

**HRW Student Task Force
Human Rights Education
Survey**

Report Date: August 2011

Kofi Annan declared, "*Human rights education is much more than a lesson in schools; it is a process to equip people with the tools they need to live lives of security and dignity.*" Indeed, human rights education plays an essential role in teaching the world's future leaders how to prevent and address the worst human rights violations of our time. By instilling youth with the analytical and moral frameworks necessary to affect change, it ultimately empowers them to improve the lives of others in both our local and global communities.

Yet evidence reveals that human rights education programs in today's schools are not adequately equipped to produce such change--while a majority of students claim to have learned about human rights in their classes, they lack a basic awareness of how our modern international human rights system functions. This study finds that an overwhelmingly large number of high school students cannot define basic terms such as "human right" or "human dignity" and most have never heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the most comprehensive rights agreement in international law.

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The following report is based on the *Human Rights Education (HRE) Survey*, conducted from March to June 2011 by the HRW Student Task Force. The survey was completed by approximately 2,900 students (grades 9-12) in ten public and private high schools in the Los Angeles area. Our goal is to analyze the prevalence, or *absence*, of human rights education within high school curricula and activities in Los Angeles-area schools, as well as the mechanisms that are most effective when implementing human rights education.

Based on an initial STF student-generated and conducted survey in 2008, the 2011 HRE Survey maintains the original student-created questions. The survey aims to determine what education the students are already receiving about human rights, in what class, and if they would like to learn more about the subject.

- Report findings from an in-class paper survey done in March through June of 2011: **2,884 respondents.**
- The students hailed from 10 schools – 6 public and 4 private.
- 725 Freshmen, 822 Sophomores, 855 Juniors, 459 Seniors, and 23 teachers participated.
- 2381 students were from public schools and 503 were from private schools.

- Students were asked 5 multiple choice questions and 2 subjective questions to answer in their own words.
- Comparisons were made between grade levels.
- Data Analysts: James Kim (Yale); Amy Calfas (Tufts, *STF alumna*); Deepti Immaraju (UCLA graduate, former STF intern); Kaley Lesham (Tufts, *STF alumna*); Steven Gordon (NEC, *STF alumnus*).

** Special thanks to Katia Johnstone (UC Berkeley) for contributing her groundbreaking student-originated survey as a high school student and alumna of STF in 2008.*

What are human rights?

- 31% of respondents did not answer correctly.

When asked for an example of a human right, the four *most common* responses were:

1. **Voting**
2. **Speech**
3. **Religion**
4. **Marriage**

Defining “Human Dignity”

What does the term “human dignity” mean to you?

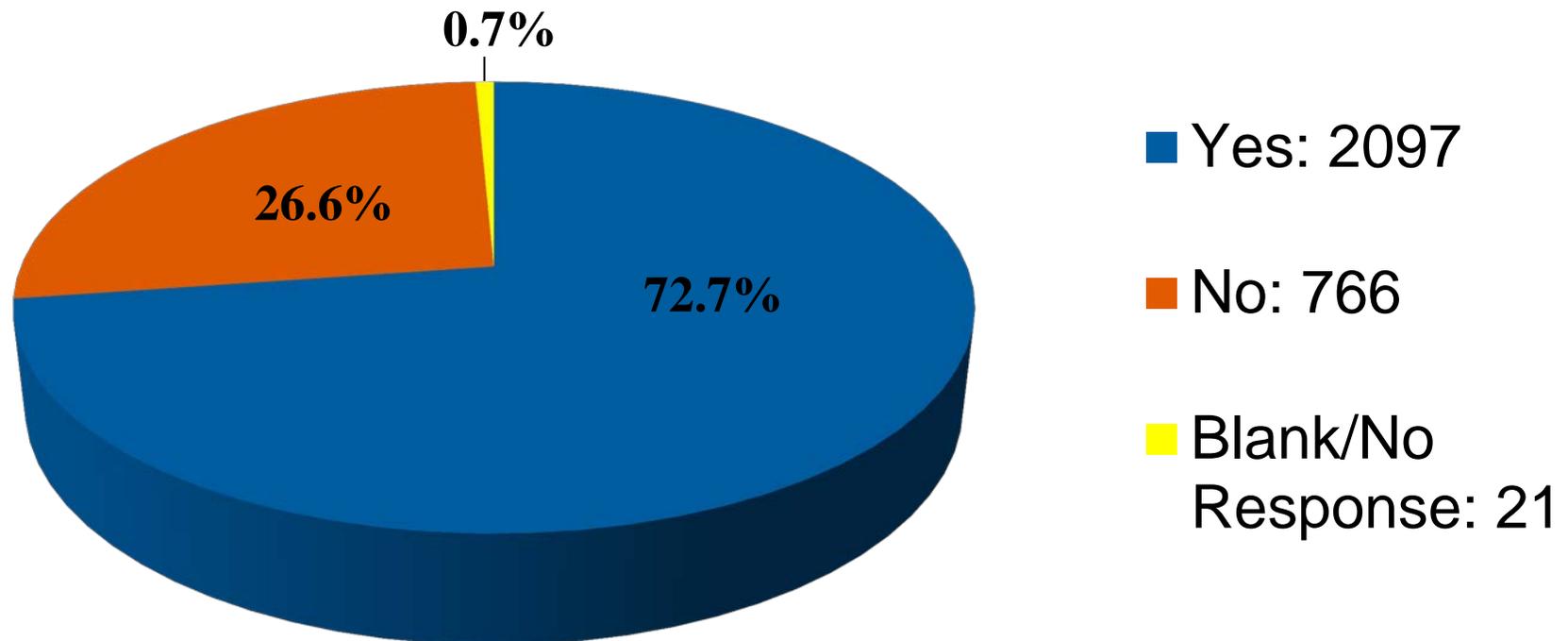
- Students had more trouble defining the term "human dignity" – 90% of respondents did not answer correctly.



