

**The Civic Action Project**  
A Collaboration between Constitutional Rights Foundation  
and the Annenberg Foundation

Field Test Evaluation

*I really believe in CAP and what it is trying to change with the government course. I had started a small aspect of this before I joined CAP, but I believe CAP can change the way government is taught nationally.*

CAP Teacher, Clark County School District, NV

During the 2009-2010 school year, the Civic Action Project (CAP) was field-tested in five sites: California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, and Pennsylvania. Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) worked with site coordinators to provide professional development to field test teachers, to develop and implement web-based resources for teachers and students, and to implement a formative evaluation of the program. At the end of the school year, CAP teachers and students were surveyed to gauge the program's potential in terms of:

- A. Usability — How easy is it for teachers to implement CAP in terms of:
  - making connections between CAP and course content.
  - using interactive methodologies in CAP lessons.
  - planning.
  
- B. Use of Research-Based Methodology/Approaches — In designing CAP, CRF met with researchers including Dr. Joseph Kahne, Dr. Diana Hess, and Dr. Melinda Fine to discuss the evaluation of this field test. The researchers agreed that if CRF embedded into CAP approaches that are proven by research to increase student civic capacities, then the evaluation should seek to determine if those approaches were implemented by teachers and experienced by students.
  
- C. Impact on Students — Though the evaluation was formative, CRF wanted to gather data about student outcomes. Data were collected through student and teacher surveys.

In addition to end-of-year surveys, much information was collected through the CAP web site including students' work and comments on their learning, teacher evaluations of each CAP lesson, and teachers' feedback on different components of the program and their advice for improving the program. More information about CRF's evaluation plan is available.

The following summarizes findings from the CAP field test organized by the major program components: **Student Civic Actions** and **Classroom Lessons**, followed by additional teacher and student comments that reflect **student outcomes**.

### **Student Civic Actions**

Central to CAP is students engaging in civic actions to address a real issue that they care about. They experience project-based, authentic learning linked to their government course. CAP

challenges students to apply the content and skills they learn in a government course to the real world by working on an actual problem, issue, or policy.

CAP provides students with a structure for identifying policies or issues they will work on, for planning and implementing civic actions, and for reflecting on the content, skills, and civic dispositions they acquire through the process. From the CAP web site, students or teachers can download the CAP Planner that includes: CAP Proposal, Thinking it Through, Civic Action, and Report forms that can be completed and handed in to their teachers electronically or “in the basket.” Students can access additional resources and advice on the web site about each item on the CAP forms. These layers of additional help for students decrease their dependency on teachers, and teachers are able to easily track students’ progress, intervening if necessary, without using a lot of instructional time.

The CAP student and teacher survey results indicate that:

- All of the teachers used CAP Planner forms to structure students’ civic actions.
- Teachers were satisfied with this component of CAP in terms of its effectiveness and ease of use with students.
- Teachers were able to use the planning forms with a variety of learners. For example, with AP students, teachers expected more rigor in students’ responses to the prompts. Our goal was to provide teachers with a tool that could be used with students of all achievement levels and that teachers could adjust the expectations to fit the learners without having to create new materials.
- The prompts from the CAP Planner forms became the basis of essays, oral presentations, and media presentations (and combinations of all three) for students to present their CAPs. We are pleased with this as one of the goals of our curriculum development was to create components that could be used in a variety of settings and adapted to meet a variety of teacher/student needs.
- The CAP Planner forms and “help” components provided structure for the students, helping them with the process and with critical thinking about their issues and actions. By reviewing student work, we (and teachers) have been able to assess student learning.
- All of the teacher surveys reported that the Civic Action component of CAP is, overall, “Very Successful” or “Successful” (on a four point scale with none reporting unsuccessful or very unsuccessful).

According to our initial analysis of program evaluation data, all of the students completed civic action projects. In fact, teachers commented both to staff and in their surveys that one of the highlights of CAP is that **every student learned that he or she can do something**. Teachers also expressed surprise that students were able to accomplish as much as they did in their civic actions, and both students and teachers reflected that they wished they had had more time to work on their issues (this came mainly from teachers who did not assign the CAP projects at the beginning of the course and now understand the importance of giving the students time to impact

their issues.)

