16.8% hardly ever. From this comparison it is obvious that the ERHS student body watches and listens to a great deal less news then the nation as a whole.

One would assume that as parental education increased the more often students would watch or listen to the news with their parents.

Table 2: Parental education relating to the number of times per week students watch or listen to the news with their parents.

			Parents highest level of schooling completed			
			High School	Some College	College Graduate	Post Graduate
How often students watch or listen to the news with their parents	Never	Count	39	64	73	15
		% within Question26	42.0%	53.0%	32.0%	43.0%
	Once Per Week	Count	33	37	85	7
		% within Question26	36.0%	30.0%	38.0%	20.0%
	3 to 4 Times Per Week	Count	14	11	40	5
		% within Question26	15.0%	9.0%	18.0%	14.0%
	Daily	Count	6	9	26	8
		% within Question26	7.0%	7.0%	12.0%	23.0%
Total	Count	92	122	226	35	
	% within Question26	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi Square: 28.01

Significance: .03

Of the students surveyed at ERHS, 43% of those with parents with post-graduate degrees selected that they never watch or listen to the news with their parents. Twenty percent of students with post-graduate parents selected once per week, 14% selected three to four times per week and 23% selected daily. Of students with parents with a college degree 32% said that they never watch or listen to the news with their parents. Thirty-eight percent said that they do so once per week, 18% selected three to four times per week, and 12% selected daily. Students with parents with some college, 54% never watch or listen to the news with their parents. Thirty percent selected once per week, 9% three to four times per week and seven percent selected daily. Of students whose parent's have a high school degree, 42% said that they never watch or listen to the news with their parents, 36% said they do so weekly, 15% selected three to four times per week and seven percent selected daily.

There is a small difference depending on parental education regarding how many times a week student's watch the news or listen to the radio with their

parents. This factor is statistically significant, but not as strong as was originally expected. The significance is mostly due to the small number of students who have parents with post-graduate education. A higher percentage of students with parents who have at least some post-graduate education watch and listen to the news more.

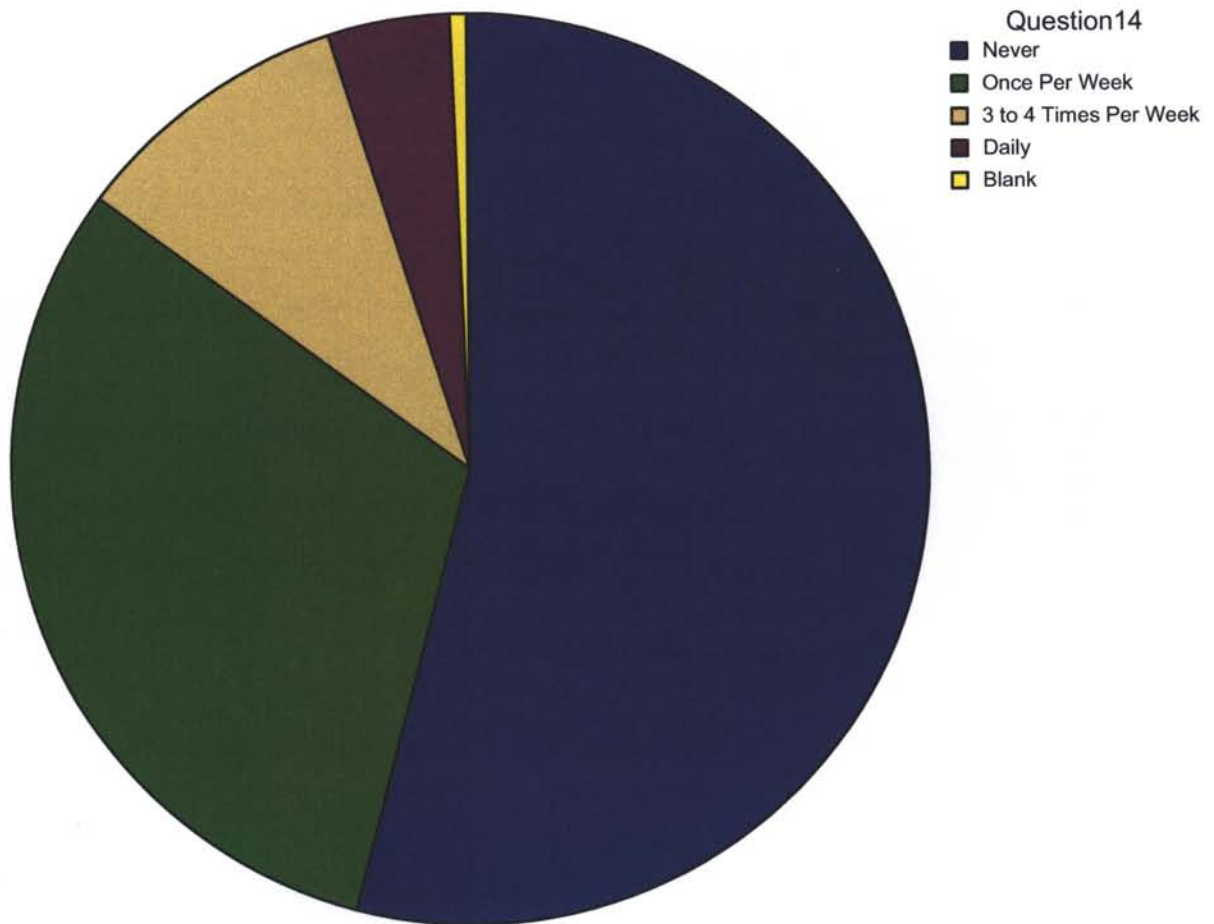
In comparing this to Niemi's study 45.5% of parents with post-graduate education have children who report watching or listening to the news with their parents daily. Nearly 39% of students of parents who are college graduates, 40.1% of students with parents that have some college, and 35.4% of students of parents that are high school graduates. In the ERHS survey 23% of students with parents who have some graduate school reported watching or listening to the news with their parents daily. Of students with parents with college degrees 12% watch or listen to the news daily with their parents; while 9% of students with parents who have some college, and only 6% of students with parents who are high school graduated reported watching or listening to the news daily. This shows that ERHS students do not watch or listen to the news with their parents as much as the students Niemi surveyed at the national level.

Is the difference between the amounts of news ERHS students watch and listen to with their parents a difference of time or place? Time really should not play a factor in this study since the ERHS survey was completed only eight years after Niemi's. If time were an important factor, one would think the results would be the opposite with more students watching the news now after major events

such as September 11th. One would assume since ERHS is located in a predominately rural area that the differences in the study are a result of location.

Discussion of the news is even less common in student's home life as 54% of ERHS students said that they never discuss the news with their parents or other household adults as shown in the graph below.

Figure 5: Number of times per week students discuss news with their parents or other household adults.



Thirty-one percent of students responded that they discuss the news with their parents once per week, ten percent checked three to four times per week,

and four percent discuss the news with their parents daily. Only one percent of students left this question blank.

These figures show that students discuss the news even less than they watch the news with their parents. This can be attributed to many factors such as parent's busy lifestyles and the move away from family mealtimes. No matter what it is attributed to though, it can be argued that students are less politically knowledgeable because of this lack of parental engagement when it comes to the news, current events, and world affairs.

Table 3: Parental education and discussion with students regarding the news.

			Parents highest level of schooling completed			
			High School	Some College	College Graduate	Post Graduate
Times per week students discuss the news with parents or other household adults	Never	Count	57	70	109	20
		% within Question26	62.0%	58.0%	48.0%	57.0%
	Once Per Week	Count	21	35	83	10
		% within Question26	23.0%	29.0%	37.0%	29.0%
	3 to 4 Times Per Week	Count	9	11	24	4
		% within Question26	10.0%	9.0%	11.0%	11.0%
	Daily	Count	5	4	10	1
		% within Question26	5.0%	3.0%	4.0%	3.0%
Total	Count	92	122	226	35	
	% within Question26	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi Square: 16.15

Significance: .44

As with Question 13, one would assume that parents with more education discuss the news with their children more but the findings show that the relationships in this table do not prove to be statistically significant. It is interesting to note though that of the parents with post-graduate education, 57% never discuss the news with their child, 29% discuss the news once per week, 11% discuss the news three to four times per week and only three percent

discuss the news with their child daily. College graduate parents maintain similar percentages with 48% never discussing the news, 37% once per week, 11% with three to four times per week, and four percent daily.

Three percent of students with parents who have some college discuss the news daily. Nine percent discuss the news three to four times per week, 29% once per week, and 58% never. High School educated parents have similar statistics with 62% never discussing the news with their children, 23% discussing once per week, ten percent three to four times per week, and five percent daily. Similarly to the contingency table presented for Question 13, parental education seems to have little overall effect on the amount of time parents spend with their children watching or discussing current events.

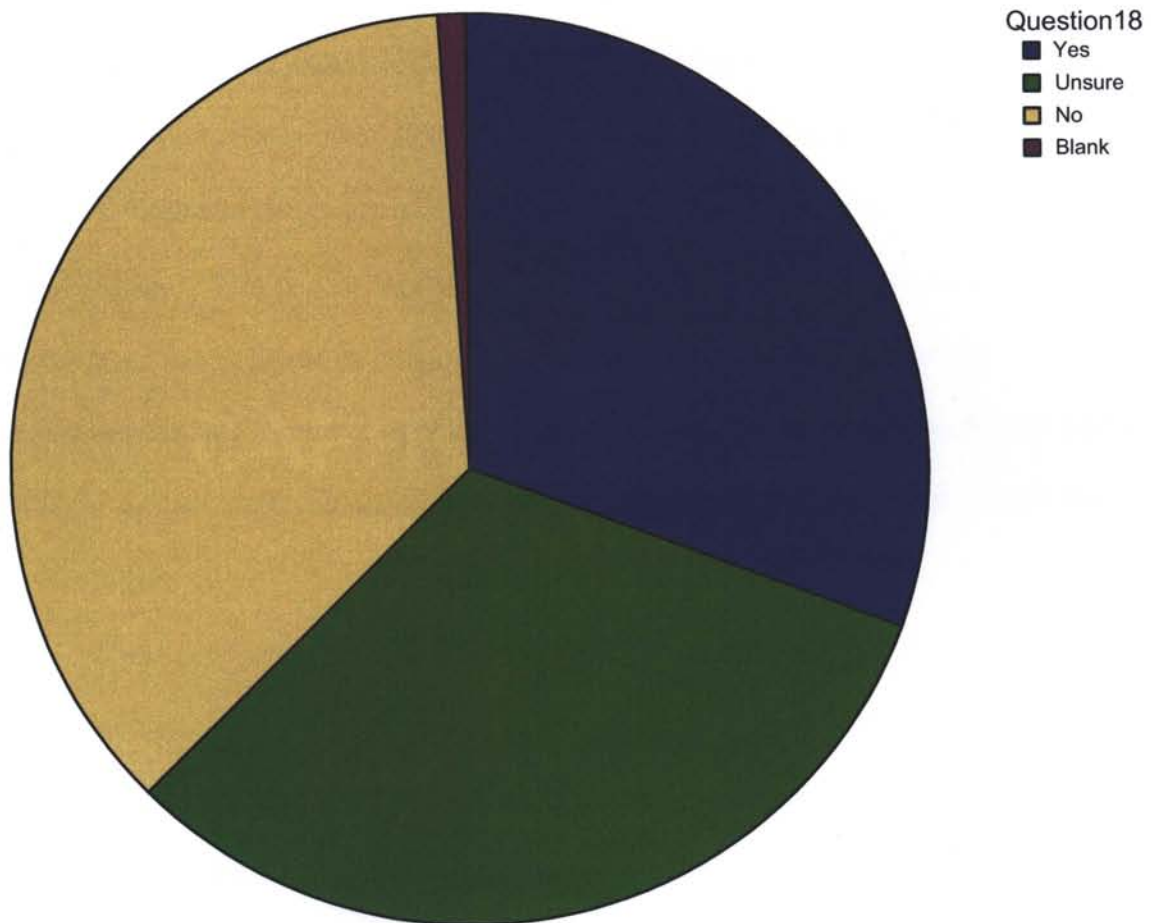
Niemi's study found that 43.1% of parents with graduate education, 31.2% of parents who are college graduates, 27.2% of parents with some college, and 21.3% of parents with a high school education had children who reported discussing the news with their parents weekly.⁴⁴ In comparison, ERHS students reported that 23% of parents who have a graduate education, 29% of parents with a college degree, 37% of parents with some college, and 29% of parents with a high school degree discuss the news with them weekly. This shows that nationally parents with graduate work and college degrees discuss the news with their children more, but of parents with some college and a high school degree the amount of weekly discussion with students regarding the news is actually significantly higher. Parents with lower levels of education in the ERHS school

⁴⁴ Niemi. Pg. 38.

district actually discuss the news more than is the nationwide average for parents with those same levels of education.

