



## **Facing History and Ourselves National Evaluation Study: Outcomes and Implications**

A two-year study using an experimental design provides definitive evidence that Facing History and Ourselves helps to create effective teachers who improve their students' academic performance and civic learning. Educational leaders, funders, and the federal government are looking for ways to transform education by promoting teacher effectiveness, which a growing body of research confirms is, "*the single most important factor in student achievement*" (Gates, 2008).

As part of ongoing education reform efforts, including significant new investments made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), state and local school districts across the country are working to dramatically improve teacher effectiveness in fostering student engagement and achievement. Facing History and Ourselves has a strong track record as a partner of choice for schools in providing ongoing, school-wide, high-quality professional development, resulting in teacher reinvigoration, efficacy, and an increase in teacher commitment—necessary conditions to reach goals for student learning (Romer, 2007).

Recognizing that students can be better prepared for the demands of citizenship by learning to think critically, empathize, recognize moral choices, and make their voices heard, Facing History and Ourselves offers schools a set of services and tools to support this learning. These services are critically needed at a time when disengaged students are dropping out at a record pace (House Education and Labor Committee, May 12, 2009). Moreover, the drop-out rate for teachers is also alarming (half of all new teachers leave the profession during their first five years), and 40 percent of teachers report that they are "disheartened" (Yarrow, 2009).

The positive impact of Facing History and Ourselves on teachers and students has been documented in more than 90 studies over the last three decades.<sup>1</sup> Teachers report that Facing History and Ourselves professional development services reinvigorate them, increase their commitment to teach, and reaffirm their aspirations and sense of efficacy as teachers. For students, participation in Facing History and

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed summary of past research on Facing History and Ourselves, please see our Evaluation Research Summary. Facing History and Ourselves Evaluation Department.  
<http://www.facinghistory.org/about/evaluation/program>

Ourselves programs results in: greater engagement in learning; increased skills for understanding and analyzing history; greater empathy and ethical awareness; increased civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions; an improved ability to recognize racism, antisemitism, and other forms of bigotry in themselves and in others; and reduced racist attitudes and self-reported fighting.

### **New Randomized Controlled Experiment Results**

For more than thirty years, Facing History and Ourselves has surveyed participating teachers who consistently attest that the program enables them to be more effective in their classrooms. Because Facing History and Ourselves attracts teachers interested in improving their skills, some have thought the success of Facing History professional development is simply due to the fact that the teachers who participate were highly motivated to begin with. Now, there are new results from an independent study using the most rigorous evaluation methodology to document the impact of Facing History and Ourselves professional development for teachers who were not seeking the program. The results of this study affirm the applicability Facing History and Ourselves has to fulfill the goals of leaders in the United States Department of Education and school districts nationwide who are looking to support and extend proven models of promoting teacher effectiveness.

In 2005, Facing History and Ourselves<sup>2</sup> partnered with university-based scholars<sup>3</sup> and Abt Associates, Inc.,<sup>4</sup> a highly experienced research and evaluation organization, to design and carry out a state of the art, randomized, controlled, experimental study of Facing History and Ourselves' lasting impact on teachers and students.<sup>5</sup> This included developing a number of innovative measures for the study.<sup>6</sup>

Seventy-six schools where Facing History and Ourselves had not been taught before were recruited to participate. Sixty-six percent of these schools were

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<sup>2</sup> The research team at Facing History included the Lead Investigator, Dennis Barr, and Terry Tollefson, Abbey Mann, Marc Skvirsky, Margot Strom, Marty Sleeper and Alan Stoskopf. Many other staff played important, supportive roles.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Selman, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Ethan Lowenstein, Eastern Michigan University, and Melinda Fine, Fine Associates and New York University served as Co-Investigators for the study along with Dennis Barr. Harvard University graduate student, Angela Bermudez participated in selecting and developing measures for the research.

<sup>4</sup> The Abt Associates, Inc. team was led by Beth Boulay and included Beth Gamse, Marc Moss, Rachel McCormick and Kristina Kliorys.

<sup>5</sup> Facing History and Ourselves and the larger research team is grateful to the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation for their generous support of this research.