CAP is designed to provide opportunities for student decision-making and problem solving. This is important because research shows that civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions are acquired to a greater degree through student-driven activities and that students need opportunities to work on and discuss issues that matter to them. Further, teachers have limited class time to devote to student projects, thus the more student-driven CAP activities are, the more students are “dosing” themselves with the intervention.

According to CAP student surveys, students did, indeed, perceive that they drove their CAP activities. Many commented that it is important to choose an issue that “you really care about” because “you are going to work really hard on it.” Additional survey comments included:

- “I learned how passionate I am about my issue.”
- “At first, I didn’t care that much about the issue because I was trying to get the assignment done. But as I worked on it, I started caring a lot about it. I saw how it impacted people and wanted to do something.”

In fact, student surveys indicate that CAP is effective in reaching its overarching goals:

88% of the students said that CAP helped them become more effective citizens.

82% said CAP helped them think of themselves as problem solvers.

94% said CAP helped them think more about issues/problems/policies.

91% said CAP helped them believe that they can do things to make a difference in society.

## **CAP Classroom Lessons**

This component consists of 14 classroom lessons that build students’ civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions so that they can identify an issue and take civic actions to address that issue. The **first five** lessons are critical to providing students with content and skills they need to identify a policy or issue to work on and to begin addressing it through civic actions. The remaining nine lessons focus on more specific content, skills, and ways of thinking about addressing policy and issues through effective civic actions. All of the lessons were designed to support the typical high school U.S. government course, and lessons are aligned to state standards for the piloting sites.

Throughout the field test, both survey and anecdotal information was collected to ensure that the CAP program was “teacher-friendly” and could be implemented in a typical high school setting. Design considerations included the realities schools and teachers face such as restrictions on instructional time; lack of resources for special projects, supplies, field trips, etc.; and need for curriculum to support standards-based instruction.

Over 50 teachers reviewed and commented on the CAP lessons, with all of them piloting at least one lesson with students. Based on this review, the curriculum was revised for the formal field test with approximately 30 teachers. Teachers shared feedback, ideas, and adaptations of the curriculum throughout the field test. The resources they created and their input has been integrated into the lessons, as well as the other web-based resources for CAP.

On the final survey, all but one of the CAP teachers reported that the amount of planning time they spent to implement CAP was “Acceptable” (the alternate choice was “Unacceptable”). All of the CAP teachers report that they were “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied” with:

- Ease of use of the teaching methods in the CAP lessons.
- Ease of engaging students in the civic action component.
- CAP as an effective means for students to apply what they learned in their courses.
- Use of CAP as an assessment of civic content, skills, and desired dispositional outcomes.

In designing CAP, a major goal was to provide a model that could work in different environments and would be flexible to meet teachers’ and students’ needs.

CAP was implemented successfully in a variety of ways and settings. Teachers integrated CAP into quarter, semester, and year-long courses, depending on the state’s U.S. government course requirement. In some classrooms, CAP was fully integrated throughout the course, while in others, CAP was used as a special unit near the end of the term. Most CAP students were seniors, but in one site, CAP was used effectively with ninth grade students. CAP field-test classes included advanced placement (AP), honors, and global studies, but the majority of the field-test students were in “regular” government courses. CAP sites included schools in underserved, lower socio-economic settings, as well as in affluent communities. Teachers seemed to find CAP easy to adapt to their particular course and students, with AP teachers adding additional expectations such as a deep analysis of economic impacts related to their selected policy and rigorous reporting of civic actions.

In one school, CAP was piloted school-wide as the curriculum to drive required senior projects. Two of the CAP sites were Small Learning Communities with Law/Government/Social Justice themes. In several schools, CAP is being used to help high school students with required service-learning projects.

