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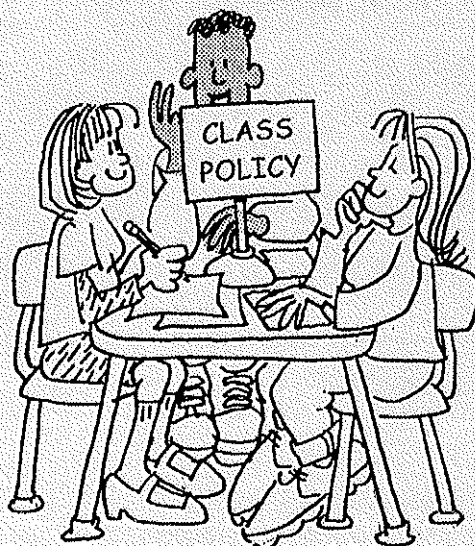
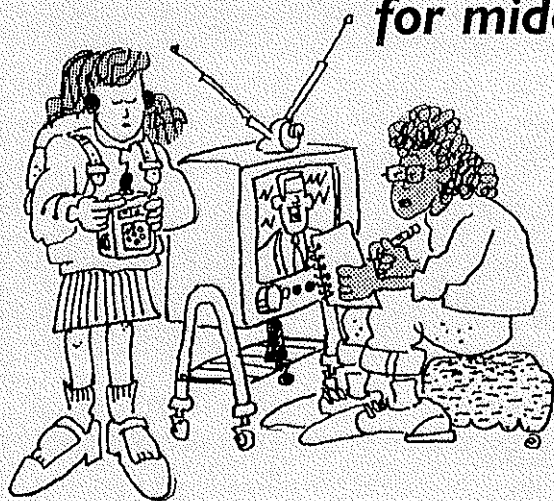
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We the People...

PROJECT CITIZEN

A portfolio-based civic education project
for middle school classes



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NSLC
c/o ETR Associates
4 Carbonero Way
Scotts Valley, CA 95066

presented by the



Center for
Civic Education

and the



National Conference
of State Legislatures

WE THE PEOPLE... PROJECT CITIZEN

A portfolio-based civic education project for middle school classes

WE THE PEOPLE... PROJECT CITIZEN is a civic education program for middle school students that promotes competent and responsible participation in state and local government. It actively engages students in learning how to monitor and influence public policy and encourages civic participation among students, their parents, and members of the community.

As a class project, students work together to identify and study a public policy issue, eventually developing

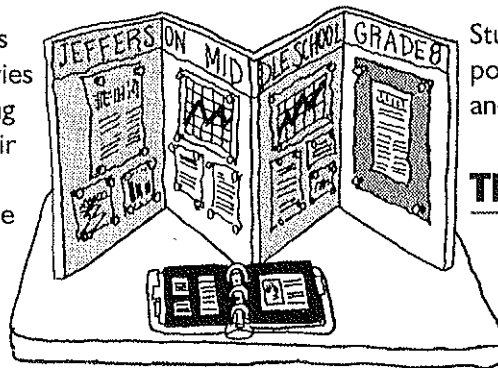
an action plan for implementing their policy. The final product is a portfolio displaying each group's work.

In a culminating activity the class presents its portfolio in a simulated legislative hearing, demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of how public policy is formulated. Classes may also be able to enter their portfolios in a local competition with other classes. Local winners submit their portfolios for a statewide competition, and state winners go on to be evaluated in the **PROJECT CITIZEN** national finals.

THE CURRICULUM

WE THE PEOPLE... PROJECT CITIZEN focuses on the role of state and local governments in the American federal system. The curriculum involves an entire class of middle school students in a series of structured, cooperative learning activities which are guided by their teachers and adult volunteers. Working in cooperative teams, the class learns to interact with their government through a five step process that includes:

- ◆ identifying a public policy problem in their community
- ◆ gathering and evaluating information on the problem
- ◆ examining and evaluating solutions



- ◆ selecting or developing a proposed public policy
- ◆ developing an action plan

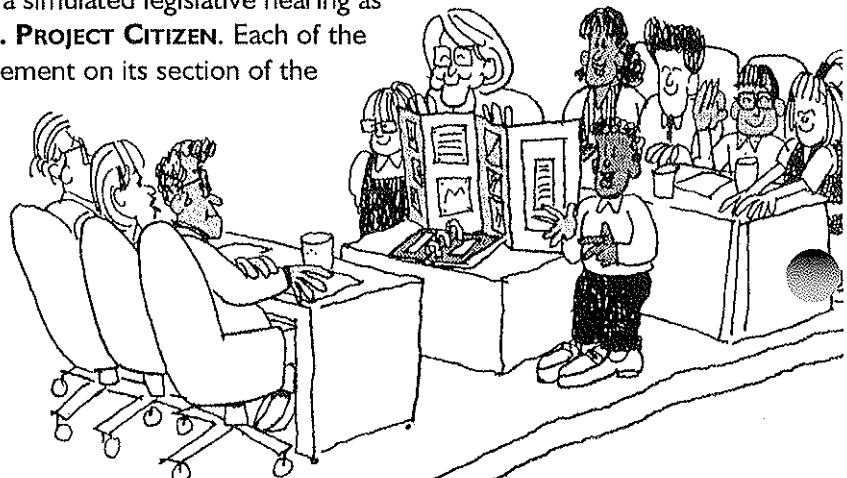
Students' work is displayed in a class portfolio containing a display section and a documentation section.