<sup>6</sup> For more details regarding the study design and measures, please see "The Facing History and Ourselves National Professional Development and Evaluation Project: Continuing a Tradition of Research on The Foundations of Democratic Education." Brookline MA: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, Inc. <http://www.facinghistory.org> or by contacting the author, Dennis Barr, at [dennis\\_barr@facing.org](mailto:dennis_barr@facing.org).

underperforming based on federal criteria.<sup>7</sup> Most were high poverty schools.<sup>8</sup> These schools were drawn from the eight areas in the United States where Facing History and Ourselves has offices. Across these schools, 134 teachers were selected by their administrators and agreed to participate. 1,371 of these teachers' ninth and tenth grade students participated in the research.

Half of the schools were selected at random to participate in Facing History and Ourselves professional development and teach Facing History in the first year of the study (2007-2008) and the other half did so in the second year (2008-2009). The first group of teachers and students is the "treatment group" and the second served as the "control group." This random assignment eliminates the effects of pre-existing differences among subjects in each group, such as levels of teacher motivation and student academic engagement or achievement. The study was designed to assess the impact of Facing History and Ourselves' professional development on the group of teachers who participated in the program in the first-year versus those who did not. The study also examined the impact of the Facing History program that was implemented by the first-year Facing History teachers on the academic performance (e.g. skills for analyzing history), social and ethical awareness, and civic learning and engagement of their students.

The federal government, policymakers, foundations, school administrators, and educational scholars have been asking for the strong evidence of program effectiveness produced by randomized, controlled experiments. Such studies are challenging to implement, however, and relatively few programs have been evaluated in this way.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, many programs that do well in ideal settings with carefully selected volunteers are not as successful when assessed in "real world" situations where, oftentimes, the programs are not fully implemented. The researchers did not try to find an ideal setting for this evaluation of the Facing History and Ourselves program, but instead implemented the most conservative tests of program effectiveness by recruiting schools and teachers who had not been exposed to the program in the past and were not seeking out the program. This type of study design requires that all of the data from these teachers and their students be included in the final analysis, even if the

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<sup>7</sup> Schools that have not met annual yearly progress requirements, based on standardized test scores, for two consecutive years are considered underperforming.

<sup>8</sup> In one quarter of the schools, 90% or more of the students were eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), making them eligible for school-wide federal Title I funding. In 60% of the schools, 40-89% of students were eligible for FRPL.

<sup>9</sup> Studies like this are unusual because it takes substantial resources to recruit and randomize enough teachers and/or students to be able to ascertain with reasonable confidence and statistical significance that the observed differences are large enough to be meaningful (as measured by their "effect size"). Fortunately, Facing History and Ourselves received a grant from the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation to undertake this rigorous study.

teachers did not implement the Facing History and Ourselves program fully or well. In fact, only 47% of the treatment teachers implemented full Facing History courses with most of the remaining teachers teaching parts of the program and some teaching little or no Facing History.

The high bar set by the research design underscores the significance of the results: the study found that **Facing History and Ourselves' professional development services engage teachers, and increase teacher efficacy in promoting students' academic and civic learning.** Those teachers who received Facing History and Ourselves services, relative to those who did not, demonstrated **significantly greater efficacy in promoting community- and learner-centered classrooms, deliberative skills, historical understanding, and civic learning.** The heightened efficacy for Facing History teachers corresponds with student outcomes: **the study also captured statistically significant results for students in those same areas—improved classroom climate, skills for analyzing history, and civic skills and dispositions.**

### **Teacher Impact**

The teacher findings document statistically significant results with educationally meaningful effects in multiple categories of teacher “efficacy.” “Efficacy” refers to teachers’ beliefs about their knowledge, and skills in their subject areas. A teacher’s sense of “efficacy” is a critical underpinning of high quality teaching (effectiveness), and has been associated in other studies with teacher retention. Previous research has demonstrated linkages between teachers’ assessments of their own efficacy and student outcomes such as achievement, motivation, and student efficacy (students’ sense of confidence in their own academic abilities). Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching, have a greater commitment to teaching, and are more likely to stay in the teaching profession. Higher teacher efficacy is also related to a positive school atmosphere (Henson, 2003; Hoy, et. al. 1998).