Question 18 asks each student to evaluate if they feel their family has a say in what the federal government does.

Figure 6: Do students think their family has a say in what the federal government does?



Answers were decidedly split when it comes to the question of if a student thinks their family has any say in government. Thirty-one percent said that they

do think their family has a say while 37% said no and 27% were unsure. This is important to note because typically, people with a greater interest and knowledge in politics will be more likely to feel that they have a say in what the government does. It is assumed from this question that students answers will reflect their families overall attitude toward the government.

Niemi's nationwide survey, 64.2% of students said that they feel that their family has a say in what the government does and 35.8% responded no.⁴⁵ Question 26 asks for the parent's highest level of schooling completed. This shows that ERHS students are much more unsure about this possibly due to more alienation due to rural location factors. With 64.2% nationwide and only 31% of ERHS students responding that they feel they have a say this is unusually low. The percentage of students responding no is only one percent higher than the national average but Niemi did not take into account those students who were unsure. This shows that obviously some factor of rural life in Olney is influencing how students feel about their and their families' role in the government.

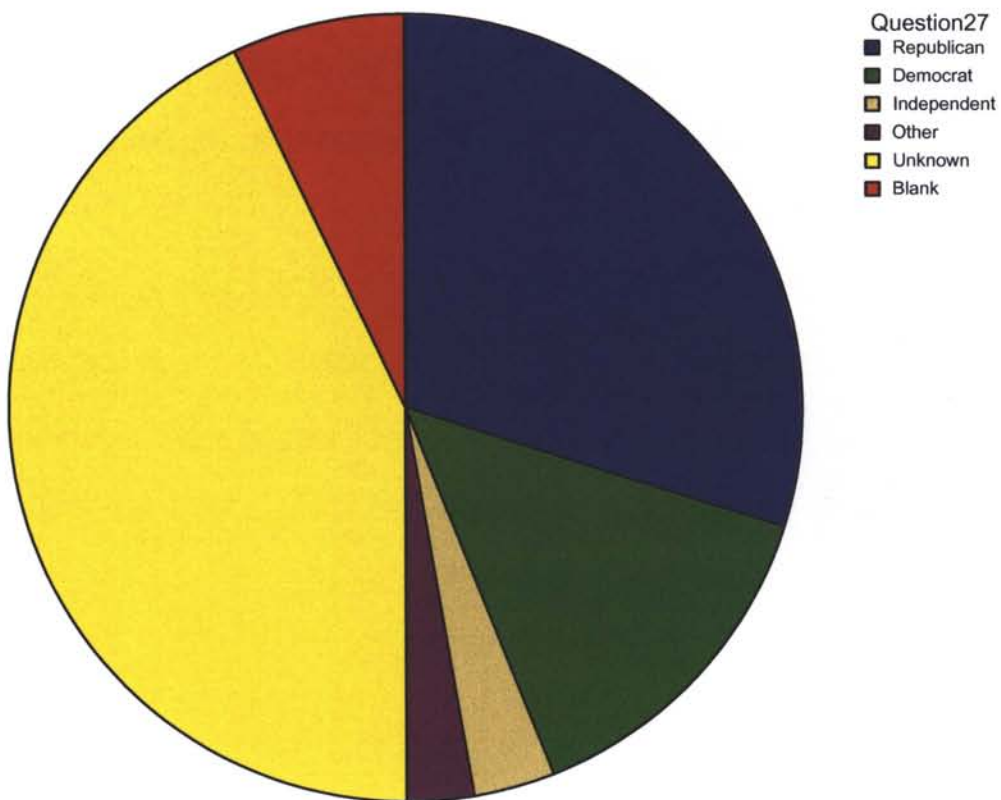
This could be attributed to the 2000 election and not simply to rural and urban factors. After this election many people throughout the country felt that their vote did not matter because President Bush was able to beat Vice-President Gore without winning the popular vote due to the Electoral College. Because Niemi's study was completed in 1996 this could play at least some role in the percentage differences between the nationwide survey and ERHS.

⁴⁵ Niemi. Pg. 20

Student's responses to this question can also be used as not only a family factor with regards to political knowledge but also as a contributor to socio-economic status and how that contributes to student's knowledge levels.

Question 27 asks for parent's political party affiliation.

Figure 7: Parent's political party affiliation.



Students responded to this question regarding their parent's political party affiliation. An overwhelming 43% of the ERHS student body did not know what political party their parents were affiliated with while 30% responded that their parents are Republican, 14% Democrat, three percent Independent, three

percent other, and seven percent of the student body preferred to leave the question blank.

It is interesting to note how many students considered themselves to be members of the same political party as their parents. This will help to define whether party identification is transmitted by the parents or by socialization within schools or with peers. It is also possible that party identification could be related to all of these factors, which will be explored through the hypotheses further. As question 27 asks for student's parents' political affiliation, question 28 asks students directly what political party they are affiliated with.

Table 4: Overall Political knowledge and defined parental party affiliation.

			Parent's defined or undefined political party	
			Undefined Political party	Defined Political Party
Student's Political Knowledge Score	.00	Count	48	17
		% within defineparty	21.0%	7.0%
	1.00	Count	37	25
		% within defineparty	16.0%	10.0%
	2.00	Count	29	28
		% within defineparty	12.0%	12.0%
	3.00	Count	26	28
		% within defineparty	11.0%	12.0%
	4.00	Count	28	34
		% within defineparty	12.0%	14.0%
	5.00	Count	23	34
		% within defineparty	10.0%	14.0%
	6.00	Count	18	22
	% within defineparty	8.0%	9.0%	
7.00	Count	13	23	
	% within defineparty	6.0%	10.0%	
8.00	Count	10	18	
	% within defineparty	4.0%	7.0%	
9.00	Count	2	11	
	% within defineparty	1.0%	5.0%	
10.00	Count	0	2	
	% within defineparty	.0%	1.0%	
Total	Count	234	242	
	% within defineparty	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi Square: 33.47**Significance: .00**

By taking the overall mean scores, which is the basis for the overall political knowledge of the student body of ERHS and cross-tabulating this with parents with defined political parties (Republican, Democrat, or Independent) it can be determined if parents with defined political parties have more politically knowledgeable children.

Of the students surveyed 1% of students scored a ten in political knowledge and had parents with defined party identification. Five percent of students scoring nine on the political knowledge survey had parents with defined party identification, scoring eight 7%, scoring seven 10%, scoring five 14%, scoring four 14%, scoring three 12%, scoring two 12%, scoring one 10% and scoring zero 7%. The percentages are always higher for parents with defined parties except for the one and zero political knowledge scores.

It is apparent from these numbers that students whose parents have defined party identification are significantly more likely to be knowledgeable about politics. It therefore must be assumed that parents play at least some role in their children's overall socialization.

Table 5: Students Political Affiliation and Parental Affiliation Compliments

			Parent's Political Party Affiliation				
			Republican	Democrat	Independent	Other	Unknown
Student's Political Party Affiliation	Republican	Count	94	6	2	3	10
		% within Question27	61.0%	8.0%	12.0%	21.0%	5.0%
	Democrat	Count	5	35	2	0	9
		% within Question27	3.0%	49.0%	12.0%	.0%	4.0%
	Independent	Count	14	6	11	0	10
		% within Question27	9.0%	8.0%	65.0%	.0%	5.0%
	Other	Count	1	6	0	8	5
		% within Question27	1.0%	8.0%	.0%	57.0%	2.0%
	Unknown	Count	38	19	2	3	185
		% within Question27	25.0%	26.0%	12.0%	21.0%	84.0%
Total	Count		72	17	14		
	% within Question27		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-Square: 983.09

Significance: .00

The table above shows that many ERHS students affiliate themselves with the same party to which their parents belong. Sixty-one percent of students who classified their parents as Republican also classified themselves as Republican. Forty-nine percent of students who classified their parents as Democrat also

classified themselves in that category. The most astonishing number is that 84% of students who classified their parents as unknown also classified themselves as unknown. Niemi did not report findings for this variable in his study.

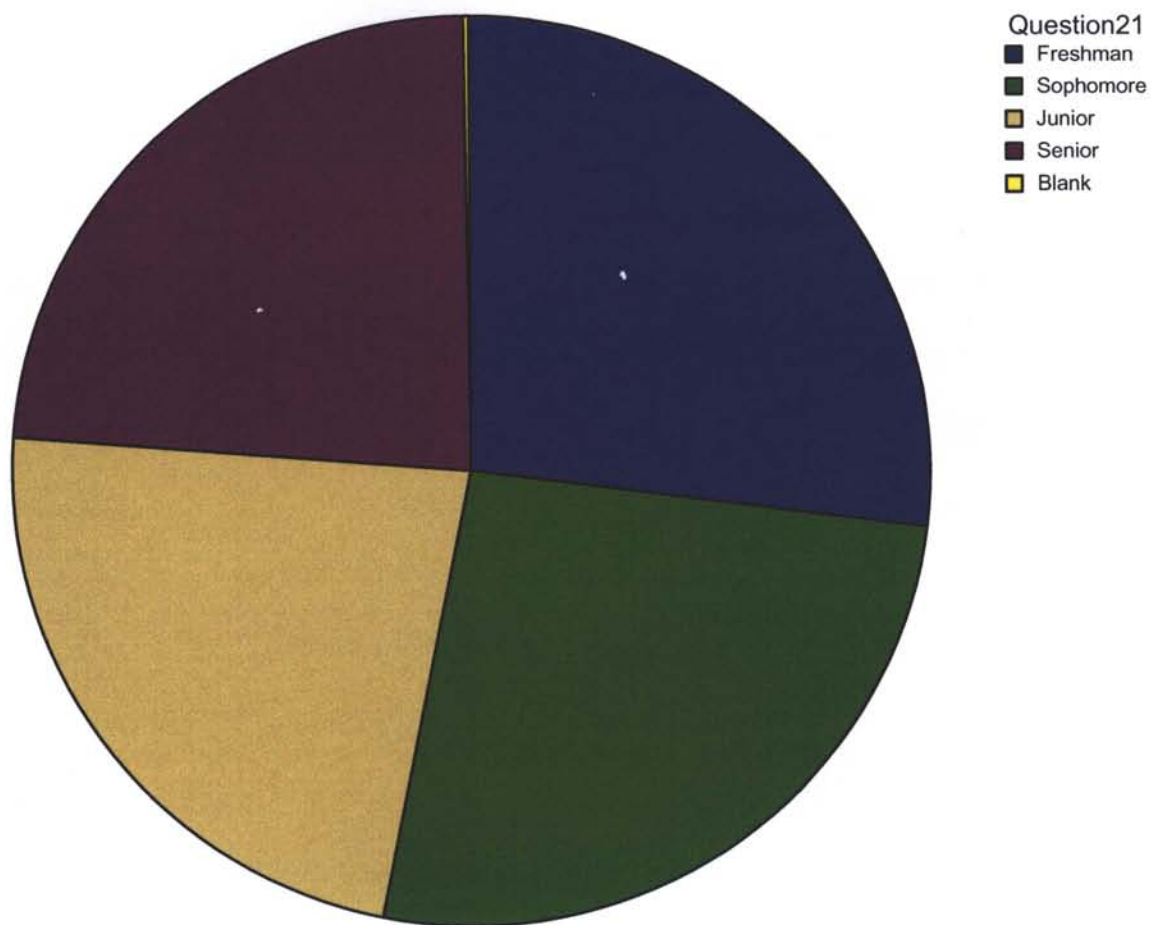
This unknown group could play a large role in the reason why ERHS student's political knowledge is so low. Because many students do not know their parents political affiliation and therefore do not classify themselves it becomes obvious that political issues are not valued in the home and thus not focused upon in ways where students would learn about them in the home.