THE TEXTBOOK

WE THE PEOPLE... PROJECT CITIZEN is a process oriented instructional guide designed for use in grades 6-9. The teacher's guide includes directions for leading the class through the five step process and developing a class portfolio. It also contains instructions and evaluation procedures for conducting a simulated legislative hearing.

PROJECT CITIZEN SIMULATED LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS

Participating teachers are encouraged to hold a simulated legislative hearing as the culminating activity for **WE THE PEOPLE... PROJECT CITIZEN**. Each of the four portfolio groups prepares and presents a statement on its section of the portfolio before a panel of community representatives who act as legislative committee members. Each group then answers questions posed by the committee members. The format provides students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of how public policy is formulated while providing teachers with an excellent means of assessing performance.



The Making of Good Citizens

Kids too young to vote are learning about community problems and how to solve them.

At the same time, they're learning how the legislature works. So far, 11 states have picked up the program, but sponsors want more involved.

By Don Harris

The kids at inner-city Crockett Middle School in Phoenix are street-smart. Most of them are Hispanic. They see, feel and live the rough side of life every day. They are survivors.

So it should come as no surprise that Crockett's eighth graders targeted a Gentlemen's Club, which some years ago would have been called a strip joint, as a class project and community problem under an innovative program: We the People... Project Citizen.

Co-sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures and the Center for Civic Education, Project Citizen teaches middle schoolers how to identify and deal with a public policy problem in their community. They gather information, conduct interviews with key players, develop an action plan and encourage elected officials—from school board members to state legislators—to adopt their proposed solutions. With a striptease bar just over 300 feet from their school (within the legal limits, they soon discovered), the Crockett students' problem was drunk drivers so near a school. Their solution: bartenders should be trained to recognize when patrons were drunk and not allow them to get in their cars and drive.

The students met with and interviewed police detectives, school board members, teachers, representatives of a neighborhood association and community professionals in their Project Citizen exercise. More than once employees of the striptease bar hung up on their telephone calls, and calls to government officials often were not returned. But they persevered and put together a portfolio of the problem and their ideas for a solution. They practiced a presentation they would make before a panel of judges at the state Legislature.

One of the judges, Michael Fischer, director of Project Citizen for the Center for Civic Education in Calabasas, Calif., says the program started five years ago with a large-scale pilot operation in California called the American Youth Citizenship Competition. Middle schools were targeted for the program because most high school civics courses concentrate on the federal government. NCSL's Karl Kurtz, another judge in the Arizona competition, says that experience made it clear to him that eighth graders have the "knowledge, energy and enthusiasm necessary to develop innovative public policy solutions to problems in their communities."

Last year, schools in 11 states were involved in Project Citizen. In addition to Arizona, programs ran in Alabama, California, Florida,

Don Harris is a free-lance writer in Phoenix.

Indiana, Maine, Michigan, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania. Winning portfolios from statewide competitions across the country will be on display at NCSL's 1997 annual meeting in Philadelphia in August, and a panel of legislators and legislative staff will select a national winner for Project Citizen.

NCSL and the Center for Civic Education are pushing more legislatures to get involved with the project. "We hope to have 36 states this year," says Fischer. "The level of participation varies. Legislative involvement is extremely helpful, although Indiana has a good program with no legislative support yet. In Alabama, the Legislature actually funded Project Citizen with a \$5,000 grant."

LEARNING ABOUT THE LEGISLATURE

Surveys from all over the country show that voters have low opinions of the work of state legislatures and that they know little about what their lawmakers do. There's also a growing sense that America's long traditions of volunteerism and civic involvement in local communities are deteriorating. *Bowling Alone* is the title of Harvard University professor Robert Putnam's book analyzing declining civic and group participation in American life. It captures the concern that we are no longer the nation of joiners once described by Alexis de Tocqueville.

NCSL's Kurtz says the organization believes that the "best long-term solution to these problems is education—not just book learning but hands-on, experiential education—about state and local government and how to get involved in solving community problems. Project Citizen is an ideal tool."

Lynda Rando, director of the Arizona Center for Law-Related Education of the Arizona Bar Foundation, a co-sponsor in Arizona, says the mission of her organization is to increase public understanding of the legal and political systems. "I think this program is wonderful, teaching kids about the Legislature and the role they can play. Everyone becomes more knowledgeable. Not just the kids. It rubs off on the parents. The lay public has a misunderstanding of policymaking at the Legislature."

Rando's group, which is an arm of the State Bar of Arizona, supports the program by providing 10 free sets of Project Citizen material to each participating school. The material guides the students and their teacher through the process of studying a problem, gathering

information, examining solutions and developing public policy.

In Arizona, five of the 20 classes participating last year made an oral presentation before a panel of judges. The judges included 11 legislators, educators, an attorney, Fischer and Kurtz.

Clearly, some students were awed, meeting legislators for the first time, having lunch with them and making their presentations in the restored House chamber where the state's founding fathers crafted statutes early this century. Others seemed comfortable and in complete control as they argued their case, documenting and defending their position.

"It gets more people involved, knowing what the legislative process is all about," says Representative Herschella Horton, an enthusiastic supporter of Project Citizen. "One of the most important aspects is that we are reaching people at an early age," she says. "They realize they can have an impact, they can be involved in their community."

