

THE CIVIC SUMMIT FOR MIAMI YOUTH

WHO *we do.* DECIDES?

Saturday, November 14, 2026 · Miami Dade College Kendall Campus
Built by Virtutem Populo and the Miami-Dade County Youth Commission for the Office of Mayor Daniella Levine Cava

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ONE DAY. 147 STUDENTS. A MEASURABLE SHIFT IN HOW THEY SEE THEIR COUNTY.

On Saturday, November 14, 2026, 147 students from 28 schools spent a full day at Miami Dade College Kendall Campus learning how Miami-Dade County actually makes decisions.

The Civic Summit for Miami Youth was convened by the Office of Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and built by a joint working group of Virtutem Populo and the Miami-Dade County Youth Commission. It grew directly out of the Mayor's Civic Connections Summit in June 2026.

Students moved through six hands-on activities: identifying a problem, locating who decides, balancing a county budget, testing information, weighing tradeoffs and meeting the officials and partners who work on their issue. Every student left with a signed 30-Day Civic Commitment.

Surveys taken at check-in and at the close of the day show gains on every skill measured, with the largest jump in understanding the county budget.

KEY FINDINGS

ALL 6
skills rated higher after the summit than before

5% → 78%
rated their budget understanding a 4 or 5

22% → 82%
felt confident they can make change

97%
of students with both surveys improved on at least one skill

100%
said they enjoyed the summit

87%
rated their Accountability Circle a 4 or 5

IN THIS REPORT

01	**The need**	Why local civic learning matters
02	**The origin**	From June to November
03	**The day**	Who was there and what they did
04	**The results**	What changed for students
05	**The commitments**	What students pledged to do
06	**What's next**	January reconnection and the 2027 summit



students at the mic

“Too many of us have been handed a microphone without ever being given a map.”

CLINT A. JOHN, JR. · EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND PRESIDENT, VIRTUTEM POPULO · OPENING REMARKS

22%

of U.S. eighth graders scored at or above Proficient in civics on the 2022 Nation’s Report Card, the first decline since the test began in 1998.[1]

31%

scored below Basic, meaning they likely cannot describe the structure and function of government.[1]

81 vs 44

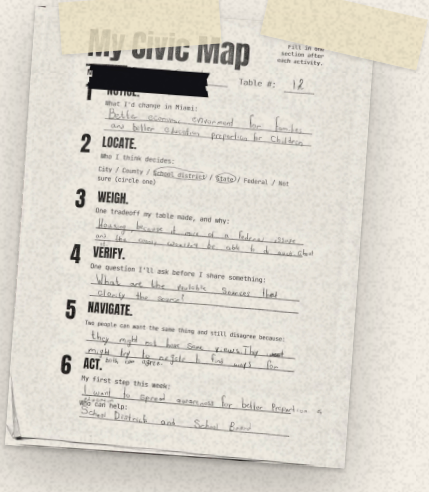
Young people who felt their voice mattered in high school were far more likely to say they would vote: 81% versus 44%.[2]

Young people are affected by public decisions long before they can vote for the people making them. Most never learn which office holds the pen on the bus that runs late, the street that floods or the school that closes.

Research is clear that this matters. CIRCLE at Tufts University finds that young people who build knowledge, skills and a sense of voice are more likely to vote and take part in civic life as adults.[3]

So the Office of Mayor Daniella Levine Cava asked a joint working group of Virtutem Populo and the Miami-Dade County Youth Commission to build something different: a day where students practice the work itself.

Not a field trip. Not a lecture. A full day of mapping power, balancing a real budget, testing information and sitting across the table from the people who run county programs.



1. National Assessment Governing Board, “Eighth-Grade Scores Decline in Civics and U.S. History,” May 2023. nagb.gov 2. CIRCLE, “Youth Who Develop their Voice in High School Are More Likely to Vote,” March 2024. circle.tufts.edu 3. CIRCLE, “Sense of Belonging and Positive School Climate Are Key to Building Youth Political Engagement.” circle.tufts.edu

THE ORIGIN

FROM A JUNE CONVERSATION TO A NOVEMBER SUMMIT.

The summit did not start in November. It started when the Office of the Mayor asked nonprofit leaders a question about civic life in Miami-Dade, and young people answered with a plan.

JUNE 2026

CIVIC CONNECTIONS SUMMIT

Mayor Daniella Levine Cava brought nonprofit leaders together. Conversations became working groups, and working groups became plans.

SUMMER TO FALL

A JOINT WORKING GROUP

Virtutem Populo and the Miami-Dade County Youth Commission built the summit with the Office of the Mayor: weekly working sessions, partner calls, site visits with Miami Dade College and every student material written in-house.

NOV 14, 2026

CIVIC SUMMIT FOR MIAMI YOUTH

147 students, 28 schools, 10 Accountability Circles and a full day of practice in local government.

DEC 14, 2026

COMMITMENTS DUE

Each student's 30-Day Civic Commitment reaches its deadline.

