

## CAP and Proven Practices in Civic Education

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools (CMS) has published its most recent report, *Guardian of Democracy*. This new report expands on the *2003 Civic Mission of Schools* report, which listed promising approaches of civic education. CRF contributed to the research for the original report and embedded the promising practices in the **Civic Action Project**. The *Guardian of Democracy* report validates the “promising approaches” as “proven practices.”

The following provides some examples of how the Civic Mission of Schools six proven practices are embedded in CAP:

**1. Classroom Instruction:** Schools should provide instruction in government, history, economics, law, and democracy.

CAP lessons are aligned with content standards for the high school U.S. government course. As groups of teachers from different states start CAP, we align each lesson to their state standards. CAP lessons focus on government content and include readings, discussion questions, and interactive activities in which content is reinforced. Students apply content and skills from the lessons as they choose issues; take civic actions to address their issues; and reflect upon and assess what they are learning throughout their CAP experience, and how it relates back to their government course.

(Note: Please sign on to the CAP web site to use the links. User: capguest Pass: crfcap.)

Example Links:

[Standards Alignment](#) — Click on any of the states to see the specific standards the lesson addresses.

[Democracy](#), [Government](#), [Law](#), and [History](#) Content — CAP content, as a whole, focuses on issues of democracy. Each lesson explores public policy using both authentic case studies and hypotheticals. The lenses of history, law, and [economics](#) are used to:

- illustrate how public policy is related to current issues.
- explore the role of government and the role of citizens in creating, modifying, eliminating, enforcing, and leveraging public policy.

**2. Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Issues:** Schools should incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events into the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.

CAP provides multiple opportunities for students to discuss current and controversial issues that matter to them:

**Embedded in Lessons** — Each CAP lesson provides teachers with [prompts](#) to engage students in discussion. In addition, several CAP lessons require students to discuss their chosen issues in [small groups](#). Many of the issues students choose are controversial (at least among high school students) such as same-sex marriage, establishing policies related to breeding or non-breeding of pit bulls, euthanasia, policies related to gun control, and banning the use of Facebook for both students and teachers at school.

**CAP Discussion Board** — Students talk about their issues, share ideas, and get feedback and guidance from their peers and from CAP teachers. Some teachers [assign students to respond](#) to prompts taken from the CAP Planners (documents that guide students through the processes of identifying and proposing an issue to work on, doing research, formulating and taking civic actions, reporting on their CAP experiences). Last semester, we noticed that teachers were responding to each others' students, providing web sites related to the students' issues and advice about their civic actions. ([Sample thread — team teaching](#))

We are encouraging more teachers to share students as this could be an incredibly powerful way to use **blended learning**, particularly in civic education. CAP has the potential to become a national social-network built around discussion of issues among youth and government teachers, and not just a theoretical discussion, but one that leads to students' taking authentic civic actions to address issues that matter to them.

Many of the blended learning programs for K–12 provide video/audio lectures, games, or question/answer assignments that support what is being taught in the classroom, but few, if any, offer opportunities to interact with others around the content. CAP could be an important model for *project-based blended learning* in that it provides resources for students that support the classroom lessons *and* ongoing support and advice from teachers, CAP staff, and other students. It also offers an abundance of student work for them to look at and learn from and gives recognition for their work.

**CAP Blog Feature** — Students use the blog feature to express their opinions about the issues they are working on. (Some posts are from individual CAP students from various schools who are simply talking about the issue they are working on.) Like the discussion board, teachers are also taking advantage of the blog feature to create writing assignments. For example, a Colorado teacher has developed a [“What’s the Fuss?”](#) assignment, which asks students to describe why they think their issues are important. This assignment is now used by other teachers as well as by individual students adopting the format of Colorado students' blogs. In addition, some CAP teachers require students to post their final report, PowerPoints, and letters to public officials on the CAP blog page.

**3. Service-Learning:** Schools should design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.

**Civic Engagement** — The goal of the CAP program is to engage students in authentic civic actions to address a problem, issue, or policy that matters to them. For many years, CRF has integrated service learning into civic education programs. We utilized our deep experience in this area to develop CAP as a workable and doable civic-based service-learning program and we aligned [CAP with service-learning](#) best practices.

**Policy Connections** — In CAP, students must describe specific policy implications as they propose and work on their selected issue. Five ways of thinking about policy connections are provided through a [video](#), embedded in two CAP lessons, and in the layered [help](#) feature of the CAP planning forms. We think that requiring students to make policy connections helps both teachers and students see CAP’s connection to the government course and to *civic* participation as opposed to more traditional service-learning programs.