IMPORTANT ISSUES

Lawmakers, teachers and others who have worked with students in Project Citizen are intrigued by the issues that concern youngsters. For example, students at Kyrene Centennial Middle School, which won last fall's statewide competition in Arizona, chose as their subject: "The Quality of Human Growth and Development in AIDS Education." Their teacher, Janet Thor, says: "We used to call it sex education." Other subjects that were considered by various schools included gang prevention, graffiti, school overcrowding, censorship and dress codes.

Sara Chesterfield, whose students at Crockett took on the exotic night club in their neighborhood, says Project Citizen gave them a second chance to try to resolve a thorny issue. "While the place was being built two years ago, the students picketed. Teachers and neighborhood organizations went to the state Liquor Board to stop it, but they weren't successful. It was just far enough from the school to be beyond the 300-foot limit."

Many of the students who were in sixth grade when they picketed the bar were eighth graders when they took up the cause again. This time, their objective was not to close the bar. "They wanted to make it a policy that all people who serve liquor should be able to recognize when a person is intoxicated, perhaps through their body language, and to stop serving them," Chesterfield says. "Sure, it's the law, but it's not being enforced. The kids are concerned that a driver who is impaired will be leaving the bar about the time they are getting out of school. If a customer is drunk, they want the bar to provide that person with a safe ride home.

"These kids are survivors, and they want to continue to be survivors."

The kids were undaunted by the lack of cooperation from the people who run the bar. One of the students, Catherine Canales, says: "I kind of knew they were going to do that. When you call someone and tell them you're against them, they're going to hang up on you. I wanted to talk to them. Our goal is to have bars everywhere in the state train their employees. There are drunk drivers everywhere."

Canales values Project Citizen because "it shows that all teenagers aren't bad. We learned that if we stick together, we can make a difference." Another Crockett student, Hector Leon, says he's not disappointed because they were stonewalled by the bar. "The state has to

WHAT CAN LEGISLATORS DO?

Legislators can get involved in Project Citizen by:

- Ensuring that the legislature endorses Project Citizen either through a formal resolution or a written commitment by legislative leaders
- Appropriating or raising funds to support Project Citizen
- Assisting in the selection of schools and teachers to participate in Project Citizen
- Assisting classes in conducting the necessary research to accomplish their task
- Serving as judges for statewide competitions
- Presenting certificates of achievement to students, teachers and schools.

Project Citizen can be conducted on a small budget. Its costs will vary from state to state, depending on the level of activity. The Center for Civic Education will provide free curriculum materials for up to 10 classrooms in each state. The primary costs that might be incurred relate to competition among different schools if transportation to a central location is required. The Arizona Bar Foundation's program costs for last fall's statewide competition were approximately \$9,000 for 10 classrooms.

The Center for Civic Education has established state coordinators for Project Citizen in the education community in approximately half the states. To find out who the coordinator is for your state, contact Karl Kurtz at NCSL (303) 830-2200 or Karl.Kurtz@ncsl.org.

help us," says Leon. "The bar won't listen to us. We need a statewide law. That would make a lot of people safer."

Their counselor, Chesterfield, says she would like to start the next project with sixth graders. Then they could follow through for a couple of years if they don't achieve all their goals, much like legislators do with a bill that fails to pass the first time it is introduced. During

the process, Chesterfield's students were confronted with the bottom line question of who would pay for their proposed instructional program for bartenders.

"I think we learned that the economic issue is the most crucial issue," Chesterfield says.

Senator Randall Gnant says Project Citizen helps young students learn something about current issues and how they could be solved. "What I like most about the program is that the students pick their own problem, come down to the Capitol and make a presentation," Gnant says. "They make three presentations before three different panels. By the time they make their third presentation, they're all polished." The senator hopes students realize that a new law is not always the solution to a problem. "More community involvement may be the answer," he says.

The winning subject chosen by Janet Thor's students at Kyrene Centennial Middle School could very well become an issue for the Legislature, but not right away. First, the students plan to ask the local school board to call a community forum to evaluate the quality of sex education courses. Later, they will take their proposals to the Department of Education, and eventually to the House and Senate.

Students Katie Taylor and Mitchell Radigan told how their group finally settled on sex education after brainstorming sessions that touched on a number of subjects. They narrowed the topics to teen pregnancy and book censorship. When they couldn't find any sex education books dealing with AIDS in the school library, they decided that students needed to know more about the deadly disease.

"We found out that most students were not as informed as they

should be and as teachers thought they should be," Taylor says. "The judges at Project Citizen liked what we had done and said we were brave for picking the subject."

Although Thor's students will be graduating this spring, the project continues. They plan to present their suggestions on sex education to local high school district officials. Thor says the students learned that they can talk to adults and get decent feedback. "They also learned how government works, and that you need to start at the grass roots level," she says. "I wish more schools were involved. I would do it again—in a heartbeat. I learned that students are a constant source of inspiration and knowledge."

Representative Horton acknowledges that some of the topics selected by the students probably aren't fodder for the Legislature. For example, youngsters in a Tucson elementary school are interested in gang prevention.

"They see gangs in the upper grades, but they have no gangs in their school and they want to keep it that way," says Horton. "I was very encouraged. They need to use community resources, perhaps have a probation officer assigned to the school."