Peer Groups

How do students compare to others in their different peer groups? Which peer group has the highest impact?

Question 21 asks students simply for their grade in school. This variable will be studied to see if students' political knowledge increases as they advance in school. At ERHS 3 credits in the social science are required for graduation. Among these requirements are 1.5 credits (3 semesters) American History, 1 credit (2 semesters) World History, and .5 credit (1 semester) in Government. World History is offered at the sophomore level, American History at the junior level, and Government at the senior level. If the level of political knowledge increases with grade level in school it could be argued to an extent that the school system is succeeding in some regards.

Figure 8: Number of students surveyed at each grade level.



As you can see from the figure above the student body at ERHS is fairly evenly distributed. School records indicate a total enrollment during the 2003-2004 school year of 643 students. Of those students, 80% of all students were present and willing to participate in the survey given. Of the 512 students surveyed, 27% were freshman, 26% sophomores, 23% juniors, and 24% seniors.

Niemi's study surveyed 7,429,457 students in grades 9 and 10 for a total of 58.8% and 6,759,978 students in grades 11 and 12 for a total of 38.5% of the survey. The ERHS survey is more evenly distributed with 53% responses from

grades 9 and 10 and 46.6%. Niemi does not mention why he has a higher percentage of students surveyed from grades 9 and 10. At ERHS the decrease in the percentage of upperclassman surveyed is simply due to a lower number of upperclassman students. Until the Illinois state law changed in January of 2005 to increase the age that students must attend school in Illinois to 17 many students turned 16 between their sophomore and junior year of high school and dropped out of school. This accounts for this difference and would mostly likely be found to account partially for Niemi's lower percentage of upperclassman as well.

Table 6: Overall political knowledge by grade level.

			Students grade in school			
			Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Political Knowledge score	.00	Count	25	22	15	7
		% within Question21	18.0%	16.0%	13.0%	6.0%
	1.00	Count	22	27	8	9
		% within Question21	16.0%	20.0%	7.0%	7.0%
	2.00	Count	18	23	14	8
		% within Question21	13.0%	17.0%	12.0%	7.0%
	3.00	Count	21	10	18	11
		% within Question21	15.0%	8.0%	15.0%	9.0%
	4.00	Count	26	18	12	11
		% within Question21	19.0%	13.0%	10.0%	9.0%
	5.00	Count	12	12	14	21
		% within Question21	9.0%	9.0%	12.0%	17.0%
	6.00	Count	6	14	9	17
		% within Question21	4.0%	10.0%	8.0%	14.0%
	7.00	Count	6	3	14	15
		% within Question21	4.0%	2.0%	12.0%	12.0%
	8.00	Count	2	2	9	15
		% within Question21	1.0%	2.0%	8.0%	12.0%
	9.00	Count	0	3	4	6
		% within Question21	.0%	2.0%	3.0%	5.0%
10.00	Count	0	0	1	1	
	% within Question21	.0%	.0%	1.0%	1.0%	
Total	Count	138	134	118	121	
	% within Question21	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-Square: 993.33**Significance: .00**

Overall, as the number of years in school increases, students are found to answer more questions correctly. For example, with the political knowledge score of nine, 0% were freshmen, 2% were sophomores, 3% were juniors and 5% were seniors. This shows an increase in political knowledge as the grade levels increase. With a political knowledge score of zero were 18% of freshman, 16% of sophomores, 13% of juniors, and 6% of seniors. This also shows the increase of knowledge that occurs. This leads to the finding that as students progress through school they become more knowledgeable politically.

The fact that there is a lower percentage of upperclassman with low political knowledge scores shows that at some point between their freshman and senior year they are acquiring some political knowledge. While the fact that it occurs during these years does not immediately demonstrate that it must occur because of school or in the curriculum; it is very possible that the school plays a significant role in this increase. It does show that the more education a student has the more knowledge they are likely to have.

Niemi's study looks at underclassman (freshman and sophomores) and upperclassmen (juniors and seniors) in groups and divides them into political knowledge groupings. Students who answered none to one question correctly, students who answered two to three questions correctly, and students who answered four to five questions correctly. To compare ERHS students to this they are divided into upper and lower classmen and then the questions are divided into zero to three correct, four to seven correct, and eight to ten correct.

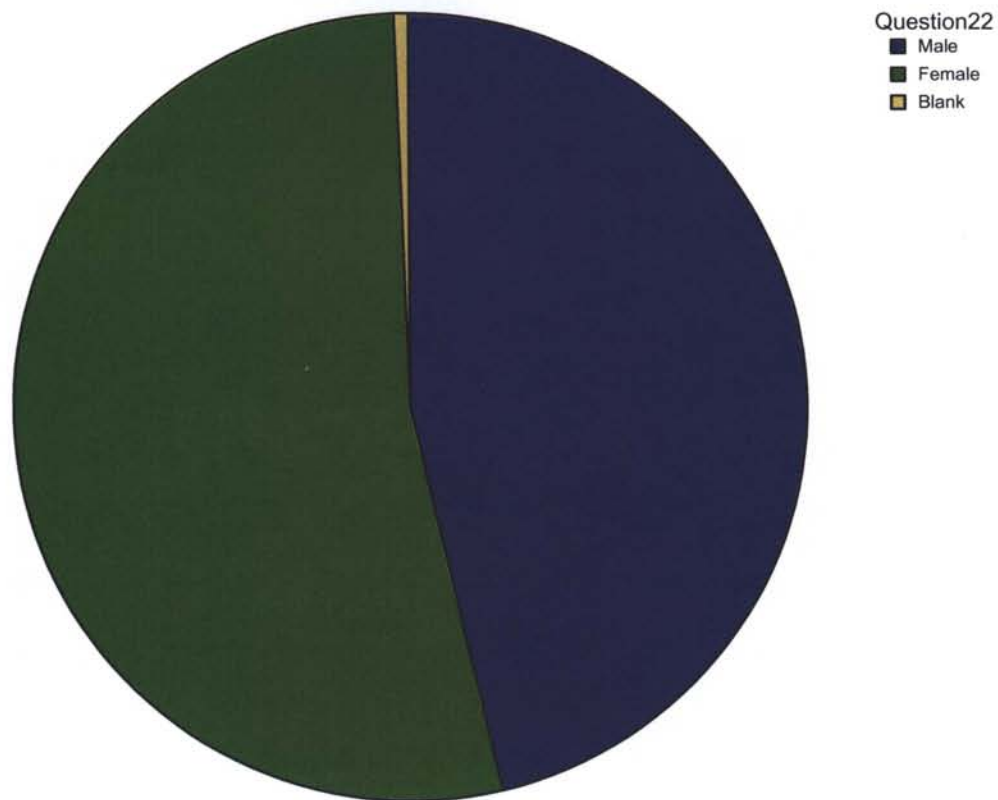
Niemi's study found that 58.8% of underclassman students and 38.5% of upperclassman students answered none to one of his questions correctly. Answering two to three questions correctly were 28.7% of underclassmen and 34.2% of upperclassmen. Answering four to five questions correctly were 12.5% of underclassmen and 27.3% of upperclassmen. This compares to the ERHS study with 26.7% of underclassman and 17.5% of upperclassman answering zero to three questions correctly. ERHS students answering four to seven questions correctly contained 36% underclassmen, and 47% of upperclassman. Only three percent of underclassmen and 15% of upperclassmen at ERHS

answered eight to ten questions correctly. This shows that in the lower level of political knowledge ERHS students are even with the nationwide findings.

However, Niemi's nationwide study had more students with higher-level political knowledge in both upper and lower classmen while ERHS students tended to have more scores in the middle area demographic. ERHS students once again prove to not be completely on target with the nationwide demographic that Niemi has.

Question 22 asks students for their gender. Gender can also play a significant role in political socialization as research shows that young men tend to be socialized politically more and earlier in life. Politics remains a male dominated arena and therefore it could be argued that even in a small, rural school setting male student's political knowledge would be higher than females. Also due to the more traditional, conservative values of rural areas the male political dominance could be even greater than in urban and suburban areas where women tend to have less traditional roles.

Figure 9: Distribution of students by gender.



Of the ERHS students surveyed 46% were male and 53% were female. In Niemi's study 51.5% of students responding were male and 48.4% were female. The ERHS survey, while significantly smaller than Niemi's, is more representative of the total population in the United States as statistically there are more females than males nationally according to the 2000 census.

Table 7: Overall political knowledge by gender.

			Student's Gender	
			Male	Female
Political Knowledge Score	.00	Count	27	41
		% within Question22	11.0%	15.0%
	1.00	Count	22	44
		% within Question22	9.0%	16.0%
	2.00	Count	25	37
		% within Question22	11.0%	14.0%
	3.00	Count	30	30
		% within Question22	13.0%	11.0%
	4.00	Count	36	31
		% within Question22	15.0%	11.0%
	5.00	Count	28	31
		% within Question22	12.0%	11.0%
	6.00	Count	23	23
		% within Question22	10.0%	9.0%
	7.00	Count	22	16
		% within Question22	9.0%	6.0%
	8.00	Count	15	13
		% within Question22	6.0%	5.0%
	9.00	Count	7	6
		% within Question22	3.0%	2.0%
	10.00	Count	2	0
		% within Question22	1.0%	.0%
Total		Count	237	272
		% within Question22	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-square: 23.44**Significance: .27**