[CAP Planner](#) — The CAP Planner consists of a set of four documents: CAP Proposal, Thinking It Through, Civic Action, and CAP Report. In each, students respond to carefully designed prompts that reflect a metacognitive approach to the way average citizens approach problems and issues in their communities. The prompts were designed by deconstructing the thinking processes of individuals who, themselves, have taken civic actions to address a problem, issue, or policy. Unlike the linear action planning process in ACT and CityWorks, CAP encourages a more organic approach as students continuously reframe the way they think about the issue they are working on and reflect and build upon the actions they take.

The CAP Planner also provides a way for teachers to monitor students’ progress through the CAP experience and to redirect students who propose civic actions that are overbroad, unsafe or inappropriate. We continue to build the CAP Planner as a model of blended learning with the understanding that one of the most challenging things about project-based learning is teachers not having the class time to spend helping individuals/groups in long-term projects. The CAP planning forms offer layers of help (actually the ACT Handbook layered under each prompt) to make sure students can keep progressing, even if they are not able to meet with their teachers.

Throughout the CAP experience, students are asked to reflect on and describe their own learning in terms of content, skills, and dispositional outcomes and to connect this “learning through doing” to their government course. We continue to work on helping teachers recognize how the planning documents provide assessment of content **and** critical thinking skills.

**4. Extracurricular Activities:** Schools should offer opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities outside of the classroom.

An unintended—but exciting—outcome has been the use of CAP in after-school/club settings and the creation of school clubs through student CAPs. We have a couple of teachers who use CAP in clubs they run (Leadership, Green Club). With staff from the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium, we are currently piloting CAP as a 4H model in North Carolina.

Students at several CAP schools have created clubs out of their CAP experiences. A teen nutrition club was created to support students with eating disorders and several clubs related to LGTB issues have been and still are meeting due to CAPs. The students who started these clubs began their CAPs with the goal of changing school policies. Some succeeded, like in Las Vegas where a school’s PDA (Public Display of Affection) policy was being enforced one way with heterosexual couples and in a harsher way with same-sex couples. The girls who changed the school policy also started a club which is still in existence two years later. The student who started the health club wanted the school to adopt a nutrition class as an elective, but became aware of all that must be done to start a new class—from the school level to the state level—and instead got the buy-in she needed to start this official school club.

**5. School Governance:** Schools should encourage student participation in school governance.

Many CAP students choose school-based issues such as tardy policies, cafeteria food, student parking, school start time, inclusion of special education students in extra-curriculars, recycling programs, and previously mentioned PDA policies and starting new clubs. In all of these cases, students interacted with policy-makers at the school-site and sometimes district levels and were deeply involved in school governance.

**6. Simulations of Democratic Processes:** Schools should encourage students to participate in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

Many of the CAP lessons use simulation and role play activities that put students in the roles of policy-makers and citizens who must solve hypothetical problems reflective of current issues. Two CAP lessons were based on simulations from the CityWorks curriculum that, according to the CityWorks evaluation, were particularly powerful.

In addition to the simulations in CAP lessons, it might be argued the CAP experience as a whole is a simulation of democratic processes.

## **Additional Practices Embedded in CAP**

### **A. Interact with adult role models and policy-makers.**

We know from prior research on CRF programs that providing students with opportunities to interact with adults, particularly adults in authority or policy-making positions, can increase content knowledge and positive civic dispositions, as well as civic skills such as formulating good questions and gaining new perspectives. In addition to providing CAP teachers with suggestions and encouragement to have outside resource people come to CAP classes, we are finding that most students have authentic interactions with adult role models and policy-makers as they work on their issues. Several schools have adopted Bell Gardens High Schools' model of inviting local policy-makers to a CAP culmination in which students share and discuss their work. Building on this model, CRF organized a CAP event with representative students from six schools at L.A. City Hall. Mayor Villaraigosa "toured" the room, talking to every student about his/her CAP issue and civic actions. ([Video from the CAP LA Showcase](#))

### **B. Practice the skills involved in having public conversations about their issues through blogging and a discussion board.**

We are interested in learning more about 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that are and could be embedded in CAP. Though we are pleased to see students and teachers using the discussion and blogging features on the web site, we are exploring ways to engage students in higher levels of critical thinking and deeper discussion. Ideas and suggestions from the advisors are welcome.

### **C. Focus on student work.**

The CAP web site features a large body of student work and, according to teachers and students, they are using this work to improve their own practice. In professional development, instead of simply showing teachers the lessons, we are using student work not only to motivate them to do CAP, but to help them gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge, skills, and dispositional outcomes they are looking for and how to implement CAP to achieve them.