Overall, in this new research on Facing History and Ourselves’ model of professional development, the following teacher outcomes were supported:

- Participation in a Facing History and Ourselves professional development seminar and follow-up activities has a positive, statistically significant impact on all areas of teacher efficacy measured, as well as on teacher satisfaction and engagement with the teaching profession, and satisfaction with professional development experiences. Teachers expressed a sense of efficacy to promote:
  - **community centered classrooms** (i.e. the capacity to create classroom environments in which students treat each other with respect)
  - **learner-centered classrooms** (i.e. the ability to make the subject matter personally relevant to students with diverse personal,

- cultural, and social identities)
- **knowledge-centered classrooms** (i.e. the ability to teach for understanding by asking questions that engage students with key ideas and concepts in the subject and promote students' curiosity about the world around them)
- **student historical understanding** (i.e. the ability to foster students' understanding of the key historical concepts of evidence, agency, and causality)
- **student civic learning** (i.e. the ability to promote students' understanding of key democratic principles and values, including freedom of expression, the protection of the vulnerable groups, equity and justice, and the importance of civic participation)
- **student social and ethical awareness** (i.e. the ability to promote students' capacity to understand others' points of view and to coordinate them with one's own)
- **student character development** (i.e. the ability to adjust lessons about moral issues to meet the needs of students)
- All teacher **findings were replicated** with the second group of teachers.
- The outcomes for the first cohort of teachers were **sustained** over two years.

### Student Impact

Facing History and Ourselves students scored higher than control group students on all of the civic and academic outcomes that were measured.

- The findings were statistically significant for **historical understanding**, including skills for interpreting evidence, analyzing what leads people to make ethical choices, and thinking critically about cause and effect.
- The findings were statistically significant for **civic learning** variables, including tolerance, awareness of the power and danger of prejudice and discrimination, and civic efficacy (the capacity to make a difference).
- Teachers who implemented full units in the second year of the study had the same impact on the new group of students' academic and civic learning as they had had with the first-year students, suggesting that **the impact of Facing History and Ourselves is sustained in schools as teachers engage with new groups of students each year.**<sup>10</sup>

**Facing History and Ourselves can claim that its model of supplying educators with timely resources, professional development, and ongoing support**

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<sup>10</sup> This finding is outside of the experimental design because the students of teachers who did not implement full Facing History units were not included in the analysis.

**addresses a key need in the field of education: helping teachers to be more effective.** Teachers who feel more effective are more likely to stay in the profession. At the same time, the Facing History and Ourselves model is successful at improving students' academic performance by increasing their historical understanding and fostering tolerance and positive civic participation. **In sum, these findings provide conclusive evidence of Facing History and Ourselves' power to transform teaching and learning in critically important and lasting ways.**

### **Teacher and Student Findings Aligned: Educational Implications**

The teacher findings in this study are powerful, with large effect sizes. They demonstrate that quality education—involving rigorous and engaging content and sophisticated pedagogical techniques designed to foster academic and civic growth—is scalable. The high quality professional development services that Facing History offers enable “ordinary” teachers—including those working in challenging, high-need conditions—to offer high quality content and learning experiences with a strong sense of efficacy.

Taken together, the teacher and student findings paint a fuller picture of what can happen when educators promote high quality teaching and integrate academic and civic aims. The research team aligned the teacher and student outcomes to provide a more comprehensive picture of the impact of Facing History in schools. **The team found that Facing History has an impact on teacher efficacy in many of the same areas where student outcomes were found. These areas of impact speak directly to critical needs in education, including:**

- 1) Creating safer and more engaging learning environments
- 2) Promoting respect for the rights of others whose views differ from one's own
- 3) Fostering awareness of the power and danger of prejudice and discrimination
- 4) Teaching critical thinking about history and contemporary events
- 5) Increasing students' sense of efficacy in making a difference in society

#### *1) The need for safer and more engaging learning environments*

The overall state of education is sobering. Many students are disengaged or feel unsafe in school. A new Canadian study shows how levels of student engagement tend to decline steadily throughout the middle and secondary school grades (Wilms, et. al., 2009). In the United States, 7,000 students drop out every day. Only about 70 percent of students graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma. In the fifty largest cities, only 53 percent of students graduate on time (House Education and Labor

Committee, May 12, 2009). Schools must use curricula and methods that engage students.