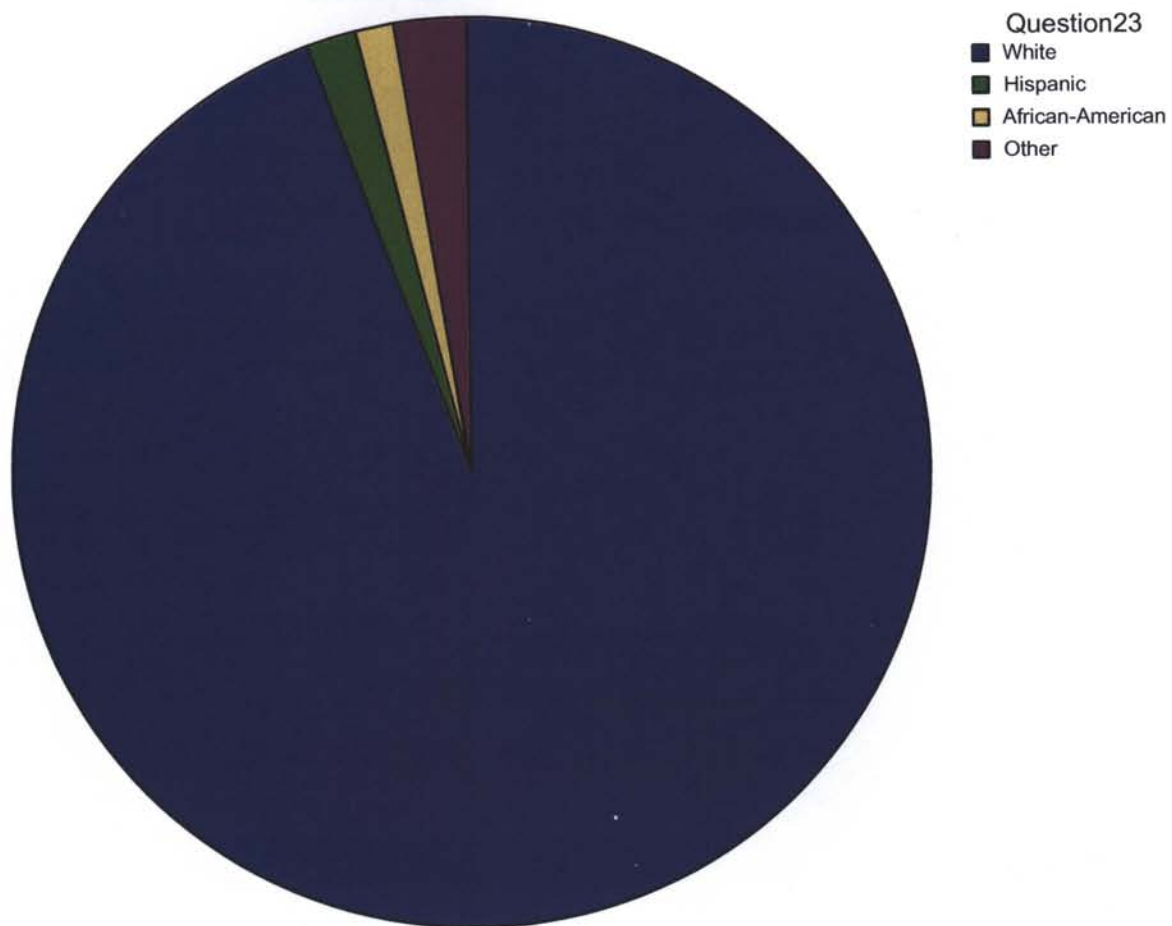
Did females or males score higher on political knowledge questions becomes the next main question. Overall males tended to have a slightly higher political knowledge scores than females at ERHS, but the difference is not statistically significant. Of students scoring five and higher on the political knowledge survey were 41% of the male students and 33% of the female students with males having a larger percentage scoring over five. Of students

scoring five or lower on the political knowledge survey 59% were males and 67% were females with females having more low scores than males.

Comparing Niemi's survey to the ERHS survey follows the same distribution pattern as grade level. In Niemi's survey, 43.4% of males answered none to one of his questions correctly, while 32.1% of males answered two to three questions correctly, and 24.5% of males answered four to five questions correctly. With females in Niemi's survey 55.1% answered none to one question correctly, 30.5% answered two to three questions correctly, and 14.3% answered four to five questions correctly. ERHS students had 43.8% of males answering zero to three questions correctly, 45.9% of males answering four to seven questions correctly, and 10% of males answering eight to ten questions correctly. Females at ERHS had 55.8% answering zero to three questions correctly, 37.1% of females answering four to seven questions correctly, and 6.9% of females answering eight to ten questions correctly. This comparison is similar to the comparison for grade level and political knowledge. In both sets of students males do tend to score slightly higher but ERHS students tend to have the highest levels of knowledge in the middle range.

Question 23 does not prove to be significant as part of the ERHS student body. This question asks students to mark their race. Of the students surveyed, 94% classified themselves as white, 2% as Hispanic, 1% as African-American, and 2% as other. Due to the overwhelmingly white population in rural, southeastern Illinois this factor will not prove to have any significant meaning with regards political knowledge by race.

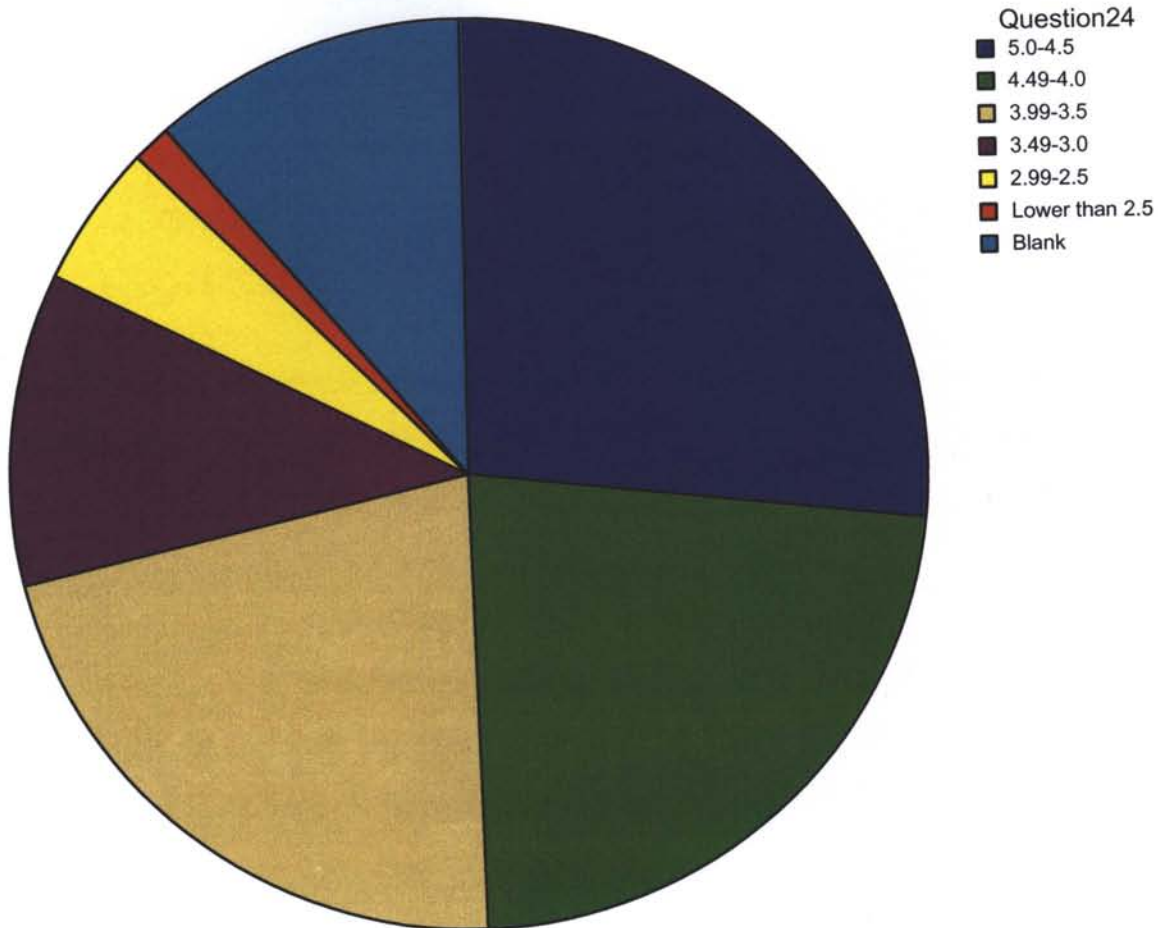
Figure 10: Students distributed by race.



Niemi's study, because it was nationwide, has a much greater distribution of ethnicities than is found in Southern Illinois. Niemi's study was 68% white and 32% Black, Hispanic or other.

While race may not vary much in Southern Illinois one would think that grade point average certainly would be. Are students who are more apt to achieve academically also more apt to have higher levels of political knowledge? Question 24 asks students for their approximate grade point average.

Figure 11: Students surveyed distributed by grade point average rank.



Of the students surveyed, 27% classified themselves as having a grade point average of 5.0-4.5, 23% as 4.49-4.0, 22% as 3.99-3.5, 11% as 3.49-3.0, five percent as 2.99-2.5 and one percent as lower than 2.5. It is important to note that this is not necessarily the students' actual grade point average but rather the grade point average they selected for themselves.

As with the other variables under peer group this is compared to political knowledge ideas by comparing it to the overall political knowledge statistic.

Table 8: Overall political knowledge by grade point average.

			Grade Point Average						
			5.0-4.5	4.49-4.0	3.99-3.5	3.49-3.0	2.99-2.5	Lower than 2.5	Blank
Political Knowledge score	.00	Count	8	8	21	12	5	1	15
		% within Question24	6.0%	7.0%	19.0%	21.0%	19.0%	14.0%	26.0%
	1.00	Count	8	15	16	10	3	2	12
		% within Question24	6.0%	13.0%	14.0%	18.0%	12.0%	29.0%	21.0%
	2.00	Count	13	14	11	8	6	1	10
		% within Question24	9.0%	12.0%	10.0%	14.0%	23.0%	14.0%	18.0%
	3.00	Count	14	23	10	7	3	1	2
		% within Question24	10.0%	20.0%	9.0%	12.0%	12.0%	14.0%	4.0%
	4.00	Count	14	15	21	8	1	1	7
		% within Question24	10.0%	13.0%	19.0%	14.0%	4.0%	14.0%	12.0%
	5.00	Count	19	14	15	3	4	0	4
		% within Question24	14.0%	12.0%	14.0%	5.0%	15.0%	.0%	7.0%
	6.00	Count	20	10	5	5	2	1	3
		% within Question24	15.0%	9.0%	5.0%	9.0%	8.0%	14.0%	5.0%
	7.00	Count	18	11	4	1	1	0	3
		% within Question24	13.0%	9.0%	4.0%	2.0%	4.0%	.0%	5.0%
	8.00	Count	14	5	5	3	1	0	0
		% within Question24	10.0%	4.0%	5.0%	5.0%	4.0%	.0%	.0%
	9.00	Count	7	2	3	0	0	0	1
		% within Question24	5.0%	2.0%	3.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.0%
10.00	Count	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	% within Question24	2.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	
Total	Count	137	117	111	57	26	7	57	
	% within Question24	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-square: 101.86**Significance: .00**

In the above table associated with student grade point averages the results are statistically significant, even though the results appear to be fairly sporadic. Most students tended to have middle range GPA's from 3.0 to 3.99, which would be B averages. These students also tended to be middle range with the overall political knowledge score.

Comparing GPA to Niemi's study of the entire nation show 32.9% of students with A averages answering none to one question correctly. Forty-seven point six percent of students with A averages with two to three questions correct and 31.9% of students with A averages answering four to five questions

correctly. Of students with B averages, 50% answered none to one question correctly, 33% answered two to three correctly, and 17% answered four to five correctly. Of students with C averages, 58.6% answered none to one question correctly, 25.2% answered two to three questions correctly, and 3.8% answered four to five questions correctly. Of students with D or F averages 70.5% of students answered none to one question correctly, 24.5% answered two to three questions correctly, and five percent answered four to five questions correctly.