JANUARY 2027

RECONNECTION

Students, circle leads and partners reconvene to share progress on commitments and plan next steps.

NOVEMBER 2027

THE NEXT SUMMIT

The second Civic Summit for Miami Youth.

> *"What would happen if young people stopped being the subject of civic conversations and started becoming the authors of civic decisions?"*

CLINT A. JOHN, JR.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND PRESIDENT, VIRTUTEM POPULO
OPENING REMARKS





THE DAY AT A GLANCE

ONE SATURDAY. ONE ROOM. THE WHOLE COUNTY.

147
STUDENTS IN THE ROOM

28
SCHOOLS ACROSS MIAMI-DADE

10
ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCLES

6
HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES

8TH-12TH
GRADES REPRESENTED

1
COUNTY BUDGET, REBUILT BY STUDENTS

Students came from public, magnet, charter and private schools, from Aventura to Kendall. Tables were mixed on purpose so no one sat only with classmates. The Mayor, the Superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools and county program leads spoke with students directly.

ON THE PROGRAM

THE PEOPLE WHO DECIDE, IN THE ROOM WITH STUDENTS.



opening remarks

OPENING REMARKS

CLINT A. JOHN, JR.

Executive Director and President, Virtutem Populo

“Inspiration can tell you to change the world. Civic knowledge tells you where to start.”

Opened the day by asking who in the room had ever complained about something in Miami, then who had figured out who could fix it. He also led Carrying the Problem, the first activity.

SUPERINTENDENT

DR. RAFAEL A. VILLALOBOS

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Leads the nation’s third-largest school district, the first public institution that makes decisions for most students in the room. He spoke with students and stayed to meet them.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

PAT MORRIS

Welcomed students on behalf of the Office of the Mayor and supported the working group from the first conversation.



MAYOR OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

DANIELLA LEVINE CAVA

Told students how she lost an early fight for student voice in college, then ran for student government president and won. Her message carried the day: keep showing up, even after you lose.

ALSO ON STAGE

A youth panel of young leaders on using your voice in public life.

HOW THE DAY WORKED

EVERY ACTIVITY FILLED IN ONE LINE OF A MAP.

Each student carried a one-page Civic Map through the day. After every activity they wrote one line. By the end, every student had moved from a complaint to a concrete first step.

01 NOTICE — CARRYING THE PROBLEM

Each student wrote one specific thing they would change in Miami, then traded cards with a stranger and carried someone else's problem.

02 LOCATE — CIVIC MAP

Groups decided who actually holds the decision: city, county, school district, state or federal.

03 WEIGH — BUILD MIAMI BUDGET

Teams balanced a county budget and had to defend every tradeoff out loud.

04 VERIFY — FOUR CORNERS

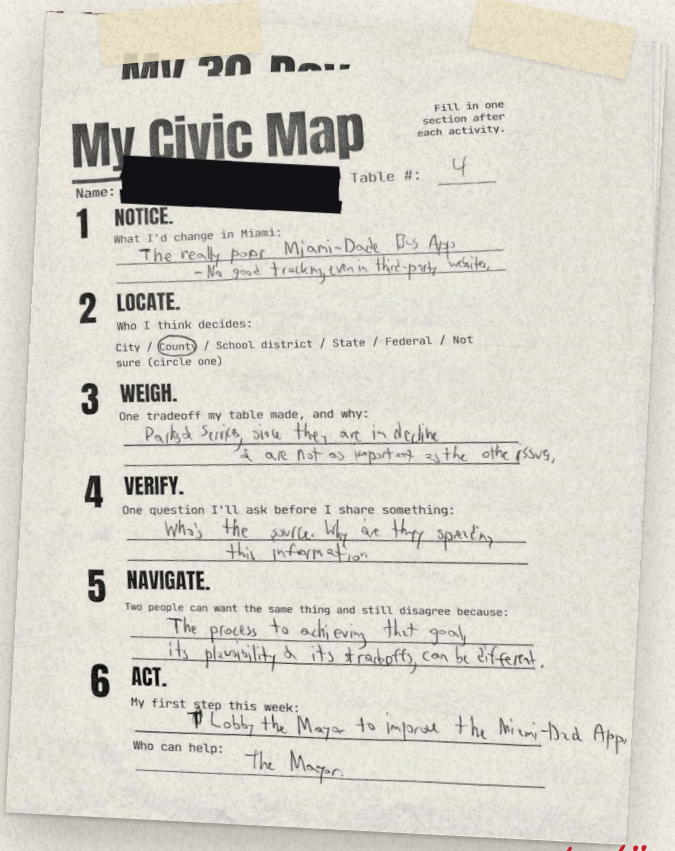
Students moved to a corner on real local claims and practiced checking sources before sharing.

05 NAVIGATE — TWO PATHS

Students saw how two people can want the same result and still disagree on the route.

06 ACT — ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCLES

Issue circles with county leads and community partners, ending in a signed 30-Day Civic Commitment.



