

**Report on a Study  
of the Affective Impact of  
We the People...The Citizen and the Constitution**

**conducted by the Council for Basic Education**

## CONTENTS

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION .....	3
Program description and goals .....	3
Congressional hearing as culminating activity .....	4
Implementation of the curriculum in the classroom .....	4
Other evaluations of the effects of the program .....	5
SECTION II: METHODOLOGY AND CONDITIONS OF STUDY .....	7
Methodology and study sample .....	7
Conditions of study .....	8
SECTION III: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: AN OVERVIEW .....	11
SECTION IV: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: STUDENTS .....	14
Characteristics of the students .....	14
Section 4.1: Changes in thinking, opinions, and study habits .....	16
Section 4.2: Beyond the curriculum .....	23
Section 4.3: Citizenship .....	25
Section 4.4: Appreciation of the curricular methods and materials .....	29
Section 4.5: Comparison to other history/social studies courses .....	33
SECTION V: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: TEACHERS .....	35
Section 5.1: Effect on their professional lives .....	36
Section 5.2: Evaluation of materials and methods .....	37
Section 5.3: Comparison to other curricula .....	42
Section 5.4: Beyond the curriculum .....	43
SECTION VI: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: THE COMPETITION .....	47
SECTION VII: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: PARENTS AND JUDGES .....	50
Section 7.1: Parents: Reactions to their children's participation .....	50
Section 7.2: Parents: Reactions to the curricula .....	54
Section 7.3: Judges: Evaluation of the program and teachers .....	55
Section 7.4: Judges: Evaluation of the students .....	57
Section 7.5: Judges: Suggestions for change .....	58
SECTION VIII: RECOMMENDATIONS .....	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	63



## Section I

### INTRODUCTION

*You know, Mrs. Arthur, they really deserve this. Most of these kids hadn't even heard the word freedom before.*

The young woman who said this was a "very competitive" Denver student on the second place team in last year's 1993 national competition. She made the comment as she and her teacher were watching the winners from California, many of them recent immigrants, bouncing off the walls in a post-competition celebration. We begin this report with her remark because it so eloquently sums up the effects we discovered of the Center for Civic Education's *We the People...The Citizen and the Constitution* program.

Section I of this report describes the *We the People...* program and the interviewers' general observations about it and its participants. Section II outlines methodology and conditions of study. Section III is an overview and introduction to Sections IV, V, and VII, which describe the findings of the study according to respondent category: students, teachers, and parents and competition judges. Section VI discusses the competition, a program element important enough to be set apart in its own section. It is inserted before the section devoted to the parents and competition judges in order to establish a clear context for their comments. Recommendations can be found in Section VIII.

#### Program description and goals

The *We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution* program was designed to foster civic competence and civic responsibility through the development of an understanding of the history, principles, and values of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights and an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in American constitutional democracy.

The *We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution* program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through an act of Congress, and is administered by the Los Angeles-based Center for Civic Education. The program offers limited numbers of free sets of curricular materials in every congressional district in the country. More than 16 million students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels have participated in the program during the past six years. The program provides instructional materials at three levels: upper elementary, middle, and high school.

The materials at each level include a student text, *We the People...*, with an accompanying teacher's guide and a test on the history and principles of the Constitution. The program incorporates a culminating activity in which students testify at simulated congressional hearings, in which they apply the principles and concepts they have learned to historical and contemporary issues. At the high school level, students have the option of participating in competitive hearings that culminate in national finals in Washington, D.C., each spring.

Since 1991, the high school level has used the textbook, *With Liberty and Justice for All*, written



in commemoration of the bicentennial of the Bill of Rights. It focuses on the philosophical and historical foundations of our Bill of Rights and its contemporary relevance. This text has been used for the competitive hearings since 1991; however, many high school teachers continue to use the *We the People...* high school text in addition to, or instead of, *With Liberty and Justice for All*.

