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Public Achievement 2005-2006 Evaluation Brief

This brief presents selected findings from the final RMC Research evaluation report, based on data collected during the 2005-2006 school year.

Public Achievement

Public Achievement is a youth civic education initiative intended to help students learn the habits, skills, and commitments of citizenship necessary to be lifelong contributors to their communities. Sponsored by the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, the specific goals of Public Achievement are to help youth develop the desire, insights, and talents to address society's problems and improve the world. Students learn basic methods for taking public action and develop a conceptual framework for learning by doing. During the 2005-2006 school year, Public Achievement programs served 800 K-12 students at 40 sites throughout the United States.

In 2004, the Humphrey Institute contracted with RMC Research Corporation to conduct a 2-year evaluation of its programs in Minneapolis/St. Paul and Mankato, Minnesota, and northwest Missouri. In 2005-2006, data were collected from 556 students, 55 Public Achievement coaches, 8 principals, and 12 site coordinators and were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Selected Findings

Public Achievement programs were found to have the following positive impacts:

You see the potential in yourself to accomplish something and it encourages you to go help out in the world and in your community.
– Student

- **Participation in Public Achievement gave students wider perspectives on the world and better skills in working with others.** Involvement in Public Achievement provided students with opportunities to work with others at their schools, gave the students better ways to justify their opinions with evidence, and helped them to work better with others by listening to differing opinions, balancing their needs with those of others to complete projects, and see how their actions impacted others in their communities.
- **Elementary school students who had sustained participation in Public Achievement were more likely than their peers to acquire civic skills and to believe that young people can make a difference in the world.** Surveys given before and after program participation showed that sustained involvement in Public Achievement was associated with strong increases on measures of civic dispositions, civic skills, and civic engagement outcomes.

- **Public Achievement students in Grades 4 and 5 gained valuable teamwork skills.** The Public Achievement students' ratings on the item, "I am good at working with other students in my class," increased from fall 2005 to spring 2006 whereas comparison students' ratings decreased.

Public Achievement helps you learn about your community and, in a way, about yourself. You learn how you can help people and figure out a way for your voice to be heard.

– Student

- **Middle school students who participated in Public Achievement gained multiple civic skills and were more likely to take responsibility for helping their schools become positive learning environments.**

Students in Grades 6-8 who were actively engaged in project implementation within Public Achievement gained more civic skills, took on greater civic responsibilities,

developed a greater sense of their schools as communities than those students who did not participate or those who were not as actively engaged in Public Achievement.

- **High school students who reported a high level of interest in their Public Achievement projects acquired multiple communication skills, including oral persuasion, and listening skills.** Students in Grades 9-12 reported that they "often" stated their opinion in a discussion and gave reasons for their opinion, listened to others even if they disagreed with them, and planned or organized a project.

- **Public Achievement coaches indicated that students at all grade levels benefited from the program.** Coaches reported that students developed teamwork and problem-solving skills and became more aware of issues facing their communities. They learned how to handle disappointment and reassess objectives if project goals were not met.

The students felt very happy to give their time to help address issues in their community. They found a deep sense of purpose in using their energy to help solve problems.

– Public Achievement coach

The students take pride in what they do, knowing that they are part of the whole organization and part of that particular project. This is something that is going to be good for virtually everyone.

– Principal

- **School administrators had positive perceptions of Public Achievement.** They noted that students who participated in the program were more engaged in their communities, had improved behavior, developed communication skills, became problem solvers, helped others in need, and gained self-confidence. Public Achievement brought positive recognition to their schools and helped to develop school-business-community partnerships.