Almost all of the field-test teachers provided students with the choice of working as a whole class on one issue or working in small groups on issues they could select. The majority of CAP classes chose to work in small groups with students selecting the issues they were most interested in. In several classes, students who had a specific interest were allowed to work independently, in other classes, students had to join a group whose issue was most appealing. Based on students’ surveys as well as CAP reports and essays, many found working in groups to be one of the greatest challenges, yet they were able to articulate the civic skills and dispositions they gained through the experience.

One teacher had students choose a theme. In one of her classes, students were divided into committees responsible for different types of civic actions. In another class students worked on more specific issues related to an overarching theme (theme: substance abuse, CAP: need for teen counseling, stronger consequences for underage drinking, etc.).

Based on the feedback from teachers, analysis of student work, and student surveys, it appears that the goals of CAP in terms of student outcomes were evident whether students were working on a whole-class project, in small groups, or individually. The student work and surveys also

indicate that students from different socio-economic, racial/ethnic, and ability levels benefit from the program.

As mentioned in the introduction, CRF worked with leading researchers in the field of civic education to develop the evaluation model for this field test. Because of CRF’s track-record in developing and working with outside researchers to use experimental design in evaluating its civic education programs, the researchers advised CRF to deeply embed research-based promising approaches that impact students’ civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The promising approaches embedded in CAP are drawn from *The Civic Mission of Schools* report published in 2003 by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Research on Civic Learning and Education (CIRCLE) as well as the evaluation completed on CRF’s CityWorks program in 2001 by Joe Kahne, Ellen Middaugh, and Bernadette Chi.

Student surveys asked them to report the amount of opportunities they had to participate in activities reflective of research-based practices in civic education:

| <b>Research-based Promising Approach</b>  | <b>Not at all</b> | <b>A Little</b> | <b>A Lot</b> |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Discuss relevant issues and/or current events                                     | 3%                | 36%             | 62%          |
| Participate in role play/simulation:  | 23%               | 52%             | 65%          |
| Make decisions  | 3%                | 32%             | 65%          |
| Work on a problem or issue you care about   | 4%                | 26%             | 70%          |
| Work with other students  | 4%                | 18%             | 78%          |
| Discuss assignments, current events, politics with adults other than your teacher | 12%               | 40%             | 48%          |

These results suggest that CAP embeds research-based promising approaches and that students recognize these opportunities. There is a slight anomaly in student responses about role plays and simulations because based on their teacher surveys, these students did participate in CAP lessons that use those methods. It is possible that a higher response of “not at all” was caused by students being unfamiliar with the terms.

Based on data collected from teachers and students thus far, CRF is excited about the success of the CAP curriculum components in achieving the goals of this project: increasing students’ civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions as they address a policy-related issue through meaningful civic actions.

## **Student Outcomes**

CRF hopes to secure funding to conduct a formal evaluation using an experimental design on the CAP program, especially given the results of the field test indicating CAP’s impact on students’ civic knowledge, skills, and dispositional outcomes. The following student and teacher comments indicate that CAP is effective in providing students with a high-quality civic education experience.

Teacher comments from end-of-year surveys:

- *CAP reminds us why we became social studies teachers — to have students become better learners, to understand that there is a society out there that is bigger than themselves, to*

*learn to express themselves in a formal way, and to be engaged with the world around them.*

- *It was WONDERFUL seeing the smiles on students' faces when they knew their voices could be heard! For example, many students were able to speak with local government officials, law enforcement, leaders in non-profit agencies, and other adults...and the adults listened.*
- *I have some students from first term that are still working on their project nine-weeks after the class ended. Some projects have turned into clubs such as the "Healthy Eating Club," a "Save Lopez Elementary" group (which is a part of a larger community movement), and an "Organ Donor Awareness" group. [LATE BREAKING NEWS: Our district has just decided that it will shelve plans to close Lopez Elementary School. CAP kids are partly responsible for this action!!!]*
- *The highlight of my school year was CAP as a whole. My students were able to start a plastic/aluminum program, changed the PDA policy to incorporate new language that made it provide equal treatment of students of any sexuality and they developed a homelessness week and also did a service project.*

Students were asked to reflect on what they learned through the CAP program. The most common types of responses are included in the chart below.