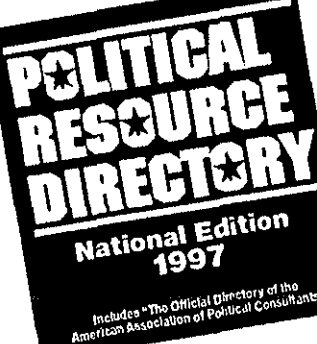
While gang prevention in elementary schools may not seem like a legislative issue, Horton is quick to add: "All politics are local, everything affects the local community. We have to look at educational funding so every child has an equal opportunity to education. That translates into a very local issue."

Funding for Project Citizen is an issue, Horton says, just as the Crockett students learned when they proposed an instructional program for bartenders. "That's real life," she says.

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Discussing politics

Craig McMillen, right, discusses the legal driving age with Sen. Richard Finan after an assem-

Times photo
bly at Hardin Northern Wednesday. Justin Slusher watches the exchange, which was later joined by several other students.

Senate president praises work of HN student activists

By JIM SABIN
Times staff writer

DOLA — When Hardin Northern sixth-grade teachers Lou Ann Sampson and Gail Hoffman first learned about Project Citizen, they never imagined it would go as far as a state award.

Neither did their students, though they never doubted that the project itself would be successful, the teachers said.

"There wasn't a doubt in their minds," Hoffman said.

That was a big part of the reason the class took first place in the "We The People: Project Citizen" competition for the state of Ohio. Ohio Senate President Richard Finan, along with several local dignitaries, were on hand Wednesday to help the class celebrate its victory with several other grade levels.

For their project, the class decided to do something about the stretch of Ohio 81 that runs in front of the school. Normally a 55 mile per hour zone, the students noted that many cars don't bother to slow down, and the ones that do, don't slow down enough.

The end result was a pair of signs, complete with flashing lights, that give motorists plenty of advance warning to slow down.

"Persistence, research, hard work — it pays off with the results," Finan said. "That's what government is all about."

To get the task done, the class took a number of steps. Some of them sat out by the old signs, which many said were poorly visible from the road, and kept track of how much passing cars slowed down, if at all. Still others started a letter-writing campaign, sending them to various police departments and the Ohio Department of Transportation.

The campaign caught the attention of Kir

Slusher, the Ohio Department of Transportation's District One planning and programs administrator. After making a few phone calls, Slusher came to the classroom and discussed the project with the students.

"What impressed me was, they continued to question what was best," Slusher said. "They didn't automatically accept my recommendation, they kept asking questions."

"They were truly concerned, they truly cared what they were doing," he added.

After settling on a plan, the students had one final hurdle to clear. ODOT agreed to install the signs, but the school would need to pay the operating costs. So several class members approached the board of education and got approval for the project.

Slusher said the signs, which were installed just before the school year, and the flashing lights are under the control of the school. That way, the lights can be turned on at will by the district, including at peak times like sporting events.

"It wouldn't have been possible without community support," Hoffman said.

Finan asked the students at the assembly if they would like to make laws and become politicians someday, and a large number of hands went up — at least to the part about making laws.

"I hope you've learned a little bit about our political system," he said. "It's obvious you've learned it takes patience."

He also challenged the present sixth grade class to participate in the competition this year, along with the seventh, eighth and ninth grade classes. All are eligible. Finan, also the president of the National Conference of State Legislatures, said he would like to see one of the classes advance to and

(Continued on page five)

Senate president praises students

(Continued from page one)

win at the national level as well.

"Go for it!" he said.

Several of the students said that the project was a success, though they didn't expect this honor.

"It's pretty nice because there's a lot of people out there that don't follow the speed limit. The lights help a lot," Billy Nelson said. "I didn't expect it to go this far, though."

Classmate Morgan Hipsher agreed.

"I think it's better because a lot of cars slow down that didn't before," she said. She added that her mom told her the old sign was really hard to see.

As for the state award?

"I didn't think it would go that far," Hipsher said.

Others in attendance at the assembly were Dunkirk mayor Willie Barnett, Hardin County Sheriff George Smith, Hardin County superintendent Lou Ann Harrold, Hardin Northern superintendent Dan Marshman and several HN board members.

Libby Cupp, state coordinator of the project and a coordinator of career and economic education at Apollo Career Center, also praised the class.

"You folks should be real proud of your colleagues for receiving this honor," Cupp told the assembled classes.

"It was quality that won the award for them," she said later. "This is really good because it helps the community."

Marshman said he and the district are extremely proud of the class' accomplishment.

"It just proves we're not only good at football, but we're good at other things as well," he said. "We have a lot of pride in what we're doing."

Sampson said she and Hoffman would let their students select a project this year, but it hasn't been discussed yet.

After the assembly, the seventh graders and their guests had a brief reception, complete with cookies and pop.

Cupp said she is looking for other schools to join the project this year. Hardin Northern was the only school in the county that participated, she said. She added that she can be reached at Apollo for more information.

Asked whether the class would do another project this year, Hipsher and Nelson said probably, but they had no idea what they would do. Whatever they, or any of the other classes, settle on, they have a tough act to follow.

"I think they did a great job," Slusher said.