My Civic Map

Fill in one section after each activity.

Name: [redacted] Table #: 4

1 NOTICE.
What I'd change in Miami:
The really poor Miami-Dade Bus App
- No good tracking even in third-party websites.

2 LOCATE.
Who I think decides:
City / (County) / School district / State / Federal / Not sure (circle one)

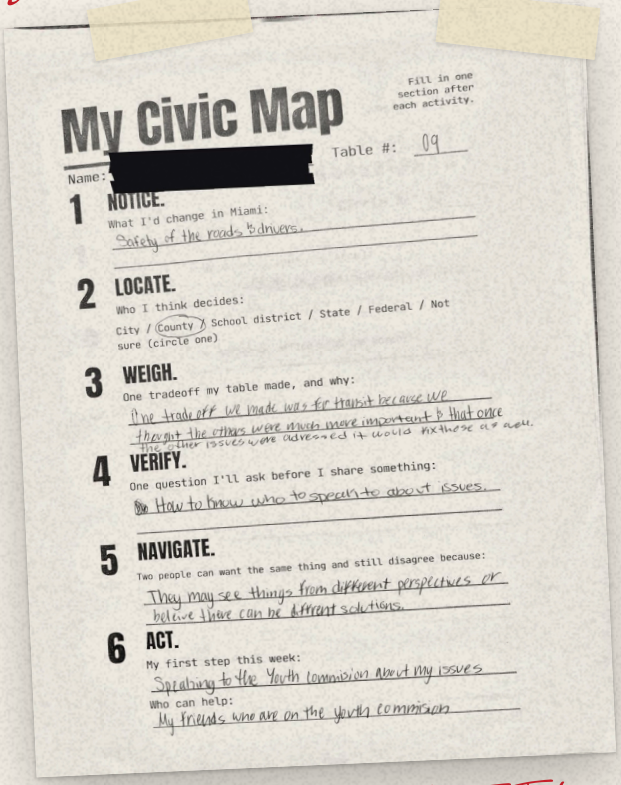
3 WEIGH.
One tradeoff my table made, and why:
Parks & Services since they are in decline & are not as important as the other issues,

4 VERIFY.
One question I'll ask before I share something:
Who's the source. Why are they sharing this information

5 NAVIGATE.
Two people can want the same thing and still disagree because:
The process to achieving that goal its plausibility & its tradeoffs, can be different.

6 ACT.
My first step this week:
I Lobby the Mayor to improve the Miami-Dad App
Who can help:
The Mayor.

from "the bus app is bad" …



My Civic Map

Fill in one section after each activity.

Name: [redacted] Table #: 09

1 NOTICE.
What I'd change in Miami:
Safety of the roads & drivers.

2 LOCATE.
Who I think decides:
City / (County) / School district / State / Federal / Not sure (circle one)

3 WEIGH.
One tradeoff my table made, and why:
The tradeoff we made was for transit because we thought the others were much more important & that once the other issues were addressed it would fix these as well.

4 VERIFY.
One question I'll ask before I share something:
How to know who to speak to about issues.

5 NAVIGATE.
Two people can want the same thing and still disagree because:
They may see things from different perspectives or believe there can be different solutions.

6 ACT.
My first step this week:
Speaking to the Youth commision about my issues
Who can help:
My friends who are on the youth commision

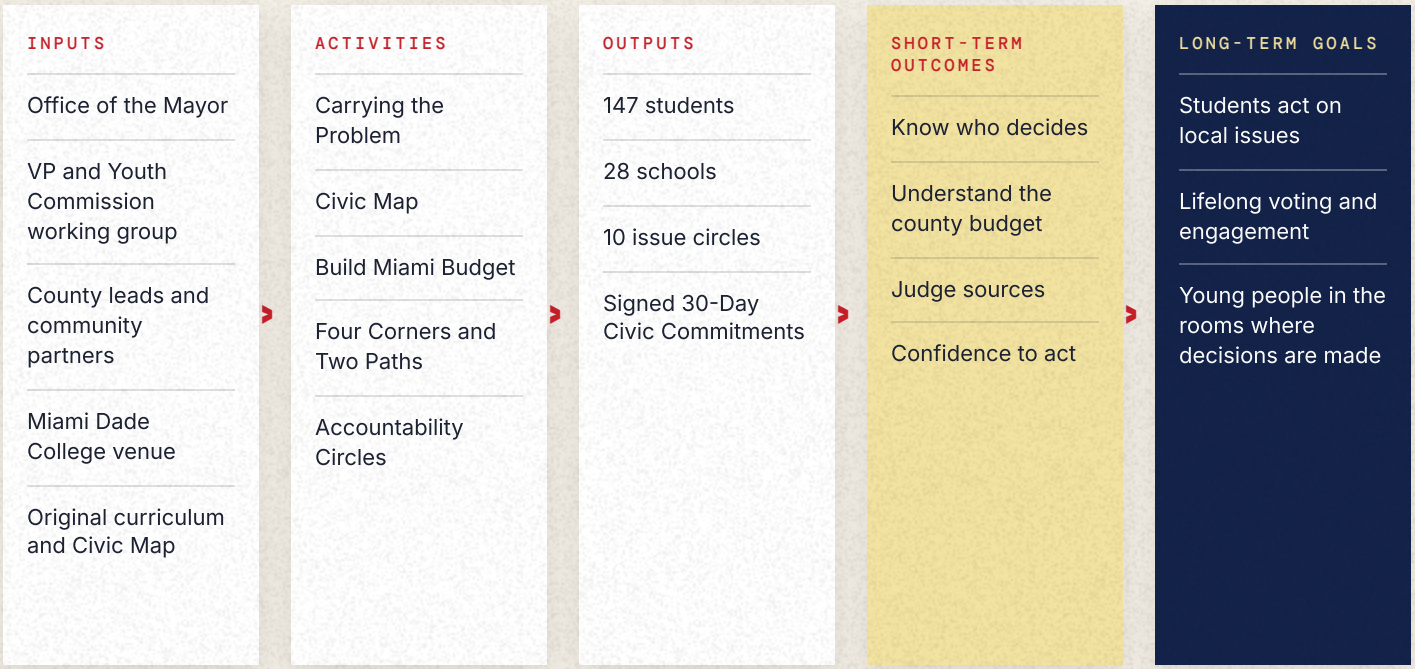
…to a first step.