Students are benefiting in two ways. First, those who are posting their work are getting recognition and feedback from teachers, students, and CAP staff. Second, those students who are not posting, but instead are "lurking" report that they are getting good ideas and suggestions for their own CAPs by looking at other students' work and other teachers' posts.

Note: We are not sure why some students visit the web site but do not post. We know that in some cases, teachers use an LCD projector on the only computer available to them to show classes the web site. We know that many CAP schools have little or no access to the web site either because of digital divide issues or because schools and districts block outside access to the Internet. We suspect there is research about

participation versus lurking and would be interested in learning more about how to move students toward engagement rather than observation.

#### **D. Integrate student use of technology.**

Again, the digital divide rears its ugly head, but we are seeing students use technology to promote the issues they work on in CAP by creating Facebook pages and videos posted to [YouTube](#).

In addition, we provide opportunities for students to showcase their CAPs by creating videos or PowerPoints to enter into CAP contests. (Scroll to see [2011 multimedia contest winner](#). Note that we are currently compiling into a CAP case study additional videos of the “Higher Wall” group.)

## *Civic Action Project – Going Electronic*

Go to <http://www.crfcap.org/>

Click on Student Materials.

Login with your user name and password.

Click on your name in the upper left-hand corner under "online users."

You may edit your profile if you would like, but you don't have to.

Click on the "blog" or the "student talk" tab.

Click on "add a new entry."

Write a short entry on:

what your issue is

why you chose that issue

what your goal is

what your next step will be

\*\*\*\*\* (Your next post will be what happened when you took your next step.) \*\*\*\*\*

After you have written all you need to, end it with "Signing Off" and your name (and partners' names) so that everyone gets credit for the blog.

Up to 3 people can get credit for a single blog entry.

Don't forget to log out when you are done!



**Your first blog must be in by \_\_\_\_\_**



The “What’s the Fuss” assignment was created by Tom List from Rocky Mountain High School in Fort Collins, Colorado. Some of the prompts from the CAP Planner are incorporated into the assignment as students propose the issue they would like to work on and make a case as to why this issue is important.

Home: Blogs



**What's the Fuss?**  
by [Jordan Christgau](#) - Tuesday, 8 February 2011, 12:58 PM

Anyone on this site

Jordan Christgau Period 4 We the people Mr. List What's the fuss? One statistic off of <http://www.ccasa.org/statistics.cfm> says 24% (1 in 4) of Colorado women and 6% (1 in 17) Colorado men have experienced a completed or attempted sexual assault in their lifetime. The reason that people should care about this issue is because it's a serious crime that hurts people physically and emotionally. Think about it, what if it was you that it happened to? Wouldn't you say that it would take part of you away? And what if the suspect only got a maximum of 20 years in prison and he got out? Wouldn't you feel uncomfortable knowing that he might sexually assault someone else who is also innocent? Well I know that I would. But even worse what if it happened to your child? The problem that I am working on is the sexual assault on a minor child. I am going to try to get the charges changed and raised for sexual assault on a minor depending on if it was first or second degree sexual assault. Another statistic from <http://www.ccasa.org/statistics.cfm> says According to the Colorado Department of Corrections, 85% of incarcerated sex offenders knew the person they victimized. Another website <http://childabuse.org/Page.aspx?pid=232> says in 2005, approximately 30,000 children were reported abused or neglected and referred for investigation in Colorado. One last statistic from <http://childabuse.org/Page.aspx?pid=232> says an average of 20 children in Colorado die from suspected abuse or neglect every year. According to [http://www.springscriminaldefenceattorney.com/sexual\\_assult\\_attorney.html](http://www.springscriminaldefenceattorney.com/sexual_assult_attorney.html) the Colorado charges against sexual assault on a child is: If convicted of sexual assault against child you may not be allowed to live, work or carry on relationships with young children even with your own, and will be counted as a sex offender. According to my own knowledge about the charges if you are convicted of sexual assault/abuse to a child and are a registered sex offender you cannot marry a teacher, cannot live close to an elementary schools, and cannot live by a day care. Another website <http://www.vanwagnerwood.com/CM/Custom/Sex-minor-crime.asp> explains the degree of rape against a child. First degree sexual assault on a minor child is when a person is convicted of having sexual intercourse with a child who isn't 13 years old. Second degree sexual assault on a minor is when a person is convicted of having sexual intercourse with a person who is 13 years old but who isn't 16 years old. One last statistic from <http://www.ccasa.org/statistics.cfm> says 29.3% of rape victims are under 11 years old, 32.3% of rape victims are between 11-17 years old, and 22.2% of rape victims are between 18-24 years old. I am very interested in going into the special victims unit which is the section of law enforcement that deals with these kinds of crimes. The reason that I want to go into this career is so that I can try and help the victims who were abused get some comfort knowing that we will find their attacker. The first few things I would do is write a letter to the person who is representing Colorado in congress and explain my side of the situation and how I feel like the prison rate should be more than 20 years in prison and then a 20 year probation to me that should be higher up as in 30 to 40 years in prison and the same amount with probation depending on if it was first degree sexual assault on a minor child or second degree sexual assault to a minor child.