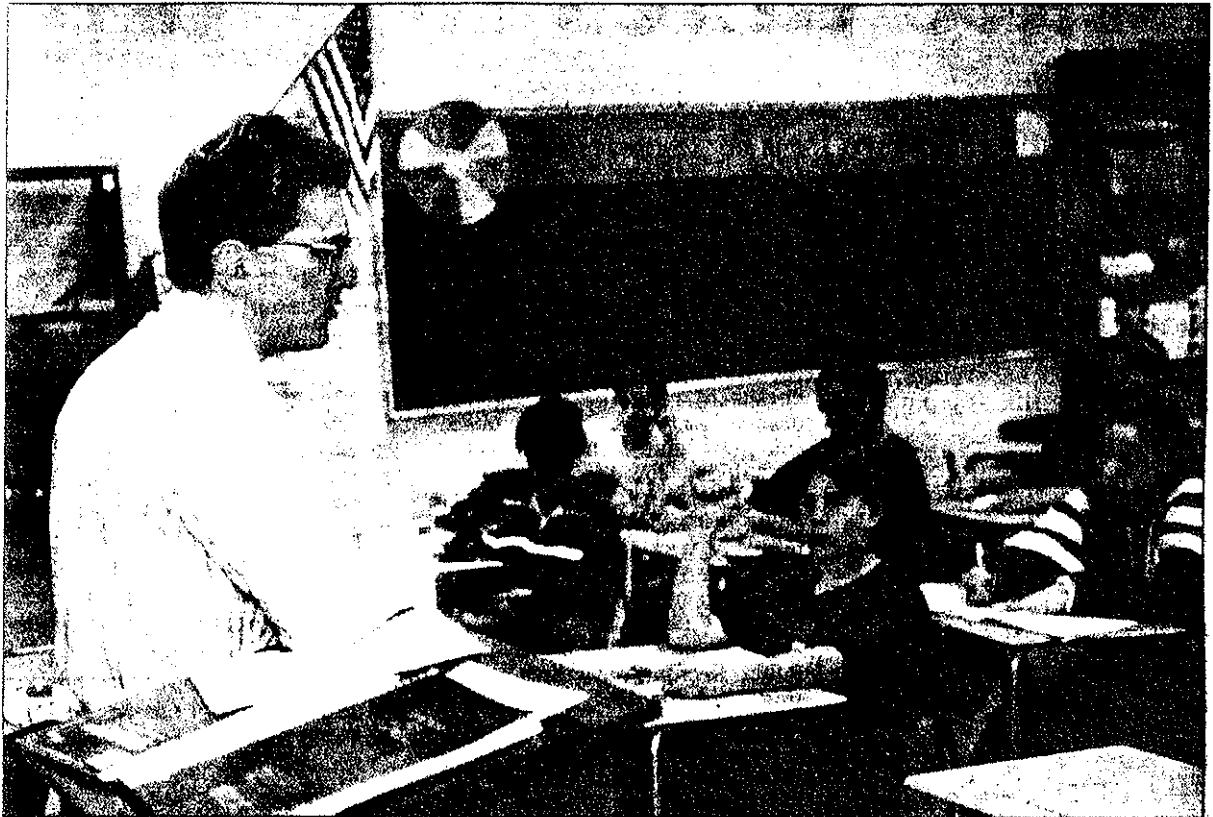
Some of the students took a more matter-of-fact view of it.

"We set a goal, and it was

accomplished," Erica Flinn said.

The students involved in the project include Rodney Adams, Miranda Businger, Lyndsay Caudill, Heather Collins, Courtney Combs, Lance Crabtree, Christopher DeLong, Chase Doll, Flinn, Jason Fought, Steven Gerlach, Drew Good, Megan Gossard, Jonathan Gross, Justin Hamlin, Hipsher, Ronald Johnson, Dustin Kindle, Scott Kramer, Ashley Lawrence, Travis Lee, Craig McMillen, Joshua Miller, Nelson, Kory Nickell, Jeffery Noel, Amanda Pierson, Joshua Poe, Tiffany Reffitt, Vanessa Ridgeway, Chad Ritchie, Jason Ruhlen, Levi Schutz, Drew Snow, Cliff Stalling and Brittany Ward.

Teens learning to fight crime



DAVID OLDS/Lansing State Journal

Crime fighters: Arnold Weinfeld, a Waverly school board member, talks to Waverly Middle School students about juvenile crime. The class is studying possible solutions to recommend this month.

Students, lawmakers join forces to reduce youth crime in area

Waverly Middle School kids gather information from papers, Internet

By **Jeremy Verducco**
Lansing State Journal

DELTA TWP. — A group of Waverly Middle School students, with the help of local lawmakers, is looking for solutions to youth crime in the Lansing area.

"It's very thought-provoking," said Lynne Shapiro, teacher. "They are taking it seriously and are concerned about being good citizens."

The class has gathered information on juvenile crime from newspapers, magazines and the Internet. Probate court officials, school board members, attorneys and Lansing Mayor David Hollister have ad-

A few of them did share some of their preliminary ideas.

"If the school district and the city became more involved with individual teens, it would reduce juvenile crime rapidly," said 14-year-old Erin Price.

Lindsey Songer, 14, said a teen center would help kids stay out of trouble.

She said she has a lot of friends who hang out in the mall.

"It's the closest place to go that doesn't cost money," she said.

The students also say having programs like Camp Highfields, which treats teen offenders assigned to it by courts, and services to keep those offenders out of trouble once they serve their time are helpful.

While taking a long look at causes, Shapiro's students are encouraged by some of the city's ef-

cents' findings are on the mark.

"The old cliché is true," he said. "It's easy to get into trouble and pretty hard to get out."

Taylor said a main component of juvenile crime, from minor infractions such as graffiti to more serious violent crimes, is idle time.

