

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

**Executive Summary**

*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.*

— CAP Field Test Teacher

During the 2009-2010 school year, the **Civic Action Project (CAP)** was field-tested in five sites: California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, and Pennsylvania. In CAP, students engage 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 is designed to provide opportunities for student decision-making and problem-solving. 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.

At the end of the school year, CAP teachers and students were surveyed to gauge the program's potential in terms of usability, use of research-based methods/approaches, and impact on students. In addition to end-of-year surveys, much information was collected through the CAP web site including student work and comments on their learning, teacher evaluations of each CAP lesson, teacher feedback on different components of the program, and teachers' advice for improving the program.

**A. Overall Effectiveness**

According to 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.
- 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.”

- 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.

## **B. CAP Curriculum Materials**

CAP provides classroom lessons that build students’ civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions to prepare them to identify an issue and take civic actions to address that issue. The first five lessons are critical to providing the 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 each lesson is aligned with specific standards for the piloting states.

The vast majority of 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 reported 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.

## **C. Implementation**

The CAP field test included underserved schools as well schools in affluent communities. CAP was implemented successfully in a variety of ways:

- Integrated into quarter, semester, and year-long courses.
- Fully integrated throughout the course or used as a special unit near the end of the term.
- Used in advanced placement (AP), honors, and global studies, with the majority of the field test students being in “regular” government courses.

## **Conclusion — Summary Findings**

The field test and expansion is yielding exciting results, especially in terms of student work — the heart of CAP. These findings indicate that CAP could be a significant new resource 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.