Tags: [Sexual assault on a minor child](#)

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[ Modified: Thursday, 10 February 2011, 04:52 PM ]



**What's the fuss?**  
by [Erick Costa](#) - Tuesday, 8 February 2011, 08:24 AM

Anyone on this site

Erick Costa

This August will be the ninetieth anniversary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment of our Constitution, where it was stated that the right to vote will not be denied on the account of a person's sex. This amendment was a big step towards removing de jure discrimination from our laws. Ninety years later we still have much work to do. The policy that i wish to bring to your attention, may not be as serious as removing someone their constitutional and natural born rights based on their sex or race, but it is still a very important step for our country to truly be considered fair and just. Age discrimination has not been taken so seriously, because we all do age, we don't change races, so it has not been taken as serious, but still it is taken very seriously for anyone who is part of the group being discriminated. The law that i am speaking about states that drivers under the age of eighteen are prohibited to use cell phones while driving. The law is not unreasonable, we do need to keep people from using cell phones while driving, but the law is made only for drivers under the age of eighteen, which excludes them from the rights of all other American drivers. This law should be made the same for all drivers, either all drivers are prohibited from using their cell phones while driving, or none are. This has to be brought to our attention, because truly we cannot say that our country is just and fair when we have clear discrimination in our own laws. It is true, the problem is not so great, especially because from the time that a teen gets their driver's license to the time that they become eighteen is a gap of only two years, but that does not take away from the fact that this law is unfair and discriminates against a certain group of American citizens. We would not add into our laws that women drivers are prohibited to use cell phones while driving but no one else is, or that African-American citizens are not allowed to use cell phones, or that Hispanic-Americans are not allowed to use their cell phones, so why would we add that teenagers are not allowed to use their cellphones. The law needs to be changed to NO driver is allowed to use hand held phones while driving.

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**whats the fuss**  
by [Savana Lucas](#) - Tuesday, 8 February 2011, 07:23 AM

Anyone on this site

Savana Lucas

The “you plus two” rule is a rule in Fort Collins that needs to be changed ASAP. There are a lot of problems with this rule. Since were in a recession rent is hard to come up with. It's very hard to get a job now days. By only having two other roommates is not enough to make rent. People are struggling to pay their bills, college payments, and groceries. If it wasn't against the rules to have more than two other roommates, people could have more money to spend on other things. I feel like this rule takes away parts of our freedom. This rule is like a dictatorship.

People should care about changing this rule because it effects are community. If not enough people can pay their rent that means they are left on the street. Also if rent is to much it hurts are economy because no one has extra money to spend on other things. This rule could hurt are community as a whole and already has. I know several people who have been evicted from their homes because they were caught with more than three people living in a house.

There are some solutions to this problem. The best solution would be to totally throw out this rule. Another solution could be to make a rule that says every room in the house can be filled by a person even if it's more than three bedrooms. I know a lot of people don't want to change the “you plus two rule” because too many people in a house will cause too much noise. A solution to this could be after two noise complaints it has to go back to three people in a house. There are many possible solutions to fix this problem. If the rule can't be totally thrown out, then we need to brain storm to come up with a solution to make rent cheaper and not have big party houses as well.

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[ Modified: Tuesday, 8 February 2011, 07:27 AM ]

## The Civic Action Project and the Service-Learning Experience

The following describes how the Civic Action Project is aligned with best-practices in service learning. The matrix of practices was provided to CRF by Terry Pickeral and is based on *K–12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice*. National Youth Leadership Council, 2008.

### Duration and Intensity

CAP is designed to be embedded in a government/civics course with students spending at least a quarter, and more likely a semester, engaged in service learning. CAP requires students to think deeply about community needs as they work on a proposal that identifies an issue they want to work on, describe how this need is evidenced in the community (impact on people, society), and propose the first actions they think will be effective in addressing their identified need.