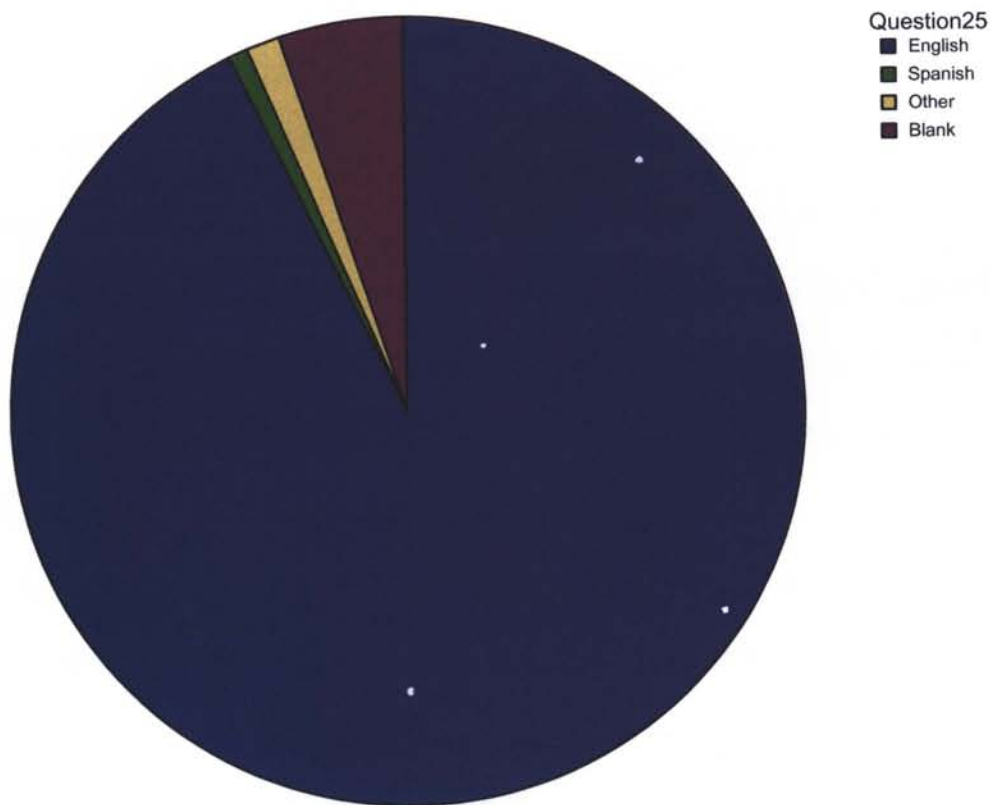
Of ERHS students with A averages, 41% answered zero to three questions correctly, 48% answered four to seven questions correctly, and 12% answered eight to ten questions correctly. Of students with B averages, 48% answered zero to three questions correctly, 30% answered four to seven questions correctly, and 6% answered eight to ten correctly. Of students at ERHS with C averages, 58.6 answered zero to three questions correctly, 31% answered four to seven questions correctly, and four percent answered eight to ten questions correctly. With D or F averages, 71.4% of students answered zero to three questions correctly, 30% answered four to seven correctly, and zero percent answered eight to ten questions correctly.

This variable does correlate with the ERHS survey. Once again Niemi's study had higher levels of political knowledge at all GPA levels while ERHS had higher percentages in the middle with many numbers being consistent. It is also important to note that all of the seniors with high political knowledge scores also have high grade point averages.

Question 25 asks students what language is spoken in the home. Similar to the race question this question will also not have any real significance as 93% of ERHS students speak English in the home. Due to Olney's rural location there is not a great deal of cultural diversity. Olney is a practically all white community with low socio-economic status overall.

Niemi's nationwide survey does have similar percentages with regard to language spoken in the home with 94% of homes with English spoken in them and the remaining 6% classified as other.

Figure 12: Students distributed by language spoken in the home.



Education

One interesting result of the survey was the question that students answered correctly the most frequently. While only 59% of ERHS students knew who the vice president was, 65% knew that the Bill of Rights consists of the first ten amendments of the United States Constitution. This could be attributed to the extensive Government classes that each student is required to take at East Richland High School in either their Junior or senior year or to the Government class they are required to take before graduating from East Richland Middle School, which is the feeder school for East Richland.

Both of these government courses require extensive study of both Illinois government, the United States government, and students must pass an Illinois Constitution test to graduate from middle school and a United States Constitution test to graduate from high school. At the high school level students are expected to memorize the Bill of Rights and all other amendments to the Constitution.

Although 65% is not even $\frac{3}{4}$ of the student body, students do not take the high school level class until their junior or senior year. This could account for some of the lower level students not knowing the answer to this question. However, I think that this question alone demonstrates that education does play a key role in the political knowledge of the students at East Richland High School.

As discussed in the literature review, education's main goal is to prepare students for adulthood. At East Richland the curriculum does not reach outside the box enough to provide our students with the knowledge they need with

regard to the social sciences and civic education. While students are retaining for the most part what is being taught budget constraints have forced the school to limit social studies class to the bare minimum. Students currently receive 2 semesters in World History, 3 semesters in US History, and 1 semester in Government. From the results of this study more focus needs to be placed on civic education by adding more elective classes. A current events class or similar elective would greatly benefit students in this area and most likely result in higher scores if students were given this quiz again after a class like that.

Dawson and Prewitt examined education through two lenses. The first focused on formal a curriculum, which in the course of this study falls under the heading of education. The other will be discussed more thoroughly in the section of the paper that addresses the extra curricular influence. They saw the formal classroom setting as where a majority of a student's political learning takes place. If students are not being provided the classes needed and teachers are not conveying needed information from which students should begin their political learning it is no wonder why a political knowledge survey such as this one has such devastating results.⁴⁶

More work obviously needs to be done throughout the East Richland School district to determine what needs to be done to instill the values of good citizenship that Dawson and Prewitt feel the formal classroom setting should include since it obviously is not currently being done.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Dawson and Prewitt pg. 109

⁴⁷ Dawson and Prewitt pg. 110

Langton did not find the school curriculum itself to play any role in a student's political socialization. From the survey of ERHS and its results as well as the author's knowledge in this area due to an undergraduate degree in education and two years of teaching experience, this assumption seems bogus. While the student's political orientation may not be directly linked their socialization and knowledge must have at least some linkage to formal education.

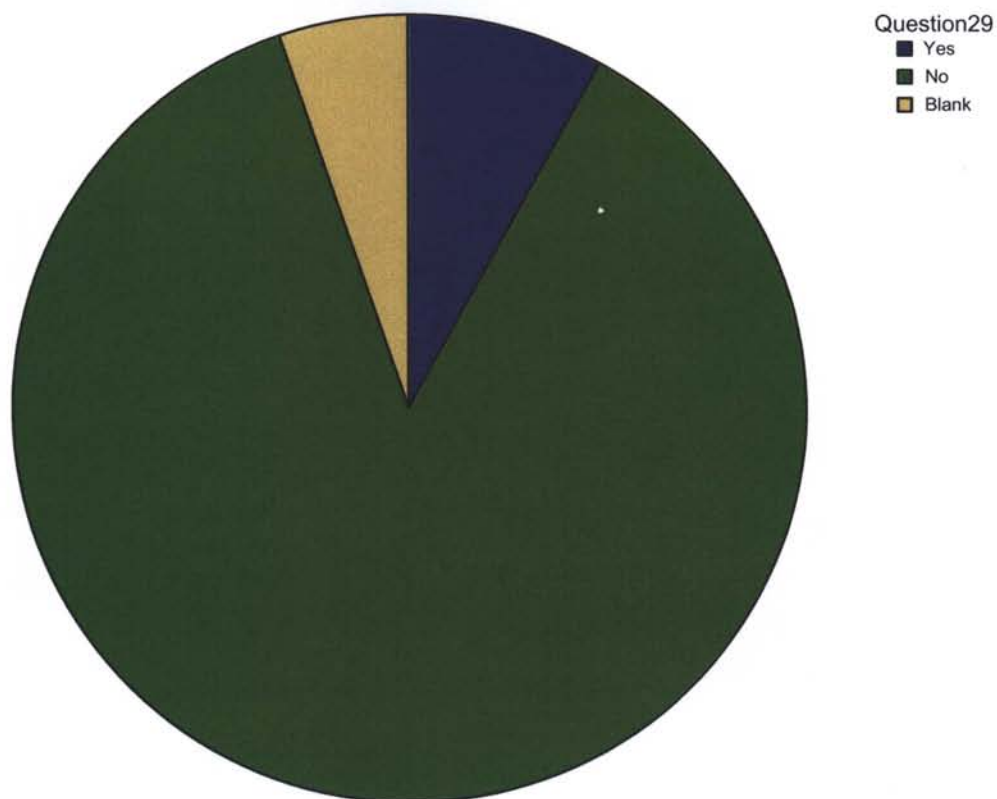
Other Factors

Extra Curricula

Jennings and Niemi show in their research, as cited in the literature review that involvement in extra curricular activities has been shown to play a role in the socialization of young people. Questions 29, 30, and 31 of the survey address this aspect of socialization.

Question 29 asks students if they are active in the schools student government.

Figure 13: Student activity within the schools student government (student council).



Only eight percent of the student body responded that they are involved with the ERHS Student Council, which is the schools' form of student government. Fifty students each year are selected by their peers to serve on the council therefore eight percent surveyed would be approximately correct. Niemi's study found 15% of students he surveyed to be involved with student government. This is obviously not a large portion of the student population, but

does their involvement with this type of student government improve their overall political knowledge?

Table 9: Political Knowledge and involvement with student council.

			Participation in Student Government	
			Yes	No
Political Knowledge Score	.00	Count	5	60
		% within Question29	12.0%	14.0%
	1.00	Count	3	61
		% within Question29	7.0%	14.0%
	2.00	Count	2	58
		% within Question29	5.0%	13.0%
	3.00	Count	6	50
		% within Question29	15.0%	11.0%
	4.00	Count	5	58
		% within Question29	12.0%	13.0%
	5.00	Count	5	53
		% within Question29	12.0%	12.0%
	6.00	Count	3	38
		% within Question29	7.0%	9.0%
	7.00	Count	3	33
		% within Question29	7.0%	7.0%
	8.00	Count	7	20
		% within Question29	17.0%	5.0%
	9.00	Count	2	11
		% within Question29	5.0%	3.0%
	10.00	Count	0	2
		% within Question29	.0%	1.0%
Total		Count	41	444
		% within Question29	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square: 22.54