| Sample Student Responses: What Did You Learn Through Participating in CAP?   |   |
|--|---|
| I learned that things can be changed with a little determination and will power. Oh, and planning.   | There are many steps to building a policy like goals, rivals, advantages, disadvantages, and then evaluate it. (This reflects CAP's G.R.A.D.E. policy evaluation tool.) |
| I learned that I (teens, students, youth) can make a difference (in my community, socially, politically).                                  | Who and how to contact to help the education system better.   |
| I learned how to get something done... what it requires and I learned how to create a policy.  | That bad policies CAN be changed.   |
| That it was very hard to get policy changed, but it was also kinda fun.  | I learned that everyone has their own opinions and if you don't agree, it's easy to talk it out and reason with each other.   |
| I learned how to write a letter the right way. (Additional students mentioned essays, persuasive arguments, Public Service Announcements.) | It's important to help out your community.  |
| I learned that people are easier to work with if they are well-informed.   | I learned to put ideas into something real not just in my head.   |
| I learned that I can try to fix a problem.   | I can be a voice for those who do not have one.   |
| It's easier than I thought to talk to people.  | Not only did I learn a lot about the issue, but also about the policies.  |
| I learned that if you want to get something done that affects you, you will have to work for it.   | I learned that many policies and problems can't be solved by just one person speaking out.  |
| You can make changes by working with special interest groups.  | I learned that there is a process to getting a policy heard by the school board and a process to get it approved.   |
|  | That policies are hard to modify, but in big numbers it's easier.   |

In addition to surveying students about their own learning, teachers were asked to identify student outcomes they attribute to CAP.

| Sample Teacher Responses:<br>What do you think were the three most important things students learned as a result of participating in CAP?  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>Can do, self advocate, process of policy change.</p> <p>Self responsibility, action can be taken through govt. channels, a sense of accomplishment that cannot be found through worksheets.</p> <p>Understanding what it means to be an active citizen, knowing they DO have a VOICE, they are able to DO the civic actions and not just read about them in a text book.</p> <p>They can cause change, there are a variety of issues within our own community, public officials are accessible to them.</p> <p>How to approach government through research, policy development, and problem solving; how to recognize a problem and evaluate how others are addressing the problem; how they can be agents of change.</p> <p>How to be engaged in formal research; to write in a persuasive manner; to care about things in the community--that it shapes us.</p> | <p>Organizational skills, presentation skills, problem-solving skills<br/>How to evaluate policy, how to plan their own policy, the value in knowing how to impact public policy as a citizen.</p> <p>Empowering students to influence government and its decisions, understanding the three levels of government and the different roles each plays, gaining skills to include specific supporting details to convince government officials about their point of view.</p> <p>The size and scope of government, evaluation of public policy, means by which we practice civic engagement.</p> <p>They are an important part of our civic life, they can make meaningful difference in the world, how policies are enacted.</p> <p>Individual actions matter, research skills, community involvement.</p> <p>Using GRADE to analyze public policy, better understanding of good citizenship, that can access their elected representatives and feel comfortable doing so.</p> |

To provide an idea of the types of issues/policies/problems students worked on with CAP, here are sample student responses to, “What was your CAP issue/problem/policy?” A list of these issues is attached.

### Summary

The field test is yielding exciting results, especially in terms of student work—the heart of CAP. CAP students are choosing problems, issues, and policies to address at every level: school, city, county, state, federal, and global (a team of teachers used CAP in a Global Studies course). CAP students gain and apply government content and develop a variety of civic, literacy, and research skills through their civic actions. CAP students are developing the dispositions of effective, engaged citizens — hope, determination, optimistic pragmatism, an appreciation of teamwork, and much more. CAP could be a one of the most significant programs in civic education because of its impact on students and its integration into a course required by most and taught by all school districts in the United States.