STUDENT CIVIC MAPS FROM THE SUMMIT. NAMES REMOVED.

OUR MODEL

FROM A ROOM OF STUDENTS TO A PIPELINE OF CIVIC LEADERS.

The summit was designed backward from a long-term goal: young people who know where decisions are made and take part in making them. Every activity was chosen to move students one step along that path.



WHY IT IS BUILT THIS WAY

CIRCLE at Tufts University finds that young people who feel their voice matters in high school are far more likely to vote, and that knowledge, skills and a sense of voice together predict civic participation later in life.[2,3] The summit gives students all three in one day.

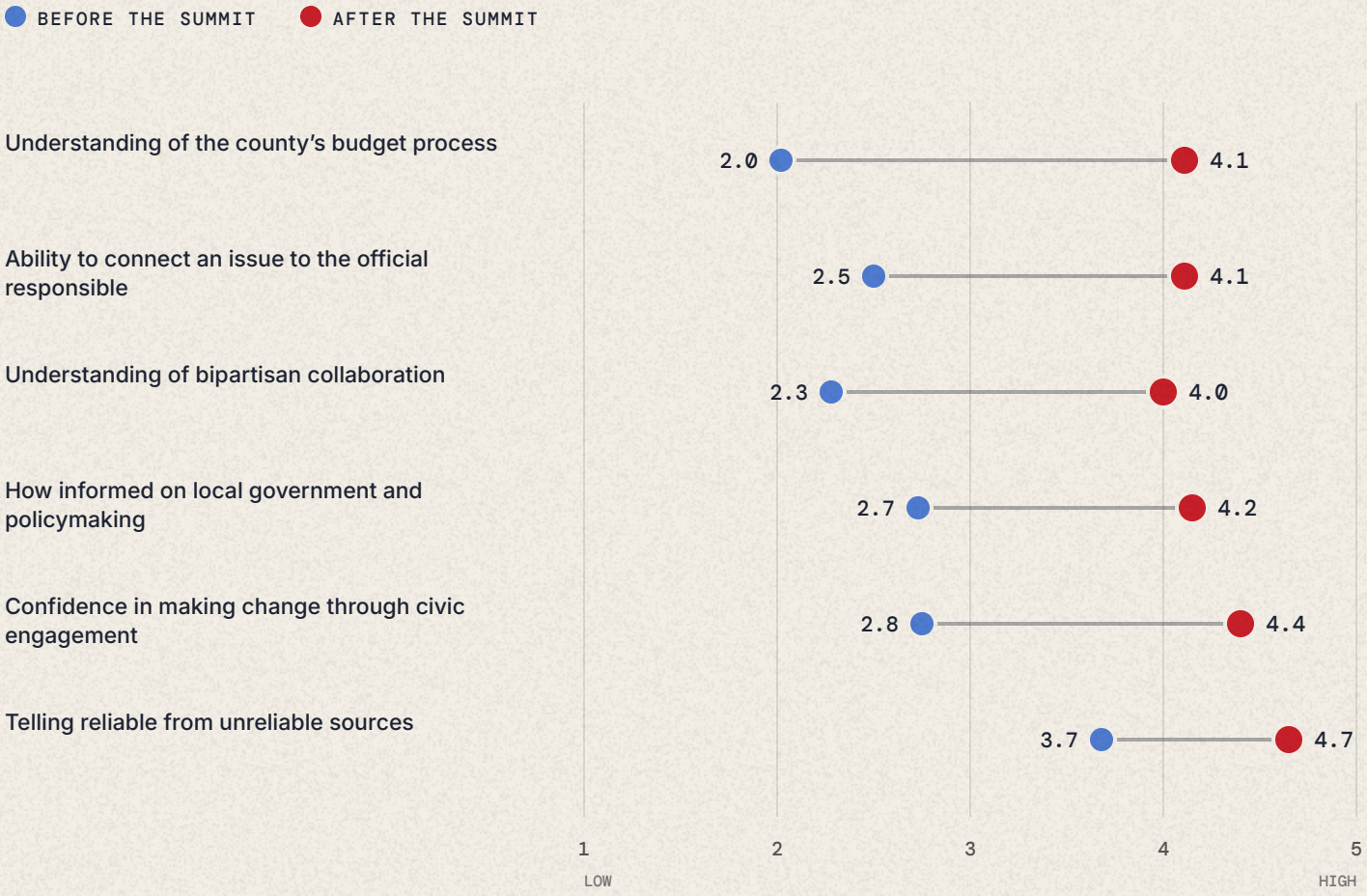
WHAT WE MEASURE

Short-term outcomes are measured with pre- and post-surveys on the day. Commitments are tracked through the January 2027 reconnection, so long-term progress can be reported across years, not just one Saturday.

WHAT CHANGED

STUDENTS WALKED IN UNSURE. THEY WALKED OUT KNOWING WHO DECIDES.