General Exposure to Human Rights

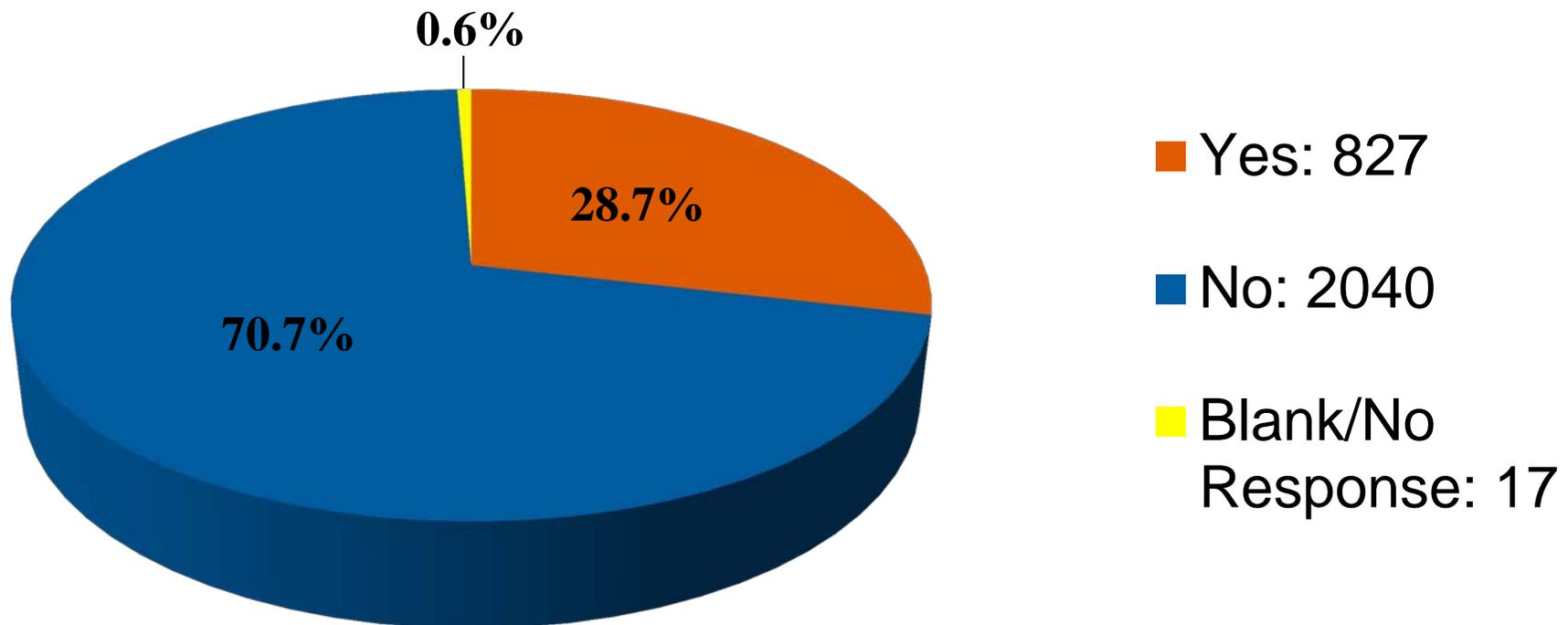
Have you learned about Human Rights in your classes?

73% of students learned about Human Rights in class.