The preface to *With Liberty and Justice for All* notes that it "is not like most history books which focus on the story of the people and events of the past. This book is a history of ideas that have influenced the development of our Bill of Rights and its application to the events of today."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to their focus on intellectually challenging material, the *We the People...* and *With Liberty and Justice for All* texts incorporate instructional strategies which promote critical thinking, cooperation, and participation. The program shifts the emphasis away from the teacher as "lecturer" toward the role of teacher as facilitator of activities such as: **group discussions** during which students are encouraged to give their opinions about philosophical, historical, and contemporary issues; **small group activities** which encourage cooperative learning and participation; and **presentations, essays, and a variety of critical thinking exercises** which ask students to evaluate controversial issues and take and defend positions on those issues.

#### Congressional hearing as culminating activity

Upon completion of the curriculum, teachers are encouraged to involve their students in a simulated congressional hearing. For this activity, teachers divide their classes into groups of students who work cooperatively to prepare and present statements and answer questions on constitutional topics before a panel of community representatives acting as congressional committee members. The hearing questions are designed to assess students' knowledge of significant persons, events, concepts, principles, values, and issues related to the Constitution; ability to identify and apply constitutional principles in specific situations; and ability to develop, support, and evaluate positions on enduring constitutional issues.

#### Implementation of the curriculum in the classroom

The *We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution* program is designed as an integrated unit that may be taught over a six-week period; however, there is wide variation in implementation in classrooms around the country. Some teachers teach the curriculum in its entirety and have their students enter the simulated congressional hearing competition. Some teach the entire curriculum and have their students participate in a noncompetitive hearing before school or community members. Some teach the entire curriculum but do not conduct a hearing. Some teach selected lessons of the curriculum to supplement other civics and government texts. Some have students use the texts as resource material for their study of the Constitution.

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Civic Education, 1991, p.1.

### Other evaluations of the effects of the program

Studies conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) have confirmed the effectiveness of the **We the People...** program in increasing students' knowledge and understanding of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.<sup>2</sup> A recent study of the effects of teaching with the *With Liberty and Justice for All* text concluded that "students participating in the **We the People...** program gained knowledge and understanding of the Bill of Rights that is superior to students in government and civics classes using traditional textbooks."<sup>3</sup>

In 1993-94, a study of the effects of the **We the People...** program on students' attitudes and dispositions was conducted by Professor Richard Brody of Stanford University. Professor Brody compared students using the **We the People...** curriculum with students using other civics and government materials as well as with adult Americans at large.

Professor Brody's results demonstrate that students involved in the **We the People...** program display more political tolerance and feel more politically effective than most adult Americans and most other students. Findings reveal that these students exhibit more political tolerance in a number of ways, including (1) placing fewer restrictions on the press, speech, and the advocacy of radical or unorthodox ideas; (2) being more willing to grant freedom of assembly to groups with diverse opinions; (3) placing fewer restrictions on due process; and (4) displaying a willingness to grant others wide latitude to speak and act politically.

Professor Brody concludes that the **We the People...** program is effective in promoting political tolerance because students in the program become more interested in politics, feel more politically effective, and perceive fewer limits on their own political freedom.

Another important finding from this study is that the more involved a student is in **We the People...** competitive hearings, the more politically tolerant he or she is likely to become. For example, participating in the hearings encourages students to support granting the right of assembly to unpopular groups, and extending due-process rights and freedom of expression to groups and individuals that are "odd" and/or "threatening."

Dr. Ruth Mitchell also describes the effectiveness of the competitions as assessment in her book on performance assessment, *Testing for Learning*,<sup>4</sup> and in a case study conducted with Amy Stempel for the Office of Technology Assessment report, *Testing in America*.<sup>5</sup> As a result of these two descriptions, the congressional hearing model of assessment for achievement in civics courses has been adopted by at least one school system (East Brunswick, New Jersey),

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<sup>2</sup>Educational Testing Service, 1988 and 1991.

<sup>3</sup>Leming, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, Ruth. *Testing for Learning: How New Approaches to Evaluation Can Improve American Schools* (New York: The Free Press), 1992, pp. 92-99.

<sup>5</sup> Congress of the United States, Office of Technology Assessment. (1992). *Testing in American schools: Asking the right questions*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office.

and is under consideration for the California Learning Assessment System (CLAS) history/social science assessments.



