

Summary of the Connecticut Consortium for Law and Citizenship Education Outcome Evaluation—Mock Trials and Great Debate Programs 2004 – 2005

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The Mock Trials and Great Debates programs sponsored by the Connecticut Consortium of Citizenship and Law Education were evaluated during the 2004-2005 academic year. Youth participants were asked to complete self-report surveys at the beginning and the end of their participation in the two programs.

The survey included questions covering participants' personal background, level of satisfaction with the program, and the specific knowledge and skills targeted by each program. Several well-established instruments also were included to assess selected youth outcomes expected to be enhanced through program participation. These outcomes included participants' social self-efficacy (self confidence); civic engagement; school performance; tolerance for the attitudes, beliefs, and rights of others; and sense of social responsibility.

Participants who completed both the pre-test and post-test surveys reported a high degree of satisfaction with both programs. The majority also reported that they acquired the knowledge and skills that had been emphasized in the programs. For instance, those who participated in the Mock Trials program reported having a better understanding of the legal system. This included understanding the roles of attorneys and witnesses, as well as the consequences of illegal behavior. Participants reported being better able to present their points of view, listen to, and accept the views of others, speak in public, organize their thoughts effectively, and work cooperatively with others. Furthermore, 61 percent stated that they might consider a career in the legal profession.

Youth involved in Debate Programs reported being better able to research information that supports their arguments, express their opinions clearly and concisely, take notes while someone else is speaking, and construct a persuasive argument. The majority also reported having gained confidence in public speaking and being better at listening to others' points of view. One hundred percent of those participating reported a greater capacity to express their opinions clearly and concisely. An equal percentage (100%) said that they had learned there are no simple answers to controversial issues.

The results of the quantitative outcome survey supported the reports given by youth involved in the Mock Trials program as noted above. Significant increases were found in participants' sense of social and personal responsibility and tolerance for others following completion of the program. This was the case particularly for younger participants and those with higher grade point averages. Significant changes of this nature are particularly noteworthy given the short-term nature of the program.

It was not possible to assess significant changes over time on any of the youth development outcomes included in the evaluation of the Debates program. This was due to the small number of completed sets of pre-test and post-test surveys and the very brief nature of youths' involvement in this program (an average of 18 days).