## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN OAKLAND HIGH SCHOOLS
EDDA Research Summary No. 1
December 3, 2014
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Educating for Democracy in the Digital Age (EDDA) is a digital civics initiative that launched in 2012 with the goal of bringing high quality classroom-based civic learning and digital media literacy learning opportunities to all Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) high school students in their classrooms. The EDDA research team based at the Civic Engagement Research Group at Mills College studies the initiative both to assess its impact and to provide feedback to the team implementing the initiative. The brief that follows focuses on the kinds of civic learning opportunities available to OUSD prior to the launch of the EDDA initiative in 2012 and the subsequent impact of the initiative on civic learning and engagement.

### CIVIC LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES PRIOR TO EDDA
✦ **Students learn about the political system, but not how to affect it through civic and political engagement.**

In 2012 the EDDA research team began administering an annual district-wide survey to OUSD seniors that asked students to report whether they had a range of civic learning and engagement opportunities, and digital literacy learning opportunities during their high school years. Year 1 of the survey surveyed students who had not been in EDDA classrooms. Data from Year 1 of the survey, therefore, provides a portrait of civic learning prior to the launch of the EDDA initiative. At this time most civic learning focused on the structure and function of government. 75% of students reported learning about government. While just 43% of students reported presenting on a social issue to

**Civic Learning & Seniors 2012**

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|---|---|---|
| Learn about structure & function of government | Learn how to become involved in politics | Present to others on social issue |
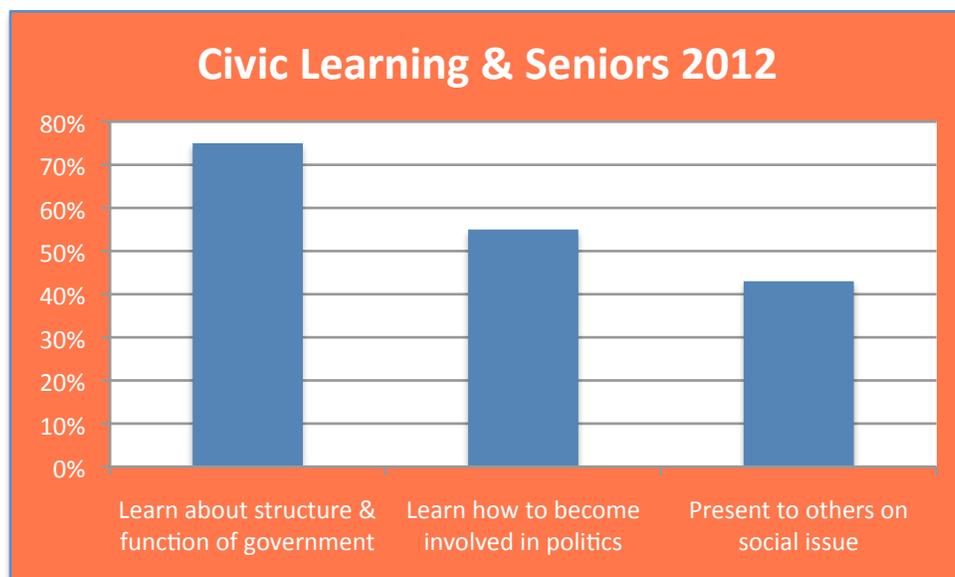
Source: Senior Survey 2014
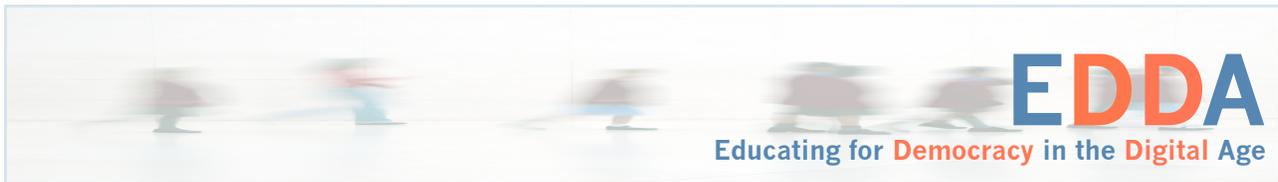
someone outside of their class, one model of civic engagement we describe below as *Raising Awareness*. Over the course of the two years of the initiative we have seen a gradual expansion of opportunities for civic engagement emerge.