Taylor suggests three preventive strategies:

■ Healthy recreational activities such as sports.

■ One-on-one academic support outside of the classroom.

■ Some type of job training after-school activity, even if it's only an hour a day, to give kids a sense of achievement.

He said that for every student involved in such positive activities, that is one student the community doesn't pay for in negative, criminal activities.

Students ask council for red light

By Bill Plott
News staff writer

Pittman Middle School students got to demonstrate a hands-on approach to social studies last week.

Three students from Stephanie Robinson's seventh-grade class spoke to the Hueytown City Council, asking city officials to pursue a traffic light at the intersection of Virginia Drive and 15th Street.

"We have one of the most dangerous intersections in Alabama here in Hueytown at Virginia Drive and 15th Street," said Kasey Street. "There have been five deaths at that intersection."

Joining her in the appeal were Amy Ross and Lauren Hammond. All three students are participating in Project Citizen, a national social studies program that attempts to get middle-school-aged students involved in community problems and needs.

Ms. Robinson said the Pittman project will be entered in statewide competition in Montgomery in March.

"We started back in September, listing a number of problems the students feel are in their community. Once you list the problems, then you narrow the list down and the group votes on them. They put a lot of hours and research in it," she said.

Some of the other problems listed by the students were pollution, recycling and school prayer. But Ms. Robinson said the dangerous intersection was one that students could really get into that had possible and immediate results.

"Not only do they identify the problems, but they must determine how to solve the problem. They decide which branches of government they need to go to, who in the government they should talk to, what steps you take to get something changed (and) what is your role in the change," she said.

The intersection has led the Pittman students to contact the Alabama Department of Transportation, the Jefferson County Highway Department, the Hueytown City Council, the Hueytown Police Department, local news media and individual City Council members.

The students have contacted the various agencies and officials through telephone calls, correspondence and personal contact such as the recent council meeting.

Project Citizen requires the students to devise alternate solutions in case the first one isn't feasible.

"Our alternatives would be four-way stop signs, adjusting the speed limit in each direction and putting up warning signs (about the dangerous intersection)," said Ms. Hammond.

The class has 24 students. Ms. Robinson said they were divided into groups of six to identify and pursue the problems.

See Red Light, Page 5B

Red Light

From Page 1BC :

"They learn that everybody is not going to agree on everything at all times," she said. "In the groups they can learn to agree on things first."

"The project will be submitted to Montgomery on March 2. If we can at least get some wheels turning, it should help," she said.

Mayor Gerald Hicks told the students and Ms. Robinson that the City Council and other residents have been concerned about the same intersection for a long time. He said state Rep. Johnny Curry, R-Hueytown, has

indicated that a stop light will be erected at the intersection this spring.

Ms. Robinson said Curry will be hearing from some of her students as they prepare the project for the state competition.

"When the light goes up, they'll know they had a part in that," she said. "I think that's a real goal now."

Although she had been a substitute for several years, this is Ms. Robinson's first year in the classroom as a full-time teacher. A native of the Bagley community, she graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham last summer.

THE BIRMINGHAM NEWS
Wednesday, February 25, 1998
Page 1BC

A10 Liberty students work for new drug program

West Valley View, Avondale, Arizona, March 4, 1998

by Megan Hartl
staff writer

They're too young to vote, to drive or to drink a beer. Most of them just squeak by when it comes to getting in PG-13 movies.

But a group of 10 eighth-graders at Liberty Elementary School want to change the drug awareness curriculum not only in their school, but across the state.

Through research unearthed during their participation in the "We the People... Project Citizen" program, the students believe that drug awareness education offered through the school's D.A.R.E. (Drug Awareness Resistance Education) program occurs too late.

The students developed a four-year curriculum which begins in second grade. The curriculum would prepare the youngsters for the D.A.R.E. education in sixth grade.

"My kids are serious about this," the students' government teacher Jody Arnold said.

"My kids long-term goal is to see this adopted statewide. They feel strongly enough about this, that this should be adopted by all schools that participate in a drug program."

Feb. 2 the students presented their project and the curriculum they developed before the Liberty school board. Although it wasn't up for adoption that evening, it may make its way into the school's curriculum.

Project Citizen

Greg Brozeit is the assistant director of the Calabasas, Calif.-based Center for Civic Education. Along with the Colorado-based National Conference of State Legislatures, the two sponsor the middle school civic education project known as Project Citizen.

"Project Citizen is designed to help middle school students work together to identify a public policy issue in their community, research it, determine various ways to address the issue, recommend a class policy and develop an action plan to have their policy adopted," Brozeit said.

Arnold's students chose drug education.

"They felt that D.A.R.E. is a good program, but it's too late. The kids already have been introduced to the wrong types of information about drugs by the sixth grade," Arnold said.

The students began their Project Citizen work the first day of school, Aug. 11, 1997. Last December they placed second at the Arizona competition held at the state Capitol. They presented their case not only before a group of judges, but the state Legislature as well.

The Arizona Project Citizen is sponsored by the Arizona Bar Foundation.

Brozeit served as a judge in December's contest and said he was "just blown away" with their project and how articulate the students were.

"These students chose a large-scale topic that has baffled adults, and yet found a solution — or part of the solution — within their community, within their school's curriculum," Brozeit said.

"One student said to me, 'Sixth grade is just too late. We already know about (drugs) by then.'"