Students also need safe spaces in which to learn. Violence is ever-present in the lives of young people. In one major study, an estimated 30 percent of 6th to 10th graders in the United States were either bullies, targets of bullying, or both (Nansel, et. al., 2001). Bullying and violence contribute to poor school climate, interfere with student learning, and lower teacher job satisfaction.

As a result of students' disengagement and feeling unsafe in school, a rising number of youth never have the opportunity to learn the skills they need to think critically and develop a sense that they are capable of making a positive difference in the world. Schools must be equipped to create safe and engaging learning environments if they are to succeed both in persuading students to stay in school and achieve.

This experimental study demonstrates that Facing History and Ourselves teachers feel significantly more capable than teachers in the control group of creating safe and engaging classroom climates, environments where students can participate in open and complex conversations and understand each other's perspectives. **The findings for students confirm that teachers' positive beliefs about their ability to create safe and engaging learning environments were actualized in their classroom practice. In other words, when compared with students in the control group, students in the Facing History and Ourselves classrooms perceived their teachers as creating safer and more engaging classrooms.**

*2) The need for increased tolerance and respect for the rights of others whose views differ from one's own*

A positive learning environment is one in which students feel safe enough to share their views about difficult issues, even if those perspectives are unpopular. In such contexts, students are much more likely to be invested in learning and they can develop more informed and sophisticated views.

The study demonstrates that Facing History and Ourselves teachers feel significantly more capable of promoting students' critical, but also respectful, engagement with others whose views differ from their own. **Again, the teachers' beliefs about their abilities to promote tolerance were reflected in effective classroom practices, since the study also demonstrates a corresponding impact on students: Facing History and Ourselves significantly increases students' respect for the rights of others whose views differ from their own.**

### *3) The need for increased awareness of the dangers of prejudice and discrimination*

With the number of hate groups operating in the United States increasing by 54% since 2000 and hate crimes against some groups on the rise (Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, 2009), schools must help students develop the awareness, skills and attitudes they need to live and work productively and safely with others who are different from themselves. This includes developing an awareness of the power and danger of prejudice and discrimination, as well as an understanding of the experiences of vulnerable groups in society.

This study demonstrates the positive impact of Facing History and Ourselves professional development on teachers' belief in their ability to promote a safe space for students from diverse cultural, racial, religious, and social groups to interact across social and cultural boundaries. Furthermore, the study showed that Facing History and Ourselves helps teachers feel capable of teaching students to understand the importance of protecting vulnerable groups. **Teacher efficacy in these areas corresponds with student outcomes measured in the study: Facing History and Ourselves students demonstrated greater awareness of the power and danger of prejudice and discrimination in the past and present, and the dynamics of antisemitism in particular.**

### *4) The need for critical thinking about complex historical and current events*

Today, young people must be prepared to think critically about the flood of information that they are exposed to through the media (social networking, blogs, information on the internet, TV, Twitter, etc.). They need to be able to separate fact from rumor, and they must be able to make sense of complex contemporary events involving inter-group conflict.

This study shows that Facing History and Ourselves prepares teachers to feel more capable of promoting their students' capacity to analyze historical and contemporary events by helping their students to acquire skills for interpreting evidence; analyze what leads people to make ethical choices; and think critically about cause and effect.

Facing History teachers not only felt more capable of promoting students' historical understanding; the student results demonstrate that they were, indeed, effective in doing so. A test of historical understanding was developed for the study that required students to analyze primary source material, including narratives, public documents, and graphs, related to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. The results of

the test show that Facing History and Ourselves students were able to translate the skills for analyzing history they had learned from their study of *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior* to this new historical case study. **Indeed, Facing History and Ourselves students demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of history than the control group. Therefore, Facing History and Ourselves teachers' not only had a sense of efficacy in promoting students' skills for analyzing history, they were actually more effective in doing so with their students than control group teachers.**

5) *The need for young people to know that their thoughtful civic participation matters*

Positive civic dispositions and skills for historical analysis are necessary for mature engagement as citizens, but it is also critical that students feel motivated and able to make a difference in their schools, communities, and the larger society. At a time when many students feel shut down, disengaged, and are leaving school, can professional development support teachers in helping students to feel capable and motivated to make a difference in society?