## DEFINING THE KEY COMPONENTS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In Year 2 the EDDA initiative developed a civic engagement framework that defined three components of civic engagement - issue analysis, action, and reflection. This framework was integrated into OUSD's graduate profile adding the goal of *community readiness* to existing goals of college and career readiness. One objective of the framework was to support EDDA teachers to integrate thoughtful, informed and effective civic engagement into their EDDA work.

### ISSUE ANALYSIS

✦ **Students who have more opportunities to do issue analysis report a greater interest in social problems.**
✦ **Students in EDDA classrooms had more opportunities to do certain kinds of issue analysis than students in non-EDDA classrooms.**

Issue analysis includes opportunities to discuss current events, have discussions of controversial social issues, and to do research (online and off) of social and political issues. These opportunities potentially increase interest and thoughtful engagement in civic and political issues, an important foundation for civic engagement.

Data from the 2012 Senior Survey examined the relationship between opportunities to do issue analysis and students' attention to social issues that affect the nation or world. The data showed that when OUSD students reported having **few** opportunities to do issue analysis only **18.4%** of students reported thinking about social problems in the nation or world "**quite often.**"  When students reported having **many** opportunities to do issue analysis that percentage jumped to **42.6%.**

### EDDA's Impact

We saw a significant difference in opportunities for issue analysis between EDDA and non-EDDA students:

✦ **30% of EDDA students reported discussing issues where students have strong disagreements compared to 23% of students in non-EDDA classrooms;**
✦ **35% of EDDA students reported sharing perspectives on current events compared to 22% of students in non-EDDA classrooms.**

Furthermore classroom observations suggest that issue analysis in EDDA classrooms is deepening. Two groups of EDDA teachers integrated issue analysis into their EDDA work through a focus on academic discussion. One EDDA teacher explained her reason for focusing on analyzing issues using academic discussion strategies (Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) and role play simulation).

> As I worked with my class to explore complex issues of global inequity, I found students struggling to clearly articulate their ideas – both verbally and in writing.

Because I know them well, I had a sense of what they were trying to say but knew an external audience would be confused. Because the point of analyzing an issue within the context of civic engagement is to then be able to clearly express one's perspective on the issue in order to galvanize others to action, I thought this key starting point was important to delve into. (9th grade teacher).

A student who had participated in SAC activities with another teacher describes to their teacher the value of having to learn different perspectives on an issue and the impact it had on student learning.

I think the activity worked well, because you made us… you didn't let us pick what we wanted to pick. You made us do the opposite side so that we could see the other person's point of view. Plus I think a lot of people changed their minds when they were done with the debate.

## ENGAGEMENT

✦ **Students in EDDA classrooms were more likely to do some form of civic engagement than students in non-EDDA classrooms.**
✦ **80% of EDDA teachers integrated some form of civic engagement into their classrooms.**

2014 EDDA Senior Survey data found that seniors who had participated in EDDA-affiliated classrooms were significantly more likely to report experiences:

✦ Working with other students to solve a problem in their school or community.
✦ Presenting or sharing their opinions with someone outside their classroom.