## Sample Issues, Problems, and Policies Addressed by CAP Students 2009-2010

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Puppy mill policies. (Several of CAPs in various sites.)</p> <p>Building a skate park. (Several.)</p> <p>High School drop-out rate.</p> <p>Fixing bike trails. (Several.)</p> <p>We worked on the pit-bull ban and how it affects people that own that type of dog.</p> <p>We worked on bullying. (Several.)</p> <p>I worked on trying to make the school daycare/nursery available to students.</p> <p>We worked on modifying the tardy policy. (Several.)</p> <p>Lowerclassmen allowed off campus with good GPA/parent perm.</p> <p>Trying to get our school a mandatory drug testing program.</p> <p>Drug use and support groups at our school.</p> <p>Putting recycling bins in parks.</p> <p>We tried to save energy in schools so we could keep expensive computers in our school for 2011's government budget cuts.</p> <p>Getting a homeless shelter in my community.</p> <p>Homeless teens.</p> <p>Getting an LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) program for our school.</p> <p>Changing a Store policy about teen loitering.</p> <p>Getting a skate park for local skaters. (Several.)</p> <p>Making more elective classes available.</p> <p>The policy of legalizing marijuana for medical vs. financial benefits. (There were several projects in this area with some opposed to legalizing, others in favor, and one addressing how current policy is enforced.)</p> <p>Mentor program.</p> <p>Child abuse.</p> | <p>Enforcement of a no kill policy at local animal shelter.</p> <p>Energy efficient transportation for schools.</p> <p>School violence.</p> <p>To put an etiquette class in our daily schedule.</p> <p>Better education for students.</p> <p>Ipod issues.</p> <p>Death Penalty.</p> <p>Funding for Art programs at school.</p> <p>Helping a local wolf sanctuary with recent policy restricting number of wolves it serves.</p> <p>Saving a local elementary school from closure.</p> <p>Including special needs students more in regular school activities.</p> <p>Getting streetlights or stoplights in neighborhoods in our city. (several)</p> <p>Unfair juvenile sentencing laws.</p> <p>Crystal meth labs.</p> <p>Changing internet filter policies in our district to let educational programs and resources be accessed by students and teachers.</p> <p>Gangs.</p> <p>Teen Suicide. (Several.)</p> <p>Effects of drunk driving.</p> <p>Treatment of undocumented immigrants.</p> <p>The legalization of gay marriage. (Several.)</p> <p>I worked on drug and alcohol abuse. (Several.)</p> <p>Unhealthy food served in the lunch rooms. (Several.)</p> <p>Starting school later means better learning for high schoolers. (We start at 7 am!)</p> <p>More college prep. Classes at our school.</p> <p>Enforcement and awareness of texting/driving laws.</p> |
|---|---|

## CAP Evaluation Design

We have designed the project evaluation to gauge its **usability** in different settings, amount and type of **professional development** necessary for effective implementation of CAP, and assurance that **best practices** are “locked” into the program design and thus do, indeed, **impact students**. Below is our current plan, though the evaluation design may expand as we move into the 2009-2010 school year. We have already collected and used teacher feedback on the lessons and on their current professional development needs.

**Usability.** We are interested in making sure that CAP can and will be adopted by teachers of different abilities and interests in a variety of settings. The evaluation design includes:

(A) Diversity of field-test teachers:

- Veteran government teachers and novice teachers.
- Teachers most comfortable with traditional methods and teachers who use project-based learning strategies on a regular basis.
- Teachers with high and low access to technology in their classrooms.

(B) Diversity among field-test settings:

- Affluent as well as underserved school communities; high and low performing schools.
- Small (-700 students) and large (+1,500 students) high schools
- Academies, Small Learning Communities, traditional high schools, virtual high schools, parochial high schools.
- School communities with traditionally “liberal” and “conservative” voters.

(C) Monitoring of CAP’s capacities to support and be integrated into the required high school government/civics course:

- Lesson-by-lesson teacher evaluation of how the lesson fits with their “regular” course in terms of content, standards alignment, district/school initiatives and mandates.
- Teacher evaluation of student civic action component in terms of its use as an application and/or assessment of desired course content, skills, and dispositional outcomes.
- Teacher evaluation of ease of use including requirements for preparation/planning, use of methodology (small group/cooperative learning, simulation, discussion strategies) for CAP lessons.
- Teacher evaluation of ease of use including the preparation/planning, monitoring/tracking of students as students engage in civic actions.