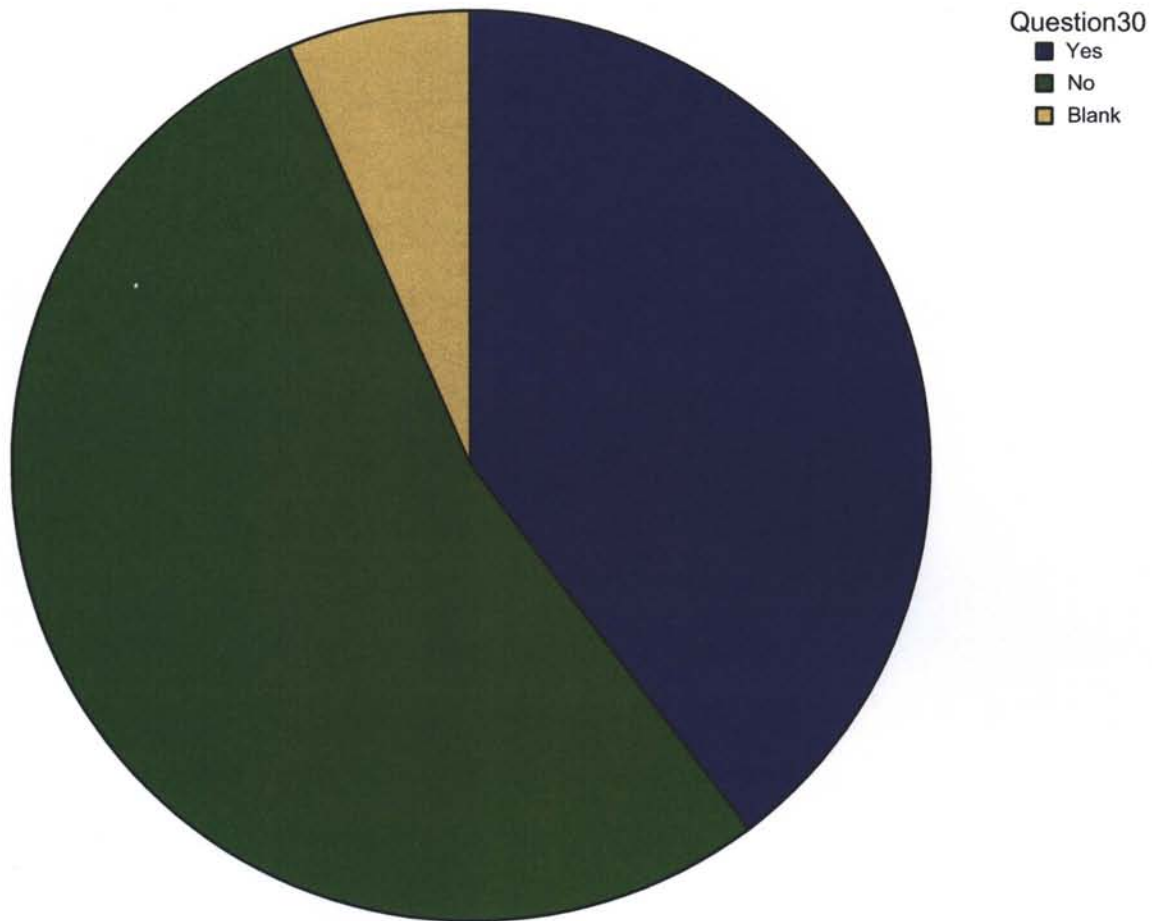
Significance: .31

A very small percentage of the student body at ERHS is active in student council therefore on the above graph the focus is on how the students who are active in student government scored on the political knowledge portion of the survey. Overall scores are distributed throughout with zero percent of students scoring 10 and 18% of students scoring an 8. Overall the scores are fairly evenly

distributed and do not support the hypothesis that student government increases student's political knowledge and socialization processes.

Question 30 addresses if students participate in community service.

Figure 14: Students who participate in community service.



Forty percent of the ERHS student body that was surveyed participates in some type of community service activity. Langton's previous research states that community service usually leads to increased political socialization and knowledge, as cited in the literature review. Niemi's study had an even

distribution of community service activity with 50% of students participating and 50% of students not participating.

Table 10: Overall political knowledge and participation in community service.

			Student Participation in Community Service	
			Yes	No
Political Knowledge Score	.00	Count	19	42
		% within Question30	9.0%	15.0%
1.00		Count	25	39
		% within Question30	12.0%	14.0%
2.00		Count	22	37
		% within Question30	11.0%	13.0%
3.00		Count	23	32
		% within Question30	11.0%	12.0%
4.00		Count	28	35
		% within Question30	14.0%	13.0%
5.00		Count	26	31
		% within Question30	13.0%	11.0%
6.00		Count	22	19
		% within Question30	11.0%	7.0%
7.00		Count	14	22
		% within Question30	7.0%	8.0%
8.00		Count	16	12
		% within Question30	8.0%	4.0%
9.00		Count	7	6
		% within Question30	3.0%	2.0%
10.00		Count	1	1
		% within Question30	1.0%	1.0%
Total		Count	203	276
		% within Question30	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square: 21.81

Significance: .35

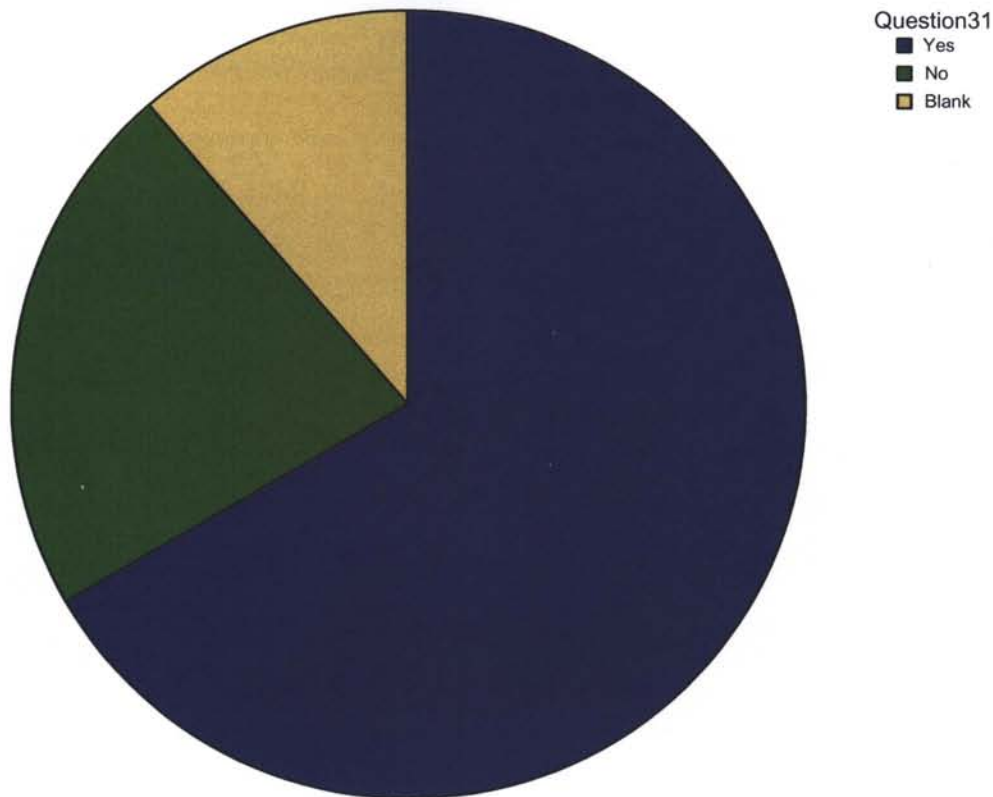
Of the students surveyed, 40% said that they do indeed participate in community service, while 54% students said that they do not. The other six percent of students at ERHS left this question blank. It would be assumed due to various socialization factors that students who participate in community service

would have higher scores on the political knowledge portion of the survey but at ERHS this was found to be insignificant. In students scoring over five on the political knowledge survey were 42% of students who do participate in community service and 33% of students who do not. For students scoring lower than five on the survey 58% do participate in community service and 67% do not. Students who do participate in community service did have slightly higher scores overall. Niemi's study found similar results for the nation with community service participates with the highest scores on the political knowledge questions presented.

Is it the fact that students participate in community service that makes their political knowledge score higher or is this attributed to other factors such as GPA or parental involvement? Students who participate in community service tend to do well in school, have a great deal of parental support, and overall be considered excellent role models. Therefore it is not possible to say that only the act of community service influenced their political knowledge but rather a combination of factors that led them to perform community service in the first place increases their knowledge.

Question 31 examines student involvement in activities both inside and outside of the school community.

Figure 15: Student involvement in organized group activities both inside and outside of school.



Sixty-seven percent of the student body surveyed responded that they belong to some type of organized group. Any student who participates in any club, team, group, or organization on any level would respond yes to this question. Niemi's study found that 81% of students he surveyed were involved in some type of activity and 23% were involved in none. Because Niemi's study was nationwide it could be argued that he has a higher percentage of participation because in more urban areas there are a greater number of organizations and activities for students to belong to. Olney, being a very rural community has a limited number of opportunities available to its young people.

Most researchers, such as Niemi, argue that participation in organized groups leads to higher political knowledge.

Table 11: Overall political knowledge and involvement inside or outside of school in groups, organizations, or clubs.

			Participation in any type of organization or activity - inside or	
			Yes	No
Political Knowledge Score	.00	Count	37	17
		% within Question31	11.0%	15.0%
	1.00	Count	41	20
		% within Question31	12.0%	18.0%
	2.00	Count	43	16
		% within Question31	13.0%	14.0%
	3.00	Count	43	9
		% within Question31	13.0%	8.0%
	4.00	Count	42	16
		% within Question31	12.0%	14.0%
	5.00	Count	44	13
		% within Question31	13.0%	12.0%
	6.00	Count	29	11
	% within Question31	9.0%	9.0%	
7.00	Count	25	8	
	% within Question31	7.0%	7.0%	
8.00	Count	25	1	
	% within Question31	7.0%	1.0%	
9.00	Count	10	2	
	% within Question31	3.0%	2.0%	
10.00	Count	2	0	
	% within Question31	1.0%	.0%	
Total	Count	341	113	
	% within Question31	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-Square: 30.26

Significance: .07

There is a marginally significant increase in political knowledge by students who are active inside and outside of school in clubs, groups, or organizations. This question dealt with any kind of club or activity at the high

school including sports and clubs and outside of school could have been anything the students defined for themselves such as church, individually formed club, etc. Overall students who were involved with some type of activity inside or outside of school were more knowledgeable politically.

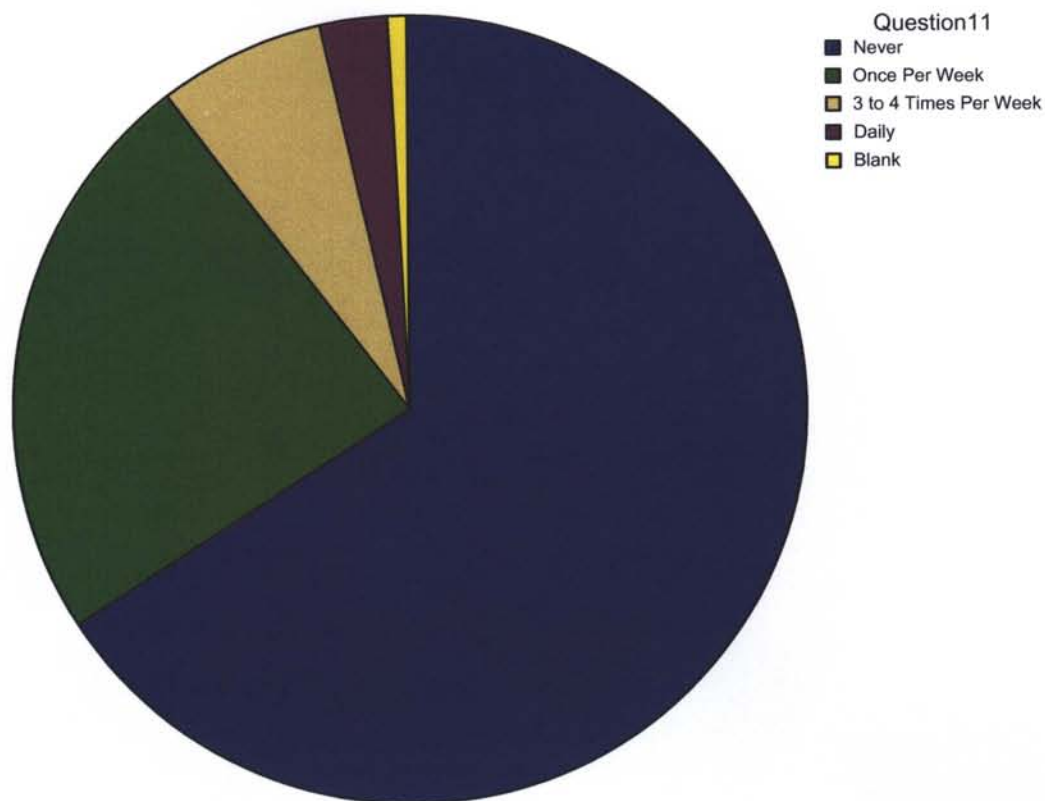
Of students scoring five or higher on the political knowledge survey were 40% of students who said that they do participate in some type of organization and 35% of students who do not participate in organizations. Of students scoring five or less on the survey were 60% of students who participate in organizations and 69% of students who do not participate.