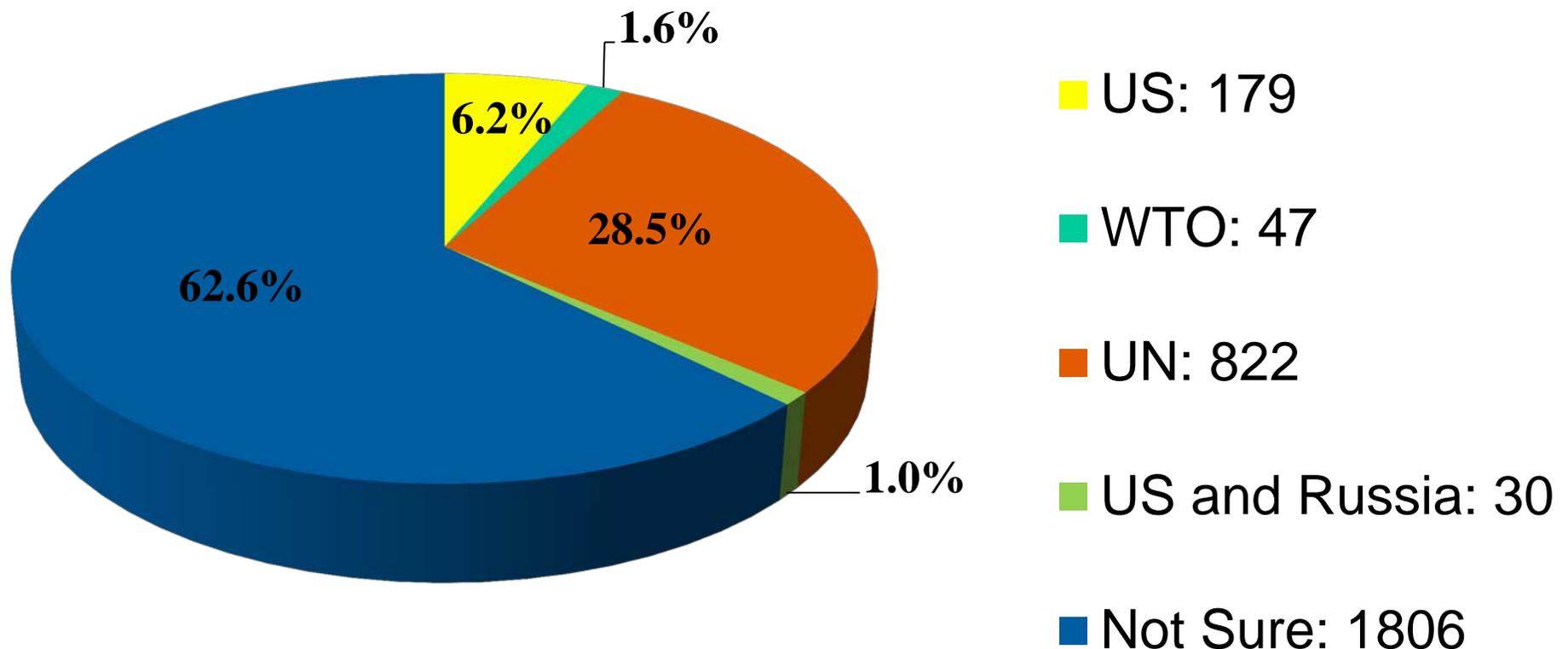
Have you heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

71 % of students had not heard of the UDHR.



Who created the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

72 % of students did not know who created the UDHR.