Students rated themselves on six skills at check-in and again at the close of the day, on a scale of 1 to 5. Average ratings rose on every one.



97%

of students who completed both surveys improved on at least one measure.

+2.1

points on budget understanding, the largest gain of the day (2.0 to 4.1).

4.4

out of 5: average confidence in making change through civic engagement, up from 2.8.

Source: Civic Summit for Miami Youth pre-survey (check-in) and post-survey (close of day). Self-ratings on a 1 to 5 scale. Averages shown.

THE BIGGEST JUMP

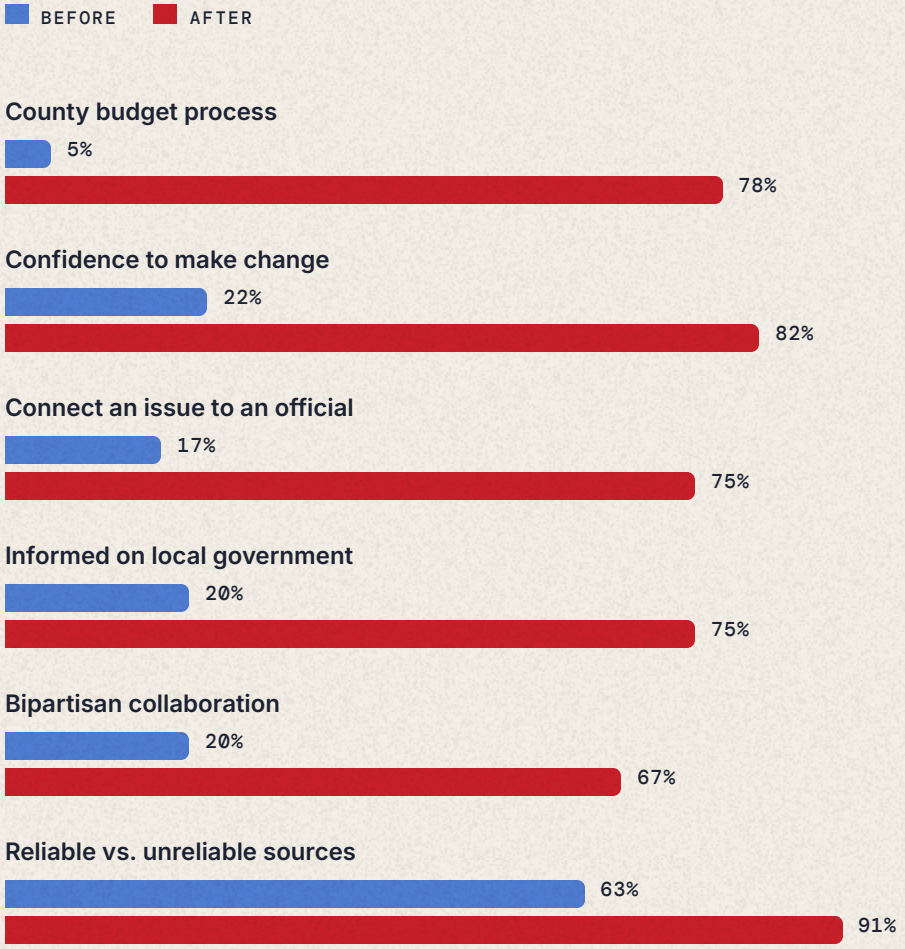
5% TO 78%

Before the summit, only 5% of students rated their understanding of the county budget a 4 or 5. After building one themselves, 78% did.



build miami budget

SHARE OF STUDENTS RATING THEMSELVES 4 OR 5 OUT OF 5



"My most valuable takeaway was realizing how much local government decisions affect our everyday lives. Making a difference starts with understanding who has the power to create change."