(D) Identifying different models for implementing CAP:

- We are expecting the field test to yield a variety of successful models for implementing CAP. For example, some teachers will divide the students into civic action teams of 2-6 students and each team will work together to identify and take civic actions to address an issue (“small group model”). Other teachers will work with an entire class to identify and address an issue through

the course of the semester or school year (“whole class model”), while some teachers will use CAP as a project-based activity completed by individual students (individual model).

- Teachers and site coordinators will document different models and provide examples and strategies to support program expansion.
- Teachers and site coordinators will identify and document “what works” in particular settings to support program expansion.

**Professional Development.** We want to ensure that CAP can be effectively implemented and expanded in a cost-effective way, thus requiring little financial investment in professional development.

(A) Monitoring of site coordinator activities:

- Time spent in a variety of professional development activities (face-to-face, individual e-mail/phone, discussion board) to be compared with levels of implementation by teachers.
- Reports from site coordinators about the types of professional development activities that were most effective including those led by the coordinator and those that were teacher-to-teacher driven.
- Types of initial professional development and follow-up support requested by teachers.

(B) Teacher satisfaction in terms of:

- Motivation to implement the different components of CAP.
- Effectiveness of different types of professional development activities in preparing teachers to implement the program and in providing follow-up support. Activities include a variety of strategies used by site coordinators as well as a variety of web-delivered professional development resources.
- Responsiveness of program staff and coordinators in providing requested activities. For example, the teachers expressed a high interest in and need for us to provide opportunities for them to support each other, and we immediately began work on a discussion board.

(C) Potential for program expansion:

- Monitoring field-test sites as different models of expansion are explored including:
  - A cadre of lead teachers training others. (Philadelphia sent a team of teachers to Los Angeles who will work with 15 others to implement CAP.)
  - Expansion through department chairs. (Teachers who serve as department chairs for History-Social Science are introducing CAP to the rest of their teachers in Nevada, Colorado, Los Angeles, and Chicago)
  - Team teaching. (We are asking that each teacher bring at least one colleague on board during the 2009-2010 school year.)

**Inclusion of research-based practices.** Since we are able to rely on research-based practices that have been proven to increase students’ civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, we want to

ensure that these practices are interwoven tightly enough into the program design so that when CAP is implemented it has a strong potential to impact students.

(A) Teacher recognition and implementation of best-practices:

- All of the teachers have been introduced to the *Civic Mission of Schools'* Promising Approaches as well as additional research-based practices including the use of outside resource people, providing opportunities for parent/student discussions, and various critical-thinking and cooperative learning strategies. We have noted that teachers came to the project with a range of prior knowledge about these practices.
- Teacher evaluation each lesson's inclusion of best practices as well as its potential to support best practices (for example, teachers reported that particular lessons are well-suited to having an outside resource person co-teach.)
- Teacher surveys will be conducted to gather data as to the best practices they believe they implemented through the CAP program and to what degree each was implemented.

B) Student perceptions of civic opportunities provided during their government/civics course:

- Using items from Joe Kahne's *California Survey of Civic Education*, we will survey students identified by their teachers as having "participated in CAP lessons and civic actions" to ensure that they received civic learning opportunities, including the applicable *Civic Mission of Schools'* Promising Approaches as well as other research-based approaches that support civic learning and engagement.
- We will correlate the student and teacher surveys, consulting with our advisors as necessary.

C) Student Outcomes:

- Though we are not conducting a full-scale evaluation of student impact, we do intend to collect anecdotal data to support CAP's potential to increase student civic learning and engagement. Teachers, students, and site coordinators will continuously be invited and encouraged to share experiences and how the program is impacting students.
- We will collect student work generated by the CAP lessons and by the student civic action component to provide examples for future CAP teachers and students, analyzing both anecdotal information and student work to see if patterns emerge in terms of demographics, school settings, and teachers.