## Section II

### METHODOLOGY AND CONDITIONS OF STUDY

#### Methodology and study sample

From August 1993 through January 1994, the Council for Basic Education (CBE) conducted an ethnographic case study of the *We the People...* program. The project was carried out primarily by CBE policy analyst Stephanie Soper, under the direction of Dr. Ruth Mitchell, formerly CBE's associate director and now an independent education consultant. Our purpose in conducting this study was to uncover qualitative effects of the program which do not lend themselves to evaluation by testing or control group comparisons. Since neither broad administrative analysis nor purely objective quantifiable measures were our focus, we looked at a small part of the overall program in close focus. We wanted to discover whether and how the program affected participants' career plans, self-images as citizens, and performance in other academic disciplines.

Interviews were conducted with students, teachers, parents and judges at four program sites: East Brunswick, New Jersey; Anne Arundel County, Maryland; Denver, Colorado; and Indianapolis, Indiana. Classroom observations were made in East Brunswick (four classes, all high school) and Anne Arundel County (three classes; one each in elementary, middle school, and high school). We conducted a total of seventy interviews (38 students, 13 teachers, a social studies department chair, 9 parents, and 5 judges). We also interviewed each of the district coordinators for the sites in the study.

Interviews and classroom visits were recorded on tape; transcriptions of the tapes are appended. The transcriptions (and quotations in this document) have been edited for clarity. Whenever possible, interviews were conducted on an individual, not group basis, to elicit the most forthright possible responses. Verbal permission to record interviews was given in every case, including the telephone interviews.

Interviews were based primarily on a set of interview protocols developed by Dr. Mitchell and Ms. Soper. Protocols were developed for each of the groups in the study—students, teachers, parents, and judges. Interview questions were developed to focus on several themes: personal change, observation of changes in others connected with the program, citizenship, evaluation of program methods and materials, and comparison of the program to other curricula. Although an order for presentation of the questions was established and generally followed, interview subjects occasionally took the discussion in directions which suggested an alternate course of questioning. As appropriate, we asked questions which were not in the established protocol but seemed to follow naturally on a subject's response.

This report is a summary of our findings from those interviews and observations.



### Conditions of study

In the first phase of this study, we contacted district coordinators to obtain the names and telephone numbers of teachers who might be interested in participating. We received far more than that. All four of the coordinators with whom we spoke regularly were cooperative and eager to do what they could to help us take a look at a program they loved. Calls were returned promptly, and far more information than just names and telephone numbers was given. Robert Flood, the coordinator of the East Brunswick's program, told us with great enthusiasm about the assessment program the school district was piloting based on the model of the Center for Civic Education's national competition. Chip Adomanis took care to explain the process we would need to go through to gain permission to visit classrooms in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. Denver's Loyall Darr and Indianapolis's Stan Harris were no less supportive or enthusiastic about helping with a study which would examine the effects of the **We the People...** program.

Ease of contact ended there, however. Because this study was conducted entirely through classroom visits and telephone interviews, the weather and teachers' access to telephones became significant factors in this study. The winter months of 1994 were among the worst in recorded history for the East Coast. Snow, ice, and extreme cold forced record numbers of canceled school days. By early February, nine working days—nearly half of a month of business days—had been missed. In the initial phase of the study, contact with teachers was difficult to establish, largely because few had easy access to a telephone or a long-distance line. Sending correspondence via the facsimile machine smoothed out this bump a bit, but most schools did not have the equipment for this. We also used regular mail, but response to that was poor—it worked only when we had already established some contact by telephone. Some teachers never called back, and consequently, though they were highly recommended by their district coordinators, neither they nor their students could be interviewed.

The teachers with whom we were able to establish contact were as cooperative as the district coordinators. Though several described feeling overwhelmed by the challenges at school, they were willing to spend their brief free time during the school day talking about the **We the People...** program and in most cases made arrangements to speak with us from their homes so they could talk at length, uninterrupted.

Some teachers were able to make arrangements for their students to gather during a free period and talk with us in the school day. Most students, though, were interviewed at home in the evenings, as it was the only time they were free. In addition, when they were at home they were less likely to give responses they thought the teacher would like to hear, or to be influenced by the presence of their peers.