Niemi's survey found that participation in some type of activity, inside or outside of school did significantly increase political knowledge. It is interesting to note that he also had controls for the number of organizations a student was involved in and found that the more organizations they were a member of their political knowledge increased respectively.

Media

Questions 13 and 14 deal with parents and the media and will be addressed in specifically in the parent's section. Questions 11 and 12 examine media at the individual student level. Question 11 specifically asks how often students read about national political issues in a newspaper or news magazine.

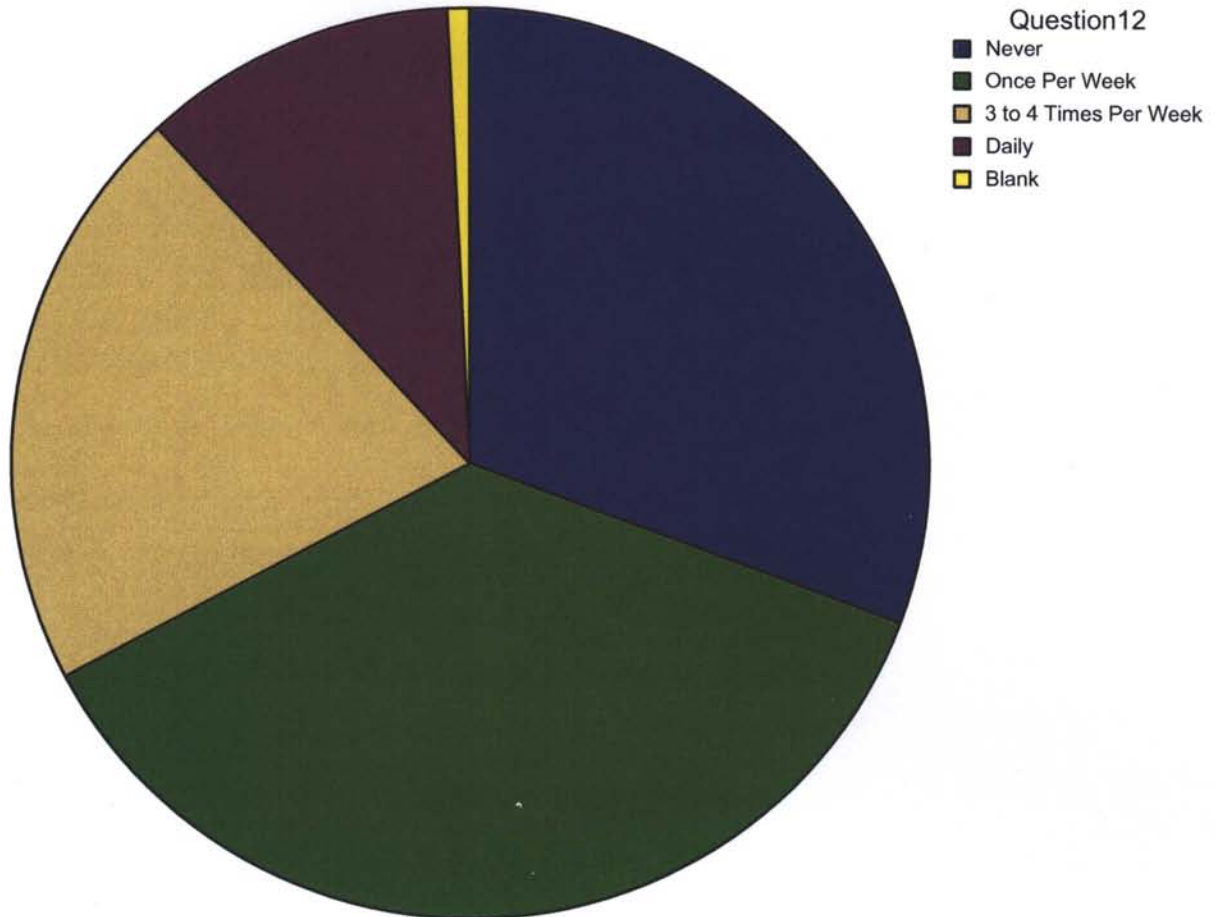
Figure 16: How often students read about national political issues in a newspaper or news magazine.



Sixty-five percent of students responded that they never read about national political issues in a newspaper or news magazine while 24% responded once per week, seven percent responded three to four times per week and three percent responded daily. Niemi's national study found that 40.2% of students never reading the national news, 18.8% read about the news at least once a month, 30% at least once a week, and 11% almost everyday.⁴⁸ ERHS students do not read about the news as much as students on the national level do.

⁴⁸ Niemi. Pg. 17.

Figure 17: How often students watch the national news on television or listen to it on the radio.



According to Niemi's national survey, student's watch/listen to the news a great deal more nationally than they do at ERHS. Niemi's survey shows 39.6% of students watching the news everyday, 31.9% at least once per week, 11.7% at least once a week, and 16.8% hardly ever.⁴⁹ The ERHS survey shows 31% of students never watch or listen to the news, 37% once per week, 21% three to four times per week, and 11% daily.

Overall, Niemi's survey and the ERHS survey were very compatible. Overall Niemi's survey showed higher levels of political knowledge across the spectrum with ERHS's levels of political knowledge ranging more in the middle no matter what variable was being discussed. This concludes the overall findings of the survey presented.

⁴⁹ Niemi. Pg. 17.

Chapter 5: Discussion

To examine the political knowledge level of ERHS, student's overall political knowledge score was analyzed, along with parent's political party identification, grade level, gender, GPA, involvement in student council, involvement with community service, and participation in groups. With regard to seven specific variables it was found that the students do not have a great interest in political or current events and three of these variables proved to be significant, and one marginally significant.

The variables for defined parental party affiliation, grade level, and grade point average were found to be significant. The variables for gender, involvement in student council, and involvement in community service were found to be insignificant, while the variable for group involvement in both in-school and out-of-school activities was found to be marginally significant. These findings will now be applied to the specific hypotheses of the paper.

Hypothesis One- Students simply do not care about political factors.

The first hypothesis is that students lack political efficacy. Many teachers, parents, and others feel that teenagers simply do not care what goes on outside of their own personal spectrum. It is important to examine why teens are not politically aware while looking at ways that teachers, parents, and others can enhance the efficacy of future generations through greater socialization.

To test this hypothesis research was completed to survey students overall political knowledge (Figures 1 and 2). Overall the student body's political

knowledge at ERHS was low with only .4% of students answering all 10 questions correctly.

This lack of knowledge could be due to a variety of factors. Is it because of parent's lack of education? Could it be lack of teaching curriculum? Or possibly lack of peer interaction? What is the cause of this efficacy? The following hypothesis will delve deeper into these questions.

Hypothesis Two - As student's progress through school their political knowledge increases.

The second hypothesis is that a student's civic development increases as they progress through the grade levels at school in rural areas. This was tested in Table 5, which controlled for grade level in school. This variable was found to be statistically significant. This means that students in their senior year of high school are more knowledgeable politically than their younger peers due not only to their education in the area but also due to other socialization factors such as family and peers. This hypothesis predicts that the school system has a significant impact on student's political knowledge and their amount of political participation. The main issue addressed here is if teachers are doing their job to educate students regarding political issues and the impact that they have on their lives. While examining this hypothesis, it is important to discuss the reasons why student's political knowledge is limited, at all grade levels, and what can be done to ensure that their political knowledge will be high in the future.

Langton states that political knowledge increases throughout high school. He, however, attributes this to peer interactions or involvement in activities and clubs within the school rather than the school curriculum.

At ERHS, it was found that student's political knowledge did increase overall by grade level but did not find Langton's theory of peer interaction to be the cause. Although students who participate in school activities did have higher grade point averages overall the individual group involvement was only marginally significant as shown in Table 10 and involvement in both student council and through community service were both found to be insignificant with regard to political knowledge.

Therefore it is argued that it is the actual school curriculum, which results in student's political knowledge increasing as they progress through the grade levels at school. What students remember in the short term could also play a role. For example, senior or 12th grade students had the highest political knowledge scores but government is a required class at the senior level. Since the information would be fresher in the minds of these students it could be said that this is due to short-term memory. It should also be noted though that political knowledge did increase with each grade level and therefore senior's higher knowledge level cannot be totally based on the government curriculum but rather the overall social science curriculum that students take throughout their years at ERHS.

Although the study of ERHS did not agree totally with Langton's theory's it is possible that peer interactions, through group involvement, do play at least some role in political knowledge as this was found to be marginally significant.

Students who responded that they are involved in some type of extra curricular activity, either inside or outside of school (question 31) did have a higher mean score on the political knowledge portion of the survey than students who are not involved by a marginally significant proportion. These students were also found to have a higher GPA as well. While neither student government nor community service has an impact on knowledge, there may well be a weak relationship to participation in general. People who participate in any activity may be marginally more likely to acquire some political knowledge.

While peer interaction does play an important role in political knowledge and overall political socialization school curriculum must also be given some credit due to the fact that as students progressed through the grade levels at ERHS their levels of political knowledge increased. Through this analysis it is thought that both curriculum and interaction with peers are needed to maximize student's political socialization.

Hypothesis Three- Students tend to be of the same political party as their parents, especially if political topics are frequently discussed in the home.

The third hypothesis is that students tend to associate with the same political party as their parents, especially if political topics are frequently discussed in the home. One recurring finding in the literature studied is that

parents are a key factor in any adolescent's environment and that how parents were socialized politically and their own political beliefs most likely greatly influence many teenagers' views.

This hypothesis was studied by crosstabulating student's political affiliation with parent's political affiliation in Table 4. This table finds that a significant number of students affiliate themselves with the same party to which their parents belong. Sixty-one percent of students who classified their parents as Republican also classified themselves as Republican. Forty-nine percent of students who classified their parents as Democrat also classified themselves in that category. The most astonishing number is that 84% of students who classified their parents as unknown also classified themselves as unknown. This finding validates the hypothesis that students do tend to follow in the footsteps of their parents and the first part of the hypothesis is validated.

The unknown group could play a large role in the reason why ERHS student's political knowledge is so low. If 72% of students do not know their parents political affiliation and therefore do not classify themselves it becomes obvious that political issues are not valued in the home and thus not focused upon in ways where students would learn about them in the home.

The second aspect of the hypothesis did not prove to be statistically significant. Parent's education did not play a role in how much they discussed the news with their children. One such cause could be the fact that parents do not have or make the time to watch or discuss news and events with their children. It is interesting to note though that the more education parents had the

more likely their students were to pay attention to the news and also, parents' with a defined political party tended to have students who were more politically knowledgeable no matter what party they affiliate themselves with. From this it can be concluded that parents obviously play a large role in the political socialization and political knowledge of their children.

Hypothesis Four- Students are more likely to watch or listen to the news if their parents have achieved higher amounts of education.