This study demonstrates that Facing History and Ourselves teachers feel more capable than control group teachers of teaching students that their voice matters and that they can influence social, civic, and political issues. **Again, teacher efficacy was translated into effective practice: the study shows that Facing History and Ourselves students actually feel more capable of making a difference in their classrooms and the larger society than control group students.**

Putting the study in a broader research context

The Facing History and Ourselves National Professional Development and Evaluation study encompasses the most rigorous and conservative test of Facing History and Ourselves' effectiveness: a randomized, controlled, experimental study of Facing History and Ourselves' lasting impact on teachers and students. Although policy makers are calling for evidence from these kinds of studies, they are still relatively rare in educational evaluation. Moreover, most studies have not shown significant effects for students or for teachers. As one researcher put it, "Without studies using random assignment, programs can look better than they are. With such studies, they can look worse than they are" (Selman, et. al., 2007).

It should be emphasized that the teachers chosen for the study were not selected because they were proven Facing History and Ourselves teachers—in fact they had never expressed interest in the program. Further, the design required that the researchers incorporate all teacher and student data in their analyses, including data for teachers who were unable to implement the program at all, along with that of their students. As noted, only half of the Facing History and Ourselves teachers were able to teach full Facing History courses. Moreover, the Facing History and Ourselves program is complex, requiring that teachers attain a wide range of knowledge and skills that take time to develop. Yet the teachers in this study were attempting to teach this complex program for the first time. Considering all of these factors, it would not have been surprising had the study found no measurable effects on students at all. Yet statistically significant impacts were found for both teachers and students, something rarely found in randomized controlled trials of educational programs.

## Summary

With many students feeling disengaged, drop out rates climbing, and many teachers leaving the profession after a few years, education is failing to prepare students for the 21st century. Yet, quality teaching is the key factor in bringing about improved student achievement and civic learning. Facing History and Ourselves can claim that its model of supplying educators with timely resources, professional development, and support addresses a critical need in the field of education: making teachers more effective. At the same time, the Facing History and Ourselves model is successful at improving students' academic performance by increasing their historical understanding and fostering tolerance and positive civic participation. In sum, these findings provide conclusive evidence of Facing History and Ourselves' power to transform teaching and learning in critically important and lasting ways.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> More findings are forthcoming and will be published in multiple venues as they become available, beginning with Facing History and Ourselves' website. (<http://www.facinghistory.org>).

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## Study Findings: Correspondence of Teacher and Student Outcomes

*In the table below, all the p-values (used to assess the difference in means between intervention and control groups) are statistically significant and all of the effect sizes (used to gauge the strength of the impact of the program) are educationally meaningful. There were 1,371 students and 134 teachers in the study sample.*

Domain	Measure	Scale	Control Mean	FHAO Mean	P Value	Effect Size
Classroom learning environment	Teacher efficacy in creating a safe and engaging classroom learning environment	1-5	3.87	4.24	<.0001	.76
	Students experience a safe and engaging learning environment	1-5	3.96	4.08	.027	.17
Deliberation and tolerance	Teacher efficacy in promoting deliberation	1-5	3.87	4.20	<.0001	.73
	Students respect the rights of groups whose views differ from their own	1-5	3.10	3.26	.016	.18
Inter-group awareness	Teacher efficacy in promoting student tolerance and psychosocial development	1-5	3.77	4.21	<.0001	.85
	Students' awareness of the power and danger of prejudice, discrimination, and antisemitism	0-1	.18	.46	<.0001	.70
Historical understanding	Teacher efficacy in promoting students' historical understanding	1-5	3.81	4.20	<.0001	.66
	Student historical understanding skills	0-1	.54	.56	.029	.14
Civic efficacy	Teacher efficacy in promoting student civic literacy	1-5	3.80	4.11	<.0001	.67
	Student civic efficacy	1-5	3.27	3.41	.019	.20