In some cases, teachers and classes couldn't be interviewed as scheduled because they didn't have their texts and couldn't begin the program. A middle school teacher in Maryland only received thirty books for her class of thirty-four students. An elementary teacher in Denver had no books by December.

Organizing visits in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, proved especially challenging. Permission is required from the county Coordinator for Research to make any classroom visits. We had been told this by Chip Adomanis and petitioned to visit, both by telephone

and letter. That process began on September 3; we received permission in mid-November, after canceling several tentatively scheduled trips. In fact, we believe permission was granted then because the elementary teacher we planned to interview was a friend of the Coordinator of Research. She was pleased to have an opportunity to participate in the study and encouraged him to give permission for the study to move forward in the county classrooms.

Permission in hand, we visited the elementary classroom and the high school, observed instruction, and conducted interviews. The middle school visit was put off several times because the teacher did not want to begin the curriculum until she had enough books for all her students; she had originally received thirty but needed thirty-four. When we did arrive for the middle school visit, however, we learned that a special lecture by a man with an extensive collection of election memorabilia was taking the place of all regular history/social studies classes that day. Following that visit, all subsequent plans to return were foiled by vacations, state or district testing, or school cancellation due to weather. School cancellation and testing that had to be rescheduled caused us, in turn, to reschedule the high school and elementary follow-up visits several times. The middle school teacher was finally interviewed by telephone.

We were eager to interview the students of one teacher who was now an administrator. He had sounded particularly thoughtful about both the strengths and possible shortcomings of the *We the People...* program; we felt it would help us to hear his students' perceptions of the program. Since he had no current students, he gave us the names and addresses of four former students. We wrote to them all of them twice, asking them to call us collect. None responded.

We also wanted to interview some of the judges at the competitions, when impressions were fresh. Chip Adomanis in Maryland and John Calimano in New Jersey made arrangements with us several times to attend the competitions. New Jersey's competition was rescheduled twice; Maryland's, four times. When they finally did meet, we were subject to earlier obligations. Consequently, judges, too, were interviewed by telephone and the opportunity to relate questions to observations of the competition were lost.

We were fortunate, however, to be able to attend the national competition. The New Jersey team members were students we had observed and talked with in the fall; it was remarkable to witness their growth in the intervening time. It also proved useful to us to have seen the full cycle of the *We the People...* program and reinforced our observations of the changes the program can provoke.

Transcription of the interview tapes proved to be a mixed blessing. On the negative side, the tapes proved unexpectedly difficult to understand. Though it wasn't evident in person, on tape it became clear that, when students groped for the right word or wanted to use a difficult or strong word, they often mumbled it to mask their uncertainty. Even with assistance, the process of transcription took several weeks. Also, the tape recorder malfunctioned during two interviews, one with a teacher, one with Keith Geiger, executive director of the National Education Association, after he judged at the national competition. We regretted the loss of those interviews. On the positive side, was the pleasure and reinforcement of hearing again on tape, students and teachers who were vitally involved in education.

Despite the setbacks of weather and non-communication, the results we have obtained from this study were made possible by the enthusiasm of those who learn or teach the curricula of the **We the People...** program. We doubt that the generally high degree of cooperation we received from students, teachers, parents, and judges would have been available had the program been perceived as mediocre.



### Section III

#### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: AN OVERVIEW

In all of the interviews conducted, in all of the classrooms visited, the **We the People...** program was lauded considerably more often than criticized. The content of the program is internalized by students to an extent that pushes its influence beyond the history classroom's walls. Program effects are strongest on the students and their teachers, but virtually all parents interviewed had been affected, too. The primary effect in this case is changed habits of communication with their children and a growing respect for their intellect. Judges' self-analysis indicates little personal change resulting from the program, but tremendous enthusiasm for what it accomplishes and satisfaction in their participation.