**Student Civic Action EDDA vs. Non-EDDA Students**
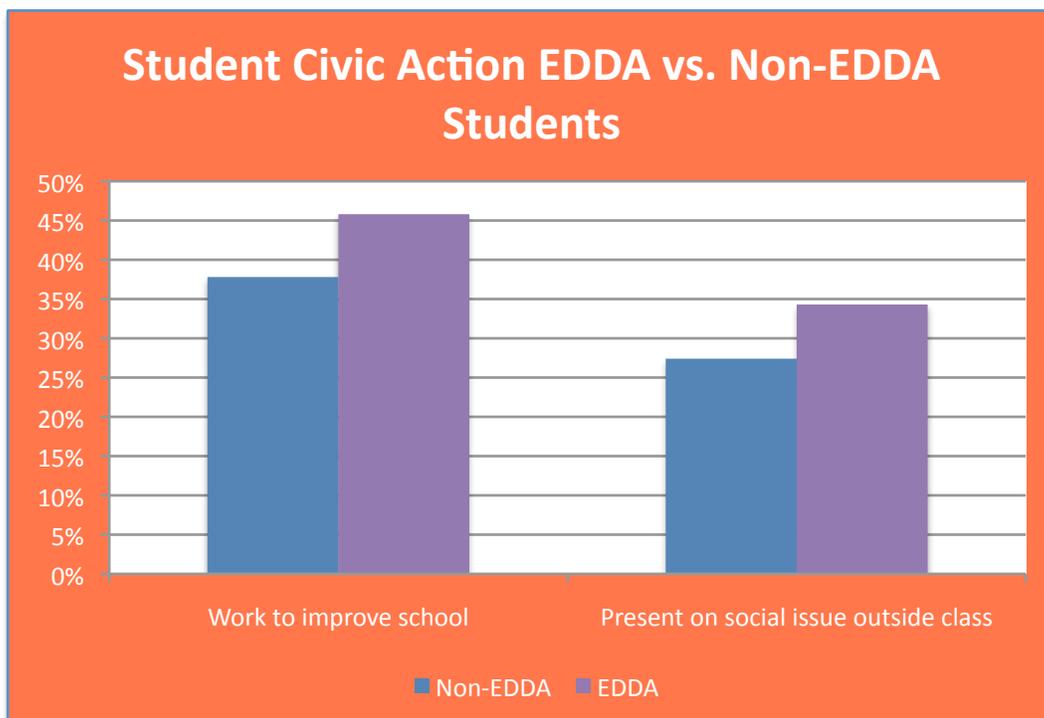


Source: Senior Survey 2014

## EDDA's Impact

Three models of civic engagement emerged in the work of EDDA teachers during Year 2 of the initiative - *Raising Awareness, Field Research, Connecting to Power Brokers*. 80% of EDDA teachers integrated one of these forms of civic engagement into their classrooms in 2013-14. Of this group about 68% created civic engagement projects around *Raising Awareness*, 30% around *Field Research* and 10% around *Connecting to Institutional Politics or Power Brokers*. Students reported learning a range of new skills from doing civic engagement projects focused on raising awareness and developing confidence. One 9th grade student reported,

> [After presenting on a social issue] I felt I got more self respect and more confidence in  myself 'cause if I could stand up there and do it by myself and like I get nervous before    presentations.  … And I stood up there and I did it for 11 minutes by myself."

A senior reported learning skills like "designing fair and accurate surveys and...working in groups to tackle these larger problems and as well as presenting information." Many of these civic engagement projects included students' presenting on social issues to audiences outside of their classes.

For some EDDA teachers research presented an opportunity for students to have a first civic foray into their communities. One teacher mentioned that she wanted her students to have more of a connection to their communities through their field research. Another wanted students to understand that solutions to and decisions about social problems "had to come from their communities." One student describing her experience of doing field research believed that her research raised awareness about global warming. "I think that I helped people, like giving out the surveys, like helping them realize that global warming is happening and [they] need to like help with the problem."