The new curriculum

In an effort to research what drug programs other schools offered and what some alternative policies were in practice, the students wrote schools all over the United States. They called school districts in Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey. They sent letters to principals and superintendents in every county in Arizona.

The students wrote their own parent survey and had them mailed to every parent in the district. Overwhelmingly, the parents said they felt the drug education should begin at a younger age.

"My students wrote their own program. The kids have to do all the work — all I can do is be a facilitator," Arnold said.

What they came up with was a program which enables younger students to feel good about themselves naturally, through a series of self-confidence-building lessons beginning in second grade.

They called their program "Building Blocks to a Future."

The curriculum begins in second grade and focuses on self-appreciation. In the third grade, students would learn about self-confidence. Fourth-graders would be taught how to recognize and control emotions. Finally, in the fifth grade, students would learn how to deal with peer pressure.

It's the Project Citizen students' belief that the students would then be sufficiently prepared to enter the school's current D.A.R.E. program, an 18-week course taught by a Buckeye police officer.

The Project Citizen group even taught Liberty's second-graders the self-appreciation course last semester.

"They wrote their own lesson plans, they did everything. They came up with coloring books, they wrote skits, they did it all themselves. I'm bragging. It was fantastic," Arnold said.

"I guess I sound like a proud mother."

Making the difference

The eighth-graders couldn't forget what they learned through their research.

QUICKglance

The students who participated in the Project Citizen effort at Liberty Elementary School were: Doreen Batchan, Tamra Bennett, Ben Brown, Amanda Houston, Emily Lyons, James Marcus, Patty Mitchell, Chris Mix, Vanessa Salazar and Amy Thomas.

They could have dropped it all after the December competition was over. But they want to make it happen.

"They truly mean that. This is not just something they did and they can forget about. They have a true belief in this," Arnold said.

Before the school board they went. Arnold didn't speak; just the children.

"I was really impressed with how comprehensive their project was. It was really involved and took a lot of effort and challenge, especially for that age level," school board member Kathleen Duncan said.

"One of the board member's questions at the meeting was 'is there any way to continue this?'"

That's what the students want to see happen. Duncan agreed.

"I think it would be a great idea (to implement the students' curriculum)... Our response as a board was that it would be a real shame if it just stopped. There is a real need for it I think we all felt it would be really nice to continue it," she added.

Liberty Elementary District superintendent Steve Bilovesky said, "When they made their recommended solution, one of the things they recommended was that we try to convince the Arizona state Legislature to look at the funding mechanisms that we use for substance abuse programs, which are some of our federal dollars, to see if they could match those and increase those so we would have the ability to broaden that program."

He added that the board would need to analyze the cost factors involved with the students' new curriculum and how it could be integrated into the existing curriculum.

"They (the students) didn't have any hard dollars on what the cost would be (to implement the new curriculum)... It's not a horrendously expensive program to implement, because it would depend on how you did it."

Maybe the most important lesson learned was that no one is a nobody when it comes to getting involved.

Arnold said, "They have learned that they can make a difference. They're not voters yet, but they will be voters and they will vote, because they now realize how important it is."

San Gabriel Valley Tribune

Wednesday, May 28, 1997

Students lauded for voting project

Officials praise in-depth analysis by eighth-grade social studies class

By Diane Brown
STAFF WRITER

WALNUT — Although they are too young to cast ballots, a group of Suzanne Middle School students has a lot to say about voter participation.

And local election officials are listening.

"The level of their research and its scope is phenomenal," Conny McCormack, the county's registrar, said Tuesday regarding the international study on improving voter participation conducted by eighth-graders in Al Haskvitz's social studies class.

McCormack met with the students Friday and requested a synopsis of their research on factors contributing to low voter turnout and suggestions for increasing voter participation. In November, 82 percent of the registered voters

Please turn to VOTE / A4



Photo by SEAN DECKER

STUDENTS from Suzanne Middle School, clockwise from left, Lesli Don-ester, Jim Park, Elisa Gahng and Michelle Truong, display the research they have collected in a project about voting.

VOTE

Students lauded for project

Continued from A1

in Los Angeles County cast ballots.

The students are producing a five-minute video presentation summarizing their project, Haskvitz said.

McCormack said she plans to use the video as a catalyst for discussion July 9 in a first-ever summit between county election officials and clerks of all 88 cities within Los Angeles county.

As part of the classroom project, Haskvitz's students compiled a 3-inch binder stuffed

with letters and abstracts of pamphlets from government officials from around the United States and from as far away as Australia, Belgium and South Africa.

Students also made suggestions for changes on voter registration cards, such as replacing the word "perjury" and simplifying other questions.

Such language makes registering to vote hectic and confusing for some people, said student Elisa Gahng, 13.

Based on their international data, the Walnut students compiled a list of 12 suggestions for improving voter participation, including mandatory voter education — with mock elections in all middle schools based on the international data.

"One of the simplest things to do is to educate people at

(school-age) level" said student Joseph Tan, 14.

The report also cited a "trickle-up phenomenon," Tan said. Parents of students in voter education programs are more likely to go to the polls, he said.

All 12 student suggestions are listed on the Internet, said Sumudu Dissanayake, 14, who designed a project Web site, at <http://www.umail.com/suzweb>.

The Web site also includes links to the E-mail addresses for every elected official, along with their track records while in office, Haskvitz said.

"Originally, I thought voting wasn't important. Nobody even talked about it," Emily Zeller, 13, said, adding she now realizes "voting is like a major part of what America is."