The results of this study have led us to conclude that **We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution** is a remarkable program. It is our strong recommendation that it continue. If we as educators truly wish to prepare students to become citizens who think, who can move beyond the "kneejerk" reaction, this program is the best preparation possible. If we also wish teachers to be deeply engaged in their work and able to teach our children how to stretch their minds around broad and important ideas, the **We the People...** program provides rich opportunities to develop professionally. Teachers and students studying with the Center for Civic Education curricula put into practice some of our highest democratic ideals—they are free to talk and explore and exchange ideas. Those opportunities are intellectually energizing in a way that few teachers or students have experienced in any other context.

The **We the People...** program appears to have other effects, as well. As students exchanged ideas, they developed an ability to think critically and independently. They also learned to understand and accept that there were valid points of view other than their own. Those qualities were put to use in other classes and in students' homes. By reports from students and teachers, and through interviews, we learned that parents had noticed these changes in their children and were pleased by them. Some parents, in fact, found their own interest in our government and its foundations piqued or rekindled as their children developed a political voice.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Even we, as interviewers, found ourselves affected by the opportunity to be exposed to the **We the People...** program. After several months of discovering how effective the program is in helping students realize what responsible citizenship means, one of us was confronted with a troublesome issue before the state legislature. The inclination to complain to friends and colleagues, but not take action, was swept aside by the example of the students. After learning of high school students taking political action within their power, a call was placed to the appropriate state senator and representative to register comment on the pending legislation.



In the March, 1994, issue of *Basic Education*, Graham Down spoke of the essential nature of the study of history. His words could easily have been written specifically about the value of the *We the People...* program:

*[P]erhaps the most compelling rationale for all our efforts as educators is to liberate our culture from the blight of certitude. To be aware of complexity is to acknowledge the all-pervasive element of ambiguity in our society. The humanities in general—and history in particular—by forcing us to study the dynamics of human nature come closer to meeting this goal than most of the other subjects associated with traditional liberal education...Of all the basic subjects, the study of history is indispensable to lifelong learning—an attribute fundamental to the human capacity for genuine fulfillment...History reminds us again and again of the essential preconditions of a civilized society. What is civic virtue? What is responsible citizenship...?*<sup>7</sup>

We asked a high school student in Maryland how his experience compared with other social studies or history classes he had taken. He responded, as if in reply to Mr. Down's assertions:

*More helpful than other classes. It tells you about your everyday life and your responsibilities in your life, ideas you can carry with you. There's more debating, more discussion. It was a lot more interactive. It was set up so you could get specific. No one was necessarily right. Like the Battle of 1812, that's just a fact. They don't just take a book and say "Here, do this and do this." This course said, "These are the facts—where does that take you?" as opposed to "Here's where the facts take you." It was more open to ambiguity.*

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<sup>7</sup> Why History? *Basic Education*, Vol. 38, No. 7 (March 1994), p. 14.

A major aim of the National Education Goals, Goal Three<sup>8</sup> states:

By the year 2000, American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy.

If one aspect of the program had to be chosen as having the greatest impact, we believe it would have to be the students' changed habits of mind. Without wishing in any way to detract from the significance of what students learn about our government's history, its documents, and their application in modern life, *we found that the single most striking effect of the program is that the students who participate in them become active, involved, engaged, independent thinkers.* They are on the path to becoming lifelong learners.

The results of our interviews were unequivocal: the curricula developed by the Center for Civic Education were considered the best the teachers or their students had encountered. Compared to other history, civics, or social studies texts or programs they had used, *We the People...* and *With Liberty and Justice for All* were emphatically preferred. This appreciation of the program became abundantly clear during our first site visit for this study. The liveliness and intellectual exercise we observed in four classes, the dynamism and thoughtfulness of the teachers and the department chair, and the behavior and comments of the students at this New Jersey high school gave us a highly favorable first impression. As we drove back to Washington, D.C., replaying parts of the student interview tapes, we wondered whether it wasn't going to sound as if we had coached the students to respond as they did.

While later interviews and classroom visits were a bit more uneven in quality, we observed that the *We the People...* program and the teachers who deliver it combine to produce learning and habits of mind that should have a long-term influence on students. In fact, it is has been difficult to select among the wealth of information and comments garnered in our investigation. The words of students, teachers, parents, and judges best attest to the program's effects; we will let them, as much as possible, speak here.