While relatively fewer teachers engaged students in projects that focused on interacting with power brokers, those who did found the exercise to be worthwhile. One teacher's project included requiring the class to do research and then travel to Sacramento to meet with legislators about the issue. She reflected: "I think they learned that they can ask for an audience from their legislators. And I think they learned that a lot of things are more public than ... they realized; that they could get their hands on lots of documents; they could talk to people in the government." One of her students described a new sense of agency around engaging in institutional politics: "Before we went to the visit we did tons of research on [a joint topic]…. Then when we went up to Sacramento for the state assembly we actually like had input and knew what they was talking about instead of going there and having no idea." Civic engagement is a major focus of Year 3 of the initiative and the research team will continue to examine factors that enable civic engagement.

## REFLECTION
✦ **Students in EDDA classrooms were more likely to engage in reflection about their civic engagement than students in non-EDDA classrooms.**

The EDDA initiative considers reflection critical to civic identity development, understanding issues, analyzing the impact of one's civic engagement, and considering one's role as a civic actor.

## EDDA's Impact

Data from Year 3 of the Senior Survey found that students in EDDA classrooms were more likely to have opportunities to reflect on what their civic engagement accomplished, what they learned from

**Opportunities for Reflection
EDDA vs. Non-EDDA Students**
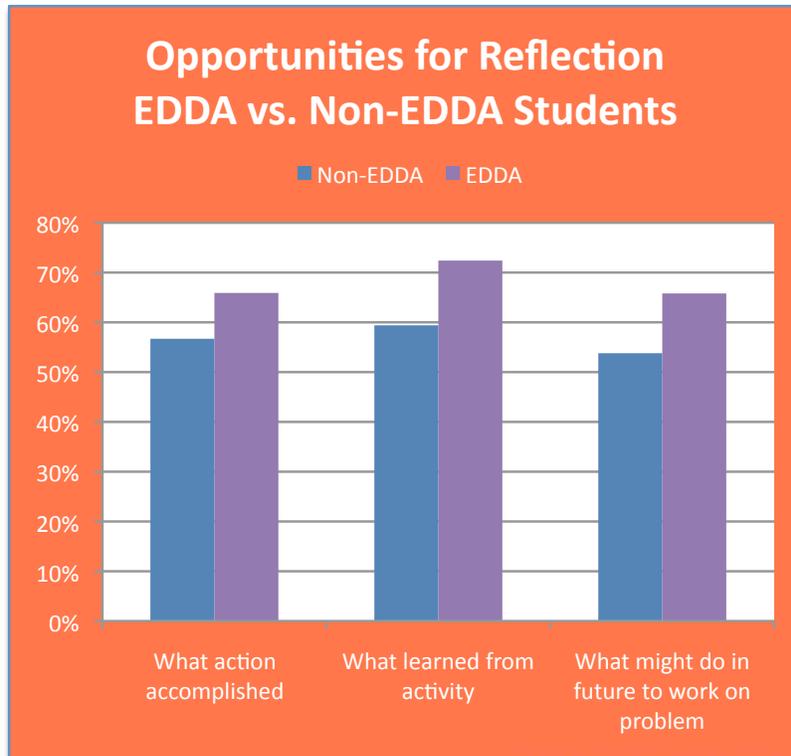
■ Non-EDDA  ■ EDDA

Source: Senior Survey 2014

the civic activity and what they might do in the future to work on a social problem than students in non-EDDA classrooms. EDDA teachers integrated reflection into their civic engagement projects in various ways - process journals, breaks in the activity to reflect, using revision as a reflection tool, and student interviews. One teacher who had asked her students to write reflection papers about their experience working on political campaigns noted that she thought it was a good thing to do and that the students really liked writing those papers. It gave "them the freedom to...put their own feelings into their own experience."

## APPENDIX

### Methods and Response Rate

We measure the impact of the initiative in this brief using the EDDA Senior Survey to compare students in EDDA classrooms with students in non-EDDA classrooms. This means we focus on the experiences of OUSD seniors. The EDDA initiative works with teachers in 9th - 12th grade and is currently implementing school-wide site plans that vertically build civic engagement into the experiences of students beginning in 9th grade. We expect the see the full impact of the initiative reflected in data from subsequent Senior Surveys.