We the People... Project Citizen

Correlating Project Citizen to Service Learning

Seven criteria for the best practices in school-based service learning are:

1. **Meet a recognized need in the community** – **Project Citizen** students explore a variety of real community problems or issues and then as a class they select one problem for in-depth study. Students formulate a public policy to address the problem and develop an action plan for having their policy implemented by an appropriate governing body or community agency.
2. **Achieve curricular objectives through service learning** – **Project Citizen** is an ideal project for an interdisciplinary core program or for social studies, language arts, or science classes. The content and instructional approach used in the program helps ground service learning in the core curriculum.
3. **Reflect throughout service learning experience** – As students complete the various tasks involved in developing a class portfolio they must reflect upon the nature and extent of the community problem they are working on, the potential of their proposed policy to solve the problem, and the impact that their proposed policy would have on the community and themselves. **Project Citizen** culminates with the students reflecting on the entire learning experience.
4. **Develop student responsibility** – Throughout the instructional program students are assigned specific individual and group responsibilities that they must fulfill to complete the portfolio and prepare for the simulated hearing. Working in teams helps prepare them for taking on responsibilities associated with service learning assignments.
5. **Establish community partnerships** – In researching their problem and preparing a policy students contact public officials, community leaders, and business persons. These contacts help develop working relationships with government agencies, community groups, and other organizations that can assist schools with their service learning program.
6. **Plan ahead for service learning** – The contacts that students make during their research enable them to select service learning assignments that are consistent with the other characteristics of effective service learning. Service learning assignments will not be random and haphazard if students participate in the identification of projects they want to undertake.
7. **Equip students with knowledge and skills needed for service** – In addition to teaching students how to monitor and influence public policy and increasing their knowledge about their community, **Project Citizen** helps students develop oral and written communication skills, research skills, and interpersonal skills. **Project Citizen** also helps students develop civic attitudes essential for participatory citizenship.

We the People... Project Citizen is administered by the Center for Civic Education in cooperation with the National Conference of State Legislatures and is partially funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress

REACTION

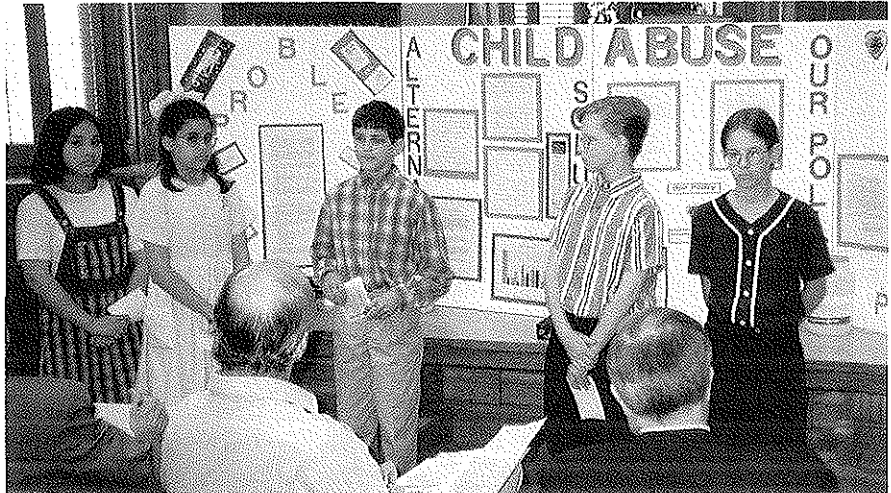
"...I not only found this to be an excellent, hands-on approach to public policy but also one of the most thorough, detailed, and easy-to-use programs I have ever seen."

Hank Rowe, Teacher, Amphitheater Middle School, Tucson, Arizona

"As a judge and practicing attorney, I have been involved in many programs, but none that even approached the excitement in civil participation of this program."

PROJECT CITIZEN is practical experience in democracy and civil involvement."

Judge Gregory J. Donat, Tippecanoe County Court 1, Lafayette, Indiana



"It's great to see more of today's youth getting involved and being rewarded for their interest in government policy and procedures."

Rep. Herschella Horton, Arizona House of Representatives

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The Center for Civic Education administers **WE THE PEOPLE... PROJECT CITIZEN** nationally through a network of state and local coordinators in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the 4 trust territories. These coordinators work with members of state legislatures, business and community leaders, and local educators to contribute to the success of the program.

Teachers and civic educators may

- ◆ contact their state coordinator (see directory in this brochure) or the Center for Civic Education to involve their students in **PROJECT CITIZEN**
- ◆ enlist members of local and state legislatures, community and business leaders, and other educators to assist students in preparing their portfolios and to serve as judges, speakers, and presenters at the simulated legislative hearing

Members of state and local legislatures may

- ◆ sign and present award certificates, speak at simulated legislative hearings, serve as judges, and welcome students from their district to their offices
- ◆ discuss public policy issues with students in their classrooms and speak at teacher training workshops
- ◆ support the efforts of the local and state coordinators in all aspects of program implementation

Community, business, and professional associations may

- ◆ volunteer time and expertise by serving on advisory committees, providing leadership support and serving as competition judges
- ◆ provide financial support to help purchase program materials, underwrite local and statewide competitions, and sending winning classes to local and state finals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on participating in the **WE THE PEOPLE... PROJECT CITIZEN** program, contact your state coordinator listed in this brochure. You may also contact:

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