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Congress. Goals 2000: Educate America Act Conference Report 103-446, p. 7.





## Section IV

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: STUDENTS

#### Characteristics of the students

Students' reasons for participating in the *We the People...* program varied. At the elementary school level, participation was required because the teacher had made it part of the fifth grade curriculum. Similarly, in the upper grades some students participated in the *We the People...* program simply because it was part of a required history, social studies, or civics course. When students were participating in the program because it was part of a required course, motivation varied. Some students had a keen interest in politics and were therefore highly motivated to make the most of the program. Others began, at least, deeply uninterested.

In some high schools, students had the option to choose a course that included the *We the People...* program. In these instances, students themselves selected the *We the People...* program; and the interviewers were often told that it was considered a feather in the student's cap to be part of the program. In these cases, students' motivation was generally high throughout the duration of the program.

The academic strength of the students in the program also varied. Sometimes at the middle and high school level the program was embedded in a course for high-achieving students. However, at the elementary level, and sometimes at the middle and high school levels, both high and average achievers participated in the program.

The gender of students in the program did not, to our eyes, play a significant role. During two elementary school visits, the interviewer was struck by the balance of participation between girls and boys. Leader and follower roles during small group work seemed to be random, and no bias for or against either sex was evident in either students' willingness to comment and respond or the teacher's and peers' reactions to student comments. Girls and boys were equally as likely to offer extended responses to telephone interviews. In one high school, we did see a class composed of two girls and four boys and another of two girls and fourteen boys. We asked the teacher if he thought perhaps girls were intimidated by either the subject matter or boys' aggressive stance in discussing politics and government. The teacher responded that the group configuration was a result of scheduling; that he had other classes where girls were in greater number and, in his opinion, the girls were as strong as the boys. Two of those four girls were reticent compared to the boys; two were as vocal. A team from this high school reached the final day of the national competition; certainly the girls' performance that day was as strong and essential to the team's success as the boys'. Since gender issues were not an object of the study, however, we did not explore them extensively.

Student responses during the interviews were for the most part remarkably enthusiastic—so much so that, several times during the course of transcribing the interview tapes, a CBE associate commented on the manner in which students replied to questions about the



program. Tone of voice, length of response, and positive adjectives in program and self evaluation spoke well of student reaction to the *We the People...* program. Teachers reported that they had no difficulty in finding volunteers to be interviewed by telephone, and students who initially were shy and needed to be drawn out began to be fluent as they reflected on their work.

One quiet young man in Indiana, for instance, when asked if the program had had any influence on career choice or other long-term plans, first replied that he was planning to be an author, so "No, [there was] no effect." But before we could move on to the next question, he reminded himself aloud of a story he was in the process of writing and asked if the interviewer wanted to hear about it. He related a futuristic tale in which characters debated in considerable detail the kind of government they should create in their new interplanetary colony. Characters considered one person/one vote, for instance, and during our conversation he revised his ideas about this issue several times as his explanations clarified his own thoughts. Several times during this narration, he paused to comment—more to himself than to the interviewer—on how much his study with the *With Liberty and Justice for All* text had influenced his story.

In counterpoint to the enthusiasm most students showed for *We the People...*, the program seems to be doing battle against a disinclination or lack of practice on the part of some students to engage in thoughtful criticism. That is difficult to believe after witnessing the quality of the national competition teams, but notes and tapes show that it is so. One group of students, for example, didn't understand a reference to hearings, yet had participated in them earlier in the semester using the *We the People...* text as preparation for *With Liberty and Justice for All*. The interviewer sat in on their class as they were just beginning the latter text. Faced with a teacher who was enthusiastic but not imaginative and far too inclined to give rather than seek answers, the students sat dully, only occasionally catching fire and far more interested in flirting.

Some teachers combat this intellectual laziness well, but even in classes with what appeared to be excellent teachers, there were problems. We observed several classes of a teacher in New Jersey, for instance. In some, students were engaged, knowledgeable, and well able to understand the distinction between personal inclination and law. In another, though, there was little evidence of ability to construct an argument based on much else besides unsupported opinion, despite the teacher's artful coaching.