Exposure to Human Rights by Class Type

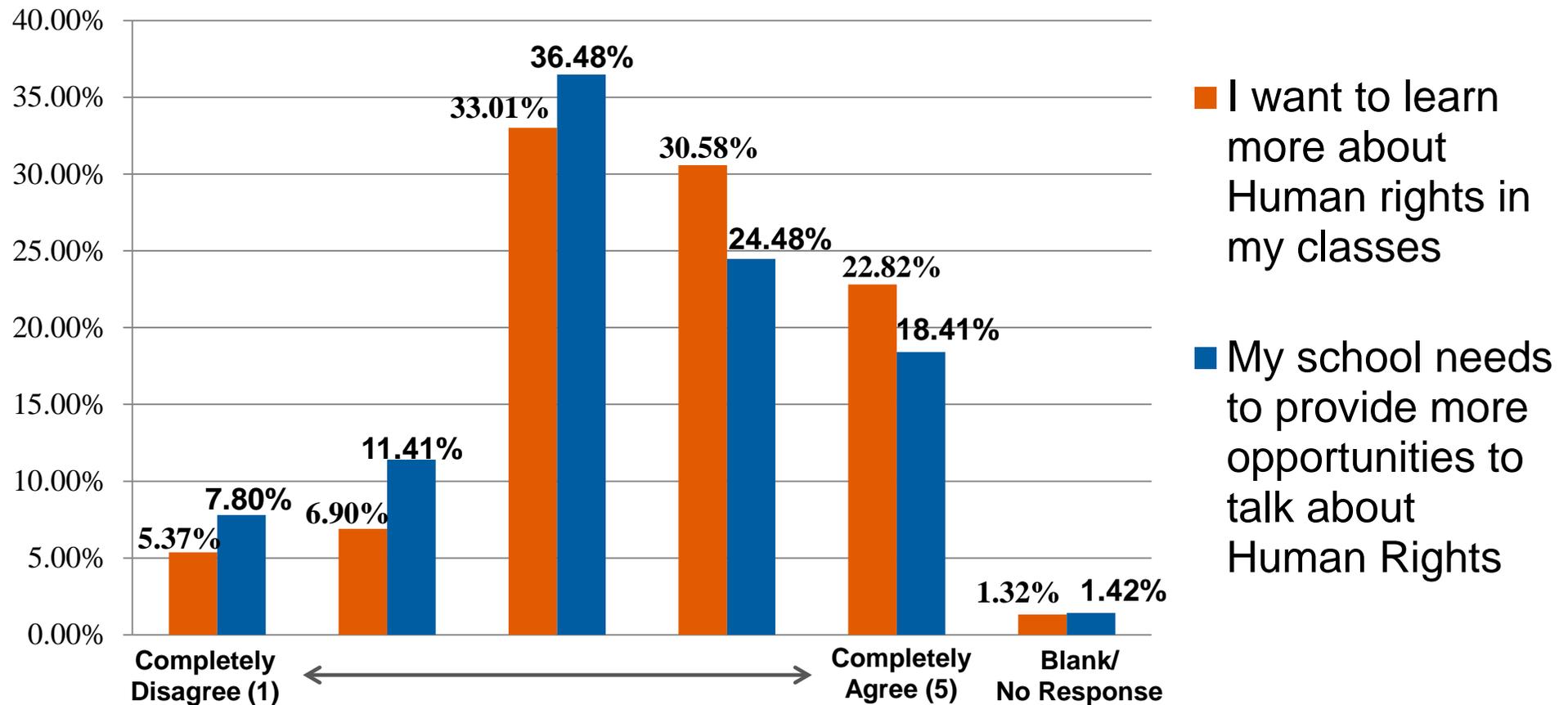
Students learned about human rights in the following classes/extracurricular activities:

| Class | Number of Students |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| History | 1786 |
| English | 820 |
| Government/Civics | 253 |
| Language | 208 |
| Arts | 178 |
| Other* | 203* |

**Includes Math, Science, STF, Student Gov't, etc.*

Student Interest in Human Rights

While more than half of the respondents wanted to learn more about human rights, they did not necessarily want that to be in their classes.



Analysis

Students thought they had knowledge of human rights when they clearly lacked awareness of the basic principles of Human Rights.

However, there is notable student interest in Human Rights as well as a solid foundation for curricular development, suggesting that there is tremendous hope for Human Rights Education (HRE).

Weaknesses of HRE Programs

- **International Law:** The survey reveals that although dialogue about human rights was common, students clearly lacked familiarity with the UDHR, the cornerstone of our modern human rights system.
- **Understanding of Definitions:** Furthermore, while most students were able to at least attempt to define the term "human rights," a significant number of students could not define "human dignity."

Room for Improvement

- **Foundations for Change:** The report was also promising, however, as it suggests that the foundations needed to develop HRE curriculum programming are already in place; most students (approximately 75%) cited "hearing" about human rights in their classes.
- **Student Interest:** The study also found significant student interest in Human Rights, both for themselves and for an expansion of programming in their schools.

Implications for Curricular Development:

- **Altering Curricular Approach:** Survey results indicate that students *would* like to learn about human rights but may not favor approaching HRE in a traditional educational setting, perhaps suggesting that alternative education styles might be more effective. Students cited learning about human rights in clubs like STF or in student government.
- **Interdisciplinary HRE:** HRE was most common in History, English, and Government/Civics classes, respectively, but in some STF schools it was also found in the curricula of more unconventional courses such as Math, Art, and Language courses, suggesting that there is room for an interdisciplinary approach to HRE to be highly successful.
- **Relevance and Accessibility:** The survey demonstrates student interest in HRE, especially for dialogue on contemporary human rights issues. Based on subjective answers, students were either most familiar with or interested in the *right to vote, speak, or marry and freedom of religion* and would be interested in learning how those rights affect their daily lives.

Taking Responsibility for the Future

***For more information, please visit
the HRW Student Task Force at:***

www.hrwstf.org

- or -

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