Students produce documentation of planning and the result of each civic action they take to impact their chosen community need in terms of the impact of their actions as well as reflecting on their own learning by doing (what new content, skills, attitudes you are developing through CAP).

At the end of the course, students are required to produce a CAP Report, which guides them through a process of reflecting on the impact they made on the community need they addressed as well as their own learning. The CAP Proposal, Thinking It Through document, Civic Action document, and CAP Report are part of the CAP Planner that guides students through the process.

CAP provides teachers with five core lessons that focus on specific content knowledge and skills that students need to successfully identify and address a community issue. In addition, CAP provides nine more lessons that focus on specific skills and content to help and inspire students as they are engaged in civic actions including making persuasive arguments/presentations, speaking in front of panels/boards/community groups, and building constituencies. All of the lessons are linked to mandated state standards.

On average, students spend at least 40 hours on CAP.

### Link to Curriculum

CAP is designed to embed service learning into the required government/civics course as a “practicum” for effective, engaged citizenship. CRF has aligned CAP to each teacher’s state standards, and for classes, schools, and districts that have service-learning requirements, CAP provides an exciting and meaningful way for students to meet the requirement.

Throughout the CAP program, students relate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they gain through CAP to their own growth as effective and engaged citizens now and in their futures.

### Partnerships

CAP is student-directed and lets students identify community needs that matter to young people. Thus no set of official community partners is attached to the program. However, CAP requires students to communicate with policy makers, community groups, and others who can share

expertise on the identified need and help students with their civic actions. In several CAPs, students ended up joining community groups to work on their identified need. For example, high school students were concerned about a local elementary school being closed down due to budget cuts and, as they investigated, learned of a community group working to “Save Lopez Elementary.” The students met with the leaders of this group and ended up joining them to, indeed, save Lopez. The adults in the Save Lopez association said that the students brought fresh ideas, energy, and hope to the cause, and the students shared that they learned better communication skills, the need to hang in there when the going gets tough, and that adults and youth can make things happen when they work together.

### **Meaningful Service**

CAP requires students to select a community need and to convince others that it is important, thus they choose issues they believe are relevant, and they must consider how and why the issue is relevant to others. In addition, CAP requires students to make a connection between their chosen issue and public policy. To do so, students must explore and explain the social issues being addressed by the civic actions they take.

## **Quality of the Service Learning Experience**

### **Youth Voice**

Key to CAP is student voice in that students choose community needs that matter to them. In fact, one of the most common answers when asked, “What advice would you give the next person who wants to work on this issue?” is “Make sure you care about your CAP problem, because you are going to work really hard on it!”

In CAP, teachers take the role of coach and facilitator, not choosing the issue or running the project. Inherent in CAP’s design are check-in points so that teachers can monitor student progress and intervene if necessary.

### **Diversity**

CAP requires students to look at multiple perspectives as they investigate causes and effects of community needs. CAP students must also connect their chosen issue to public policy and use a simple policy analysis tool that engages them in thinking about how different constituencies/stakeholders view the community problem and its possible solutions. CAP students are expected to interact with a range of people as they address their issues, including those in the community who work on the issue and those who are most impacted by the issue.

In addition to students interacting with community members, so far, all CAP teachers have had students work in CAP teams of 2–10. CAP teams grapple with issues, problem-solve, and make decisions together. According to student surveys, participating in a team required them to work with others who had different points of view and learn how to communicate ideas and reach decisions.

CAP students from different schools interact on the CAP web site through its discussion and blog features. Currently, for example, students from a school in Las Vegas chat with students from East Los Angeles, who also talk with students from Thorn Bay Community School in rural

Alaska and are joined by students in Wheaton, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago and students in Fort Collins, Colorado. These communities represent a range of socioeconomic levels, ethnic/racial backgrounds, and urban/rural/suburban settings.

### **Reflection**

CAP engages students in reflection activities throughout the program, requiring written reflection on the impact they are having on their chosen community need as well as reflection about their own learning, specifically in terms of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of effective citizens and their roles and responsibilities as citizens. In addition, students have opportunities to share their experiences and reflect on their successes and challenges on the web site.

### **Progress Monitoring**

Students are required to collect evidence of their civic actions and their impact throughout their CAP experience, including evidence of the need/problem they are addressing, evidence of what they do, and e-mails, photos, and letters showing communications they have with community members, etc.

Along with reflecting on their own learning, students must assess the effectiveness of the civic actions they take and use this assessment to plan their next civic action. This analysis and planning is built in to the CAP Planner documents.

Based on the *K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice*. National Youth Leadership Council, 2008.

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