This is not to detract from the overall excellence of the program, however. There are plentiful anecdotes, from all quarters, of the impact the program has had on students' thinking. The following sections address the changes reported to us.

**Section 4.1 STUDENTS: Changes in thinking, opinions,  
and study habits**

*It...slowly but surely chips away at your ignorance.*

—New Jersey high school student

Two of the students' most frequent observations regarding participation in the **We the People...** program were that they believed they had acquired, just, the ability to formulate thoughtful opinion, and, second, the willingness and ability to give articulate voice to their opinion. Several high school students commented that they felt they could now take a stand on issues with some sense of authority. Even the youngest children we observed, though they struggled sometimes to express themselves, were able to sort through opinion and back it up with Constitutional fact. One student put it this way:

*I think the most important part about the class is that it teaches you to back up what you say with facts. You can't just say, "Well, this is what I think because that's how I see it and I'm right."...We have to say "I believe this because of these statistics or this fact and this would be a better way to go about it." And I think that really affects you throughout life. I can make better personal decisions because I think more factually...And I also think that one of the important things about the class is that it doesn't tell you what is right. It tells you that there are these different views, and not that they're right or wrong, so it really forces you to think.*

Again and again, students described how they had developed new habits of mind, that they found themselves turning over new ideas in their mind outside of class time and discussing them even when they weren't required to. For example, one of the most touching of these self-analyses came from a high school boy who was asked if the **We the People...** program had caused him to change any of his opinions. He replied:

*It's caused me to form opinions. Normally, I [used to] just look at some of the things we'd discuss and say, "This is the issue." I didn't take a side. But now I'm just starting to think to myself while we're debating things, "This is the side I would actually take because of what I've heard."*

This is at once an indictment of an education that could let a student reach the twelfth grade without being pushed to defend an opinion and a compliment to the power of the curriculum to push a student's intellect. Detailed below are observations from students and teachers about the growth provoked by participation in **We the People...**

• **Ability to engage in civilized discussion**

The study sought to discover whether the discussions which arose in class ever were carried beyond classroom doors. Was there any lasting carryover to other areas of the students' lives? Most commonly, students told us that they had learned to avoid the temptation to argue from pure opinion and emotion, and instead, to take a rational approach and discuss issues rather than fight. One student described the change in himself:

*What I like now is that when I used to get into arguments with my friends about my opinions, I*

would wind up saying things like "What are you talking about? You're a moron." And that's not really a proper way to carry on an intelligent discussion. So I learned basically not to criticize people, just to stress my point in a more positive way and not insult them any more.

While we were visiting the East Brunswick, New Jersey, site, students were discussing issues that often have adults at each others' throats—religious rights, free speech, school prayer. What we saw was an affirmation of the comment above. Point and counterpoint were made; in the best of the classes we observed, facile and ample reference was made to Supreme Court cases and their application to current issues, students acknowledged each other's points with reasonable grace, and the teacher interjected himself only as often as was needed to consider new perspectives.

The same thing is evidently happening in Indiana classrooms. One young woman there told us:

*[The discussions] help because you learn how to speak and discuss without having arguments. In a lot of other classes, people can't discuss without having a huge argument—people can't listen to other people's views and accept them.*

- **Ability to be empathetic and tolerant**

Intertwined with the qualities outlined in the previous section were empathy and tolerance. "I can listen to someone else's point of view" and "I've learned that my way isn't the only way," were frequent comments from the students. In the East Brunswick classroom mentioned above, the teacher sparked a discussion by showing his classes a clip of the Reverend Billy Graham delivering a benediction at the inauguration of President Clinton. A student with a large wooden cross around his neck reflected aloud that he didn't personally find the prayer offensive—he liked it. "But I can see where other people might be offended by it, so maybe it shouldn't have been done."

A young woman in Denver described changes in her classmates' points of view during the course of their studies:

*Many of them seem to like it a lot...The first thing we did was women's rights. Now, they never even knew that we had any rights. When we did that, I think that was the most interesting not only because you are a woman, but because you learn what you don't