The fourth hypothesis is that students will be more aware of the world around them (through media based factors) as their parents have more education. This research examines student's habits for watching, listening, and discussion of the news and then correlates that with their civic development. Figure 4 examines the number of times per week students watch or listen to the news with their parents or other household adults. Figure 5 examines the number of times per week students discuss news with their parents or other household adults and Figure 3 looks at parental education levels.

Crosstabulating parental education and students tested this hypothesis. Students are exposed to different types of media all the time and one would originally think that this exposure would have little or nothing to do with parental education. This survey addressed specific types of media such as the news which attention to would obviously increase a student's knowledge of politics and current events.

In Hyman's study of the media he found that it the media played a significant role in socialization because in moments the entire world can become

aware of an event. What Hyman fails to mention is the fact that a person would have to be aware or paying attention to a certain type of media to become aware of this situation. For example, one high school social science teacher at ERHS asked her students about the Tsunami that occurred over Christmas Break in 2004 in January of 2005. When students were asked if they had heard about the Tsunami in early January only 1 student in a class of 30 raised her hand. During that time period the Tsunami was highly covered in all types of media ranging from internet, print, radio, and television sources and out of a group of 30 students only one student heard about the Tsunami nearly 2 weeks later. This obviously shows that even if students are exposed to media they are not exposed to the types of media that discuss news, politics, or major world events.

Dawson and Prewitt's study discusses the media factors of socialization that concurs more with this study of ERHS. They find that media can be overrated and that it only truly affects modern society since third-world countries do not have access to the types of media that we are accustomed to. Overall this survey finds that people have to care and be aware before the media can be a factor. This is where the parental aspect of this hypothesis comes in. It was found that in the ERHS student body that the higher the amount of education student's parents had the more likely they were to watch or listen to the news therefore increasing their total socialization and political knowledge.

If the parent(s) do not care about world events or the news the students are drastically less likely to be interested and this overall can play a vital role in the amount of political knowledge students have.

Hypothesis Five- Students who are more socially active in clubs and organizations will prove to be more knowledgeable politically. The fifth and final hypothesis is that students who are more socially active in clubs and organizations will prove to be more knowledgeable politically. This includes determining what role group and community involvement in organization plays in overall socialization and civic participation.

This hypothesis links back to hypothesis two that looks at student's political efficacy. The more that a student cares about a group, organization or club one would think the more likely they would be to care about something else outside their spectrum of self. This survey found that at ERHS students who were involved in student council or community service were not more likely to have a higher amount of political knowledge and that students who were involved in some type of group in general (question 31) were only marginally more likely to have a higher level of political knowledge. This finding disproved the original hypothesis.

As the literature states, Hyman felt that holding both opportunity and intellectual capacity to absorb knowledge equal that it was reasonable to regard the different levels of political knowledge would be due to differing degrees of involvement. In the ERHS study this is not the case and involvement really plays a much smaller role than one might think.

This can be attributed to the fact the students are more social and due to more interaction with peers or adults. Dawson and Prewitt feel that most political socialization in the school is in fact due to interaction with peers and not the

school curriculum itself. The fact that many students are not involved in organizations could affect overall political knowledge rates. Students are more likely to be found in front of a computer, television, or video game on a warm summer afternoon than out playing with friends. Usually these students are not watching C-Span either, they are watching, playing, and doing mindless activities that do not usually increase their knowledge in any area.

More research needs to be completed at different levels to determine if ERHS is the norm for this hypothesis. Many school districts are currently changing their curriculum to implement more community service and organization based activities with the hope of not only increasing student's political knowledge and knowledge in general but also to increase their compassion quotient. Will this idea backfire and make students even less likely to care about their fellow human beings and even less likely to care about voting? Only more research will answer this question.

From this study several factors are examined that point to the fact that it is truly a combination of factors that lead to the political socialization of high school students and leads to their overall political knowledge. Both parents and school curriculum were found to play an important role in this socialization process. Increased parental education and parents with defined political parties both proved to be significant. School curriculum was also found to play a significant role in socialization while group involvement was only found to be marginally significant. More research needs to be done in this area in an attempt to provide

the best environment for political socialization to all students in both rural and urban areas.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This paper assesses political weaknesses and strengths of students at ERHS. There are possible solutions to increase the political efficacy of student's at ERHS and throughout the nation. Until this year (2005) freshman and sophomore level students in the state of Illinois were tested each spring in the Social Science field through TAP testing or the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency. This testing was cut due to funding issues in the state of Illinois in 2004. This survey was completed in 2004 and thus the results of this testing for 2004 prove significant to the overall conclusion of the paper.

Both levels of students are tested in four areas of the social sciences, geography, economics, political science, and sociology/anthropology/psychology. Types of questions include concepts such as being able to identify the roles of the president, defining a sovereign state, citing powers of Congress, etc, under the political science portion of the test. On the 2004 test there were 17 political science questions. Students at ERHS averaged a score of 51% on these tests while the nationwide average was 46%.⁵⁰

Comparing this limited testing data along with Niemi's findings to the overall survey of ERHS tends to find that ERHS is a typical American high school with political knowledge scores slightly lower than those found in Niemi's nationwide study. The ERHS study most likely varies from Niemi's for several reasons including survey size as well as location and socio-economic status of students surveyed.

⁵⁰ School references. Tests of Achievement and Proficiency. ERHS 2004. Riverside Publishing.

Although the findings at ERHS were not particularly promising most students are leaving high school with some degree of political knowledge and socialization. The most troubling aspect of this research is that previous research, like Niemi's, has found similar trends and nothing substantial is being implemented to increase the political socialization or knowledge of our young people.

In a spring 2005 interview with ERHS principal, Mr. Chris Simpson, the lack of political socialization and political knowledge at ERHS was discussed. As principal, Mr. Simpson did not find this information to be surprising or alarming. He cited his own personal high school experience and stated that he did not care about the "political spectrum" until he was at least 30 years old. Unfortunately, except for political science scholars, even educated individuals in our society do not see the dire need for better and more advanced political science education in our schools. Political Science education should not only teach the basics, such as what the Bill of Rights and the Constitution is but also inform students of their fundamental rights and the phenomenal opportunities that they have to influence their government.

On June 1, 2005 the Illinois General Assembly passed yet another law that will limit students in the state of Illinois with regards to political socialization. Requirements in English, Math and Science were increased for graduation from high school. English was moved from three to four credits, Math and Science were both increased from two to three credits. This will mean less time and

money will be devoted to the social sciences which tend to be under appreciated and considered 'soft'.

Researching all of this information it becomes apparent that more research needs to be done, not in just determining that students are not highly political knowledgeable or socialized but in what types of classes, techniques, and ideas should be implemented to increase this knowledge in our young people. Students should be able to gain the knowledge they need make the important decisions in their future. More research is needed to develop social science curriculum into something more than a soft science that coaches teach during their off hours.

The overall findings of this survey at ERHS show that there are still great strides that need to occur to improve students overall political knowledge and their exposure to current events. Some possibilities for this could include a high school current events class requirement. Having a mandatory current events class could at least expose students to the world around them on a new level then what most of them are receiving in the home.

Surprisingly, one option that many schools are taking did not prove to be significant in the ERHS findings. Many schools are implementing mandatory hours of community service for graduation and some even require students to participate in two extra-curricular activities throughout their high school career. It is thought that these activities will increase the socialization effects that students receive from working to better the community and communicating with their peers. Because this factor was not found to be significant at ERHS, one could

conclude that factors such as community service and participation in organizations to do not play the role that many expect them to and instead this increase in socialization that people see could actually be linked to other factors such as family and peers. When an activity such as community service is forced upon young people it can sometimes backfire resulting in a negative effect. Schools could benefit students by offering incentives for students who participate in these types of activities (such as more scholarships) but not by mandating them.

It was, however, found that a stronger school curriculum is needed to increase political knowledge and socialization levels, as relationships between increasing political knowledge and a more advanced grade level in school were found to be significant. The more society is able to convey in these students an interest in current events the easier it will be for future generations due to the many parental factors discussed.

Overall, there are many options that would increase political knowledge and socialization in our high schools but they would all require time and money that currently is not available. Therefore, each parent, teacher, or other influential person in a student's life must do whatever is in their power now to increase this knowledge and more work must be completed to inform others of the importance that political socialization plays in our democracy.

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Appendix**Political Knowledge Survey**

Please fill out this survey to the best of your ability. Mrs. Weitzl is working on her thesis at Eastern Illinois University and she is attempting to assess the political knowledge of the ERHS student body. It is important that you take your time and answer the questions appropriately. If you do not wish to take the survey at all simply return it to your teacher.

1. What job or political office is held by Dick Cheney?

2. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional?

3. Which party has the most members in the House of Representatives?

4. What majority is needed to override a presidential veto in both the Senate and the House of Representatives? _____
5. Which party is more conservative at the national level?

6. What position does Dennis Hastert hold? _____
7. Whose job is it to nominate judges to the federal courts?

8. Which party has the most members in the Senate?

9. What are the first ten amendments to the Constitution called?

10. Which of the two parties favors a larger defense budget?

11. How often do you read about national political issues in a newspaper or news magazine?
 Never
 Once per week
 3/4 Times/Week
 Daily

12. How often do you watch the national news on television or listen to it on the radio?

- Never
- Once per week
- 3/4 Times/Week
- Daily

13. How often do you watch or listen to the news with your parents?

- Never
- Once per week
- 3/4 Times/Week
- Daily

14. How often do you discuss the news with your parents or other household adults?

- Never
- Once per week
- 3/4 Times/Week
- Daily

15. Do you feel you could write a letter to someone in the government to express a clear opinion?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

16. Do you feel you could make a statement at a public meeting?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

17. Do you feel that politics and government are too confusing to understand?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

18. Do you think your family has a say in what the federal government does?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

19. Should people be allowed to make public speeches against churches and religion?

- Yes

- Unsure
- No

20. Should a book that most people disapprove of be kept out of a public library?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

21. Grade in school

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

22. Gender

- Female
- Male

23. Race

- White/Caucasian
- Hispanic
- African-American
- Other _____

24. Approximate Grade Point Average

- 5.0-4.5
- 4.49-4.0
- 3.99-3.5
- 3.49-3.0
- 2.99-2.5
- Lower than 2.5

25. Language spoken at home

- English
- Spanish
- Other _____

26. Parents highest level of schooling completed

- High School
- Some college
- College Graduate
- Post-Graduate

27. What is your parent's political party affiliation?

- Republican

- Democrat
- Independent
- Other _____
- Unknown

28. What is your personal political party affiliation?

- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- Other _____
- Unknown

29. Are you active in Student Council/Student Government at school?

- Yes
- No

30. Do you participate in community service?

- Yes
- No

Check all that you are involved with.

- Big/Brothers/Big Sisters
- Bowl for Kids Sake
- Nursing Home Visits
- Relay for Life
- Community Beautification
- Trash cleanup/Recycling
- Other(s) _____

31. Are you active inside or outside of school in any clubs, groups or organizations?

- Yes
- No

Check all that you are involved with.

- Sports
- Speech Club
- Newspaper
- Art Club
- FFA
- History Club
- Investment Club
- National Honors
- SAE
- YAC
- Band
- Scholastic Bowl
- Math Team

- Chess Club
 - FCA
 - Future Problem Solving
 - JROTC
 - O Club
 - Science Club
 - T and I Club
 - Drama
 - Yearbook
 - Dance team
 - FBLA
 - FASCS
 - HOSA
 - Latin Club
 - PEP Club
 - Spanish Club
 - Other(s) _____
-
-