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## **Poor Children Deserve Better Civics Education**

To the Editor:

Alfie Kohn eloquently states how schools are miserably failing children in [“Poor Teaching for Poor Children ... In the Name of School Reform”](#) (April 27, 2011). The “pedagogy of poverty” to which Mr. Kohn refers leads not only to an achievement gap between wealthy and low-income students, but also to a civic achievement gap. Improving the educational system for the powerless requires teachers and schools to invite young people to take action in their communities and political systems. This active civics process is, however, distinctly absent in urban schools. The drill-and-kill approach to teaching low-income children and children of color in order to get them to achieve on standardized tests comes from the same philosophy that says “these kids” can’t engage in the active, experiential, and authentic learning experiences necessary to be active citizens and civic leaders.

Dry theory and rote memorization detached from the reality of students’ communities and the exciting combat of ideas that takes place in the political arena do not inspire engagement, learning, or leadership, nor change the life trajectory of young people. In fact, it has been shown time and time again that this style of teaching fails at achieving its core goal for the large majority of young people it is supposed to help.

My organization’s Action Civics process gives young people voice and power because students do not just study civics, they live civics, and their attitudes toward political participation dramatically change for the better. We believe it is particularly empowering for youths from vulnerable communities with the toughest of social problems.

Anyone who values democracy should recognize the seriousness of the problem of the civic achievement gap. Without the civic participation of all Americans, the strength, stability, and legitimacy of our democracy is at risk.

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