

Civic Action Project (CAP) and College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Inquiry in Social Studies Standards

Constitutional Rights Foundation’s Civic Action Project (CAP) provides a real-world project-based learning component for the high school government/civics course. CAP lessons provide essential concepts students need to make connections between issues/problems + public policy/government + citizens, as well as tools they need to be able to identify and address an issue that matters to them. CAP lessons make content relevant to students by using real case studies and examples of issues that other students have worked on through CAP.

The project-based learning component of CAP has students apply civics concepts and tools as they identify an issue that matters to them, make connections to public policy, develop and implement civic actions to address their chosen issue, and evaluate the impact they made through their CAP projects.

CAP is aligned to Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts and History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects and supports the C3 Framework’s four dimensions.

Dimension 1: Developing Questions & Planning Inquiries

CAP provides a set of documents, called the CAP Planner, that guide students through identifying and addressing an issue or problem that matters to them. The Common Core State Standards-aligned version of the CAP Planner is also aligned to C3. The Planners require students to formulate questions and plan their inquiry.

Typically, students generate civic-based compelling questions to begin their inquiry such as, “How can the problem of _____ be solved?”, “What can be done to improve _____ so that _____ happens?, or “Why is _____ happening and how can it be addressed?”

Students’ CAP projects typically seek to improve or increase justice/fairness, quality of life, and safety/well-being. It is key that students must connect their issue to public policy.

Active and responsible citizens identify and analyze public problems; deliberate with other people about how to define and address issues; take constructive, collaborative action; reflect on their actions; create and sustain groups; and influence institutions both large and small. ...Teaching students to act in these ways—as citizens—significantly enhances preparation for college and career.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3)
Framework for the Social Studies State
Standards

As students research their issues, they find that there are varying perspectives and must acknowledge and integrate this into their work, often needing to rethink and revise supporting questions and civic actions.

Students formulate supporting questions throughout their CAP experience, continuously demonstrating deeper knowledge they gain about the issue they are working on.

Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Concepts & Tools (Civics)

Most of the concepts and tools listed in C3’s Dimension 2 for Civics are addressed in CAP lessons. For example:

D2.Civ.4.9-12. Explain how the U.S. Constitution establishes a system of government that has powers, responsibilities, and limits that have changed over time and that are still contested.

Several CAP lessons have students analyze the roles of the different branches of government in making and enforcing public policy, and the role of the judiciary in amending, restricting, and overturning policy.

Example: *Lesson 5: Policymaking in the Three Branches of Government* introduces students to executive, legislative, and judicial policymaking and to policy evaluation. First, students discuss how policy can be made by each of the branches. Then they read about and discuss how the Chicago City Council passed an ordinance to suppress gang activity and how each branch of government was involved in the policy. Students are introduced to a policy-analysis rubric (GRADE) and apply it to the Chicago gang ordinance.

D2.Civ.13.9-12. Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes, and related consequences.

Throughout the CAP lessons students analyze and evaluate public policy, often using real-world case studies. Students are provided with a policy-analysis tool called GRADE, which they are required to use in several lessons:

- G- Goal of the policy
- R- Rivals & Advocates
- A- Advantages
- D- Disadvantage
- E- Evaluate

In addition to the CAP lessons, the project-based learning part of CAP also addresses C3's Dimension 2. For example:

D2.Civ.7.9-12. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others.

Students work with peers in teams to address their selected issues, and they also work with policy-makers, community groups, and agencies. They are required to be respectful, they learn the value of gathering different points of view in order to inform their own decisions, and more.

Civ.9.9-12. Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings.

Throughout their CAP experience, students use evidence-based reasoning to discuss and deliberate. Interactive application activities, including simulations and discussions are embedded throughout the CAP lessons that require deliberation among students, and students also must use deliberative processes as they interview, negotiate, and agree or disagree with policy-makers and community members they interact with as they take civic actions to address their issues.

D2.Civ.11.9-12. Evaluate multiple procedures for making governmental decisions at the local, state, national, and international levels in terms of the civic purposes achieved.

Most CAP projects focus on local or state issues and students regularly get an up-close look at how government policies and decisions made, enforced (or not), and sometimes abolished. The CAP Planner requires students to reflect on each civic action they take, providing details about outcomes and their own observations about processes.



Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources & Using Evidence

The CAP lessons provide practice in evaluating sources and using evidence to formulate arguments and draw conclusions. For example:

D3.2.9-12. Evaluate the credibility of a source by examining how experts value the source.

D3.3.9-12. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.

Lesson 7: Policymaking at the Local Level gets students to examine an instance of policymaking at a school board, one of the most common institutions at the local level. First, students read about and discuss a common local (and national) problem, the dropout rate. Then they role play subcommittees of a hypothetical school board, examine documents about the dropout problem, and craft a policy to address the dropout problem. Finally, they exchange policies with other groups and evaluate one another's policies using the GRADE rubric.

The CAP project requires students to gather information from a wide range of sources about the issue they are working on. They are to analyze the sources in terms of their value in answering their research questions, as well as identify bias in the sources. Students assigned to use the Common Core version of the CAP Planners keep an annotated bibliography of sources and are required to identify their top five sources at the end of CAP, thus re-evaluating the sources they collected and how these sources shaped their thinking about the issue, informed civic actions they took, and conclusions they drew.



Typically, sources students discover and use for CAP include interviews, documents including policies and studies, newspaper articles and electronic news stories, websites, electronic communications with outside resource people and policy makers, and notes from public meetings they attend.

Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

The heart of CAP is about students taking informed civic actions to address issues that matter to them. The CAP Planner is designed to capture students' critical thinking processes as they work on their issues.

CAP supports all of the objectives listed in C3's Dimension 4 for Civics and here are a few examples:

D4.3.9-12. Present adaptations of arguments and explanations that feature evocative ideas and perspectives on issues and topics to reach a range of audiences and venues outside the classroom using print and oral technologies (e.g., posters, essays, letters, debates, speeches, reports, and maps) and digital technologies (e.g., Internet, social media, and digital documentary).

Students are encouraged to build constituencies as they work toward change and they develop their own outreach efforts using a range of media including posters, blogs, videos, and electronic

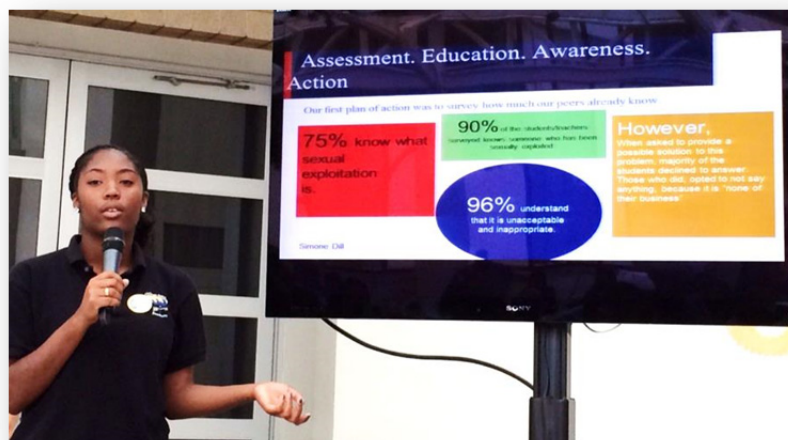
presentations. CAP offers a Public Service Announcement activity and contest that has students create videos, PowerPoint, or Prezi presentations to persuade others to care about and take action on their issues.

In addition, CAP teachers provide an opportunity for students to showcase their work and require students to create presentations that include arguments, explanations, actions, and results. A “CAPfolio” contest requiring students to use electronic media to present their CAP experience is also offered.

D4.6.9-12. Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems; instances of such problems in multiple contexts; and challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address these problems over time and place.

Students practice issue and policy analysis in several CAP lessons. The lessons model the use of interdisciplinary lenses, such as the historical lens to explore how constituencies were built during the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Students then apply these critical thinking skills to their own CAP projects, especially in terms of analyzing cause/effect, context of their issue/problem, and learning from others’ who have tried to address or are currently working on the issue.



Students often find it necessary to use the lenses of history, economics, geography, political science, and other disciplines as they analyze the causes and effects of issues and develop and implement civic actions.

D4.7.9-12. Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning.

D4.8.9-12. Apply a range of deliberative and democratic strategies and procedures to make decisions and take action in their classrooms, schools, and out-of-school civic contexts.

CAP was designed with intention to engage students in complex critical thinking—using the types of reasoning and decision-making skills that are necessary to address real issues in their schools and communities.

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www.crfcap.org

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