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**Year One Schools' Demographic Characteristics (N=76)**

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	<b>Number (Percentage)</b>
<b>Facing History and Ourselves vs. Control</b>	
Facing History and Ourselves	38 (50%)
Control	38 (50%)
<b>Region</b>	
Chicago	8 (11%)
Cleveland	8 (11%)
Denver	7 (9%)
Los Angeles	15 (20%)
Memphis/Nashville	8 (11%)
New England	7 (9%)
New York/New Jersey	12 (16%)
San Francisco	11 (14%)
<b>School Type</b>	
Public – Regular	52 (68%)
Public – Other ( <i>Charter, Magnet, etc</i> )	16 (21%)
Private	8 (11%)
	<b>Average/ Median<sup>a</sup></b>
<b>School size</b>	1,018 / 781

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**Notes:**

<sup>a</sup>Missing school size data for 2 schools, therefore average/median based on 74 schools.

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**Year One Teachers' Demographic Characteristics (N\*=134)**

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**Panel 1**

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	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Years of Teaching Experience	9.25	8.74
Years Teaching at Current School	4.64	4.40

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**Panel 2**

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<b>Sample</b>	<b>N**</b>	<b>%***</b>
<i>Facing History and Ourselves</i>	53	40%
<i>Control</i>	81	60%

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**Highest Level of Education**

<i>Bachelor's-level</i>		
Bachelor's	10	8%
Bachelor's + coursework	39	29%
<i>Master's-level or greater</i>		
Master's	30	23%
Master's + coursework	50	38%
Doctorate	4	3%

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**Race**

<i>White</i>	107	80%
<i>Other</i>	26	20%

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**Type of Course**

<i>History</i>	86	67%
<i>English</i>	33	26%
<i>Other</i>	9	7%

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**Type of HHB Course**

<i>History</i>	92	73%
<i>English</i>	26	21%
<i>Other</i>	8	6%

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**Notes:**

\* This table was computed using all 134 teachers who completed a follow-up survey. Baseline scores were imputed for the 21 teachers who didn't complete a baseline survey as Facing History and Ourselves did not expect demographics to change from baseline to follow-up.

\*\*N's do not always add up to 134 due to missing data.

\*\*\*Percentages were calculated using the N observations for which data were available as the denominator; therefore, percentages always add up to 100.

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**Year One Student Demographic Characteristics (N\*=1,371)**

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	N**	%***
<b>Study Group</b>		
<i>Control</i>	759	55%
<i>Facing History and Ourselves</i>	612	45%
<b>Grade</b>		
<i>9<sup>th</sup></i>	446	33%
<i>10<sup>th</sup></i>	925	67%
<b>Sex</b>		
<i>Male</i>	584	43%
<i>Female</i>	787	57%
<b>First Language</b>		
<i>English</i>	966	71%
<i>Other</i>	401	29%
<b>Race</b>		
<i>Hispanic</i>	484	36%
<i>White</i>	432	32%
<i>Black</i>	183	13%
<i>Asian</i>	171	13%
<i>Other</i>	90	7%
<b>Mother's Education Level</b>		
<i>Didn't finish high school</i>	284	21%
<i>Finished high school</i>	280	21%
<i>Attended some college</i>	252	19%
<i>Finished college</i>	340	26%
<i>More than college</i>	165	12%
<b>Father's Education Level</b>		
<i>Didn't finish high school</i>	321	25%
<i>Finished high school</i>	283	22%
<i>Attended some college</i>	203	16%
<i>Finished college</i>	307	24%
<i>More than college</i>	151	12%

**Notes:**

\*The student sample includes 1,257 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students who submitted both Book 1 and Book 2, 114 students who submitted only Book 1, and 30 students who submitted only Book 2. Given that the student demographic questions were found in Book 1, Facing History and Ourselves has calculated the demographics in this table from the sample of students (N=1,371) who submitted the first of two survey booklets.

\*\*N's do not always add up to 1,371 due to missing data.

\*\*\*Percentages were calculated using the N observations for which data were available as the denominator; therefore, percentages always add up to 100.

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