SOFIIA, 11TH GRADE

Source: Civic Summit pre- and post-surveys. Share of respondents choosing 4 or 5 on a 1 to 5 scale.

MEASURE BY MEASURE

NEARLY EVERY STUDENT MOVED UP ON THE BUDGET.

For students who completed both surveys, we compared each student's own before and after answers. This shows how many individual students grew on each skill, not just whether the average moved.

SHARE OF STUDENTS WHO RATED THEMSELVES HIGHER AFTER THE SUMMIT



HOW WE MEASURED

Students completed a short survey at check-in and again at the close of the day. Both asked students to rate the same six skills on a scale of 1 to 5, using identical wording. Average results compare all responses before and after.

Individual change compares the same student's answers for students who completed both surveys, matched by name and email. The post-survey also asked students to rate each activity, name their civic goal and describe their biggest takeaway. All results are self-reported.

HOW STUDENTS RATED THE DAY

100%

SAID THEY ENJOYED THE SUMMIT.

8 IN 10

WOULD RECOMMEND IT TO A FRIEND

4.8 / 5

RATING FOR STAFF SERVICE AND SUPPORT

AVERAGE ACTIVITY RATING, OUT OF 5

Four Corners	4.7
Panel and interactive stations	4.6
Carrying the Problem	4.6
Accountability Circles	4.5
Build Miami Budget	4.5



four corners



the youth panel



civic map

"I learnt that it is very important to not only tell leaders what is wrong but to come up with ideas to fix certain problems and work together to make solutions."

VALENTINO, 11TH GRADE

Source: Civic Summit post-survey.

FROM A COMPLAINT TO A COMMITMENT

EVERY STUDENT LEFT WITH A PLAN AND A DEADLINE.

Each student signed a 30-Day Civic Commitment: one issue, the office with the power, a goal for December 14, three first steps and a partner who holds them to it.

WHAT STUDENTS COMMITTED TO WORK ON



SHARE OF CIVIC ACTION GOALS NAMED ON THE POST-SURVEY, GROUPED BY THEME.

IN THEIR WORDS

"I want to change the grey infrastructure to green infrastructure."

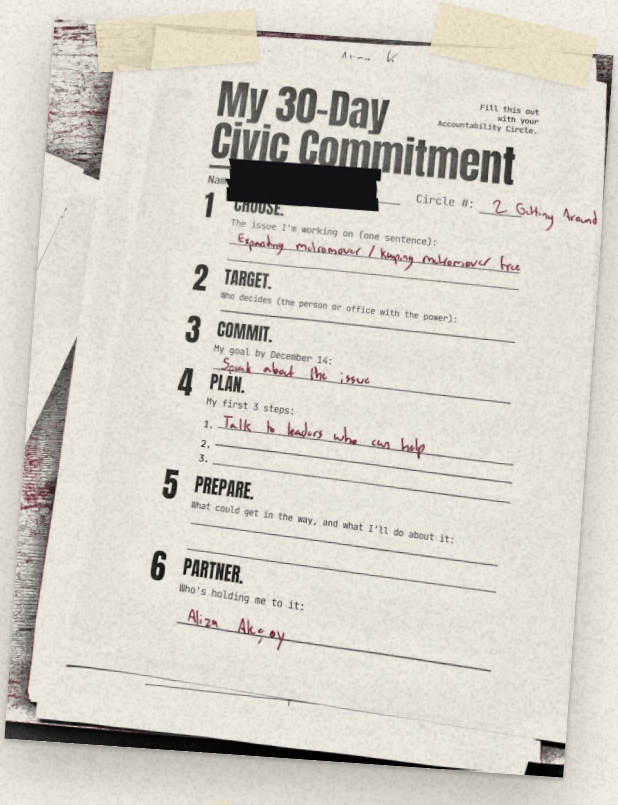
SOPHIA, 11TH GRADE

"Improve pedestrian safety with better crosswalks, lights and traffic lights."

SOFIIA, 11TH GRADE

"Increase funding to the arts programs in public schools in Miami-Dade."

AYANNA, 11TH GRADE


My 30-Day Civic Commitment

Fill this out with your Accountability Circle.

Name [redacted] Circle #: 2 Getting Around

1 CHOOSE. The issue I'm working on (one sentence): Expanding metromover / keeping metromover free

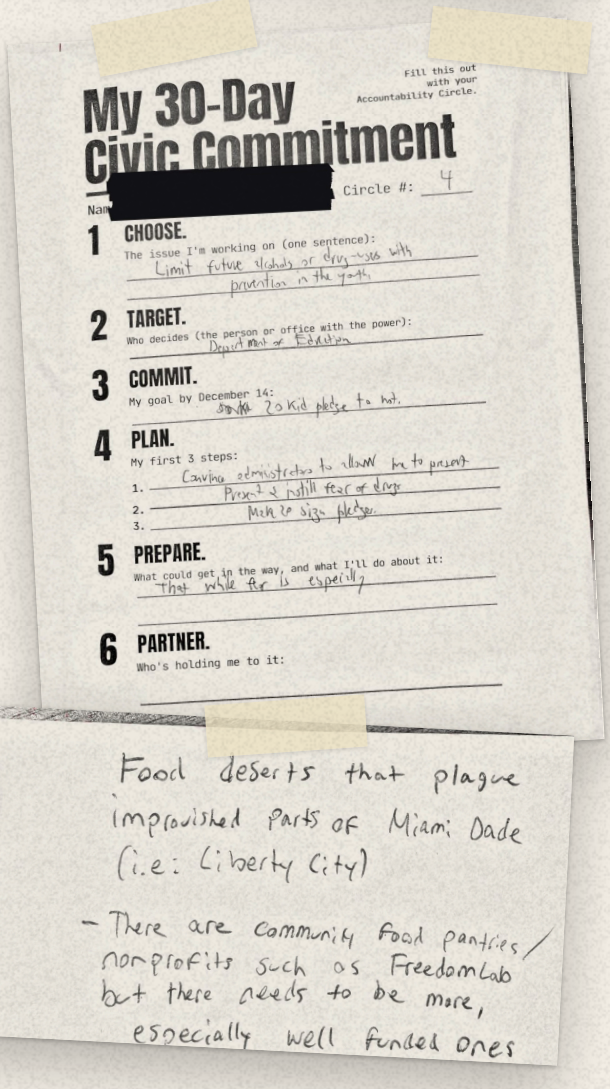
2 TARGET. Who decides (the person or office with the power):

3 COMMIT. My goal by December 14: Speak about the issue

4 PLAN. My first 3 steps: 1. Talk to leaders who can help 2. 3.

5 PREPARE. What could get in the way, and what I'll do about it:

6 PARTNER. Who's holding me to it: Aliza Akoey


My 30-Day Civic Commitment

Fill this out with your Accountability Circle.

Name [redacted] Circle #: 4

1 CHOOSE. The issue I'm working on (one sentence): Limit future alcohol or drug-uses with prevention in the youth

2 TARGET. Who decides (the person or office with the power): Department of Education

3 COMMIT. My goal by December 14: 50 Kid pledge to not.

4 PLAN. My first 3 steps: 1. Convince administrators to allow me to present 2. Present & instill fear of drugs 3. Mail to sign pledge

5 PREPARE. What could get in the way, and what I'll do about it: That while for is especially

6 PARTNER. Who's holding me to it:

Food deserts that plague improvished parts of Miami Dade (i.e: Liberty City)

- There are community food pantries / nonprofits such as FreedomLab but there needs to be more, especially well funded ones

due December 14.

STUDENT COMMITMENTS AND A CARRYING THE PROBLEM CARD FROM THE SUMMIT. NAMES REMOVED.



ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCLES

THE PEOPLE WHO RUN IT, AT THE STUDENTS' TABLE.

FROM A CIRCLE LEAD

"During my accountability circle, a student mentioned their story with the famous 'Trash Mountain' and how she remembers her school being shut down for days after a cloud of black smog was headed right towards her school. We talked with some of the experts there to see solutions and advocacy pathways to fix it. She left there excited to solve the problem."

ROBERT, ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCLE LEAD

TEN ISSUE CIRCLES

01	Arts, Culture and Media
02	Climate and Environment
03	Education and Youth Voice
04	Getting Around
05	Health and Mental Wellbeing
06	Housing and Neighborhoods
07	Jobs, Money and Business
08	Safety and Peace
09	Tech and Innovation
10	Voting and Civic Power

Each circle paired students with a county lead and a community partner working on the same issue. Students asked who decides, what it costs and what would actually change it, then wrote their commitments with the people who could help.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

WHAT STUDENTS TOOK HOME

"Seeing that youth leaders only a few years older than me were able to use their voice and become powerful."

DALLAS, 10TH GRADE

"That government officials have open ears."

DAVID, 11TH GRADE

"Pushing your own voice even if people say you're too young."

ATTICUS, 11TH GRADE

"I really liked how everyone got to work together and we got to talk to people we have never met and share our ideas."

KATTY, MIDDLE SCHOOL

"I have the ability to make change and can start today."

ANAISE, 11TH GRADE

"I now feel like I understand the role I can have in my community, like contacting commissioners and asking different officials questions."

BRANDON, 9TH GRADE

"I learned not to be afraid of being a leader and not afraid to speak up."

GRACE, 9TH GRADE

"My voice matters and there is someone that will supply an initiative for my concern."

ELLA, 10TH GRADE

"Get to know your commissioner."

BRYAN, 11TH GRADE

their words, not ours.

Responses to "What was your most valuable experience or takeaway?" on the post-survey. First names and grades only.

WHO WAS IN THE ROOM

28 SCHOOLS. MIXED TABLES.

Public, magnet, charter and private. Middle schoolers through seniors. From Aventura and Hialeah to Doral, Kendall and Palmetto Bay. Tables were mixed so students sat with people they had never met.

- Academy for Advanced Academics
- Aventura Waterways K-8 Center
- Barbara Goleman Senior High
- Coral Gables Senior High
- Coral Reef Senior High
- Don Soffer Aventura High
- Doral Academy
- Doral Academy Preparatory
- Downtown Doral Charter Upper
- Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High
- G. Holmes Braddock Senior High
- G.W. Carver Middle
- Gulliver Preparatory
- Hialeah Gardens Senior High
- Hialeah-Miami Lakes Senior High
- Highland Oaks Middle
- iPrep Academy North
- International Studies Preparatory Academy
- MAST Academy
- Miami Arts Studio 6-12 at Zelda Glazer
- Miami Lakes Educational Center
- Miami Senior High
- Ronald W. Reagan/Doral Senior High
- School for Advanced Studies, Kendall
- School for Advanced Studies, South
- School for Advanced Studies, West
- School for Advanced Studies, Wolfson
- TERRA Environmental Research Institute





partner passport



students at the mic

Schools listed from summit check-in and survey records.



with Mayor Daniella Levine Cava, 11.14.26

WITH GRATITUDE

IT TOOK A COUNTY TO BUILD THIS.

CONVENED BY

Office of Mayor Daniella Levine Cava

BUILT BY

Virtutem Populo, Inc.
Miami-Dade County Youth Commission

OPENING REMARKS

Clint A. John, Jr., Executive Director and President, Virtutem Populo

HOSTED BY

Miami Dade College Kendall Campus

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Radical Partners
Miami-Dade Commission Watch
Schola Diplomatis
County leads and community partners in every Accountability Circle

FUELED BY

Chick-fil-A (lunch)
Fifth Third Bank (breakfast from Vicky Bakery)

Thank you to Superintendent Dr. Rafael A. Villalobos and Miami-Dade County Public Schools, to Pat Morris and the team in the Office of the Mayor, to the youth panelists, to Ms. Loredo, and to every teacher and parent who got a student to Kendall on a Saturday morning.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

THE SUMMIT WAS DAY ONE.

DEC 14, 2026

30-Day Civic Commitments come due. Accountability partners follow up on each student's first steps.

JANUARY 2027

The reconnection. Students, circle leads and partners come back together to share what students did with their plans and set next goals.

NOVEMBER 2027

The second Civic Summit for Miami Youth, with more schools, more circles and results tracked from year one.

HOW TO BE PART OF IT

HOST A CIRCLE

County departments and community partners can lead an Accountability Circle on the issue they work on every day.

BRING YOUR STUDENTS

Schools, teachers and youth programs can reserve seats for the 2027 summit.

FUND THE NEXT ONE

Sponsors cover meals, materials and transportation so the summit stays free for every student.

FOLLOW UP WITH A STUDENT

Officials and partners can answer a student's commitment email or meeting request this winter.



Superintendent Dr. Rafael A. Villalobos

"I want every single person in this room to leave knowing at least one thing they didn't know when they walked in: where their next step begins."

CLINT A. JOHN, JR. · OPENING REMARKS

To partner, contact Virtutem Populo on Instagram at @virtutem_populo.

SOURCES AND DATA

WHERE THESE NUMBERS COME FROM

EXTERNAL RESEARCH

1 National Assessment Governing Board. (2023, May 3). Eighth-grade scores decline in civics and U.S. history on the Nation's Report Card. nagb.gov

2 Siegel-Stechler, K., Price, N., & Medina, A. (2024, March 12). Youth who develop their voice in high school are more likely to vote. CIRCLE, Tufts University. circle.tufts.edu

3 CIRCLE. Sense of belonging and positive school climate are key to building youth political engagement. Tufts University. circle.tufts.edu

4 Miami-Dade County Public Schools. District profile: third-largest school district in the United States. dadeschools.net

SUMMIT DATA

Pre-survey: completed by students at check-in on November 14, 2026. Six self-rated skills on a 1 to 5 scale, plus school, grade, circle and reasons for attending.

Post-survey: completed at the close of the day. The same six skills with identical wording, activity ratings, civic action goals, biggest takeaways and a photo of each student's Civic Map.

Student artifacts: Civic Maps, 30-Day Civic Commitments and Carrying the Problem cards collected at the summit. Student names are removed in this report.

Attendance and schools: summit check-in and walk-in records and survey responses.

Quotes: student quotes are taken word for word from survey responses, shown with first name and grade. The circle lead quote was shared with the summit team after the event.



WHO DECIDES?

we do.

The Civic Summit for Miami Youth was convened by the Office of Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and built by Virtutem Populo and the Miami-Dade County Youth Commission. Hosted at Miami Dade College Kendall Campus.

VIRTUTEM POPULO
POWER TO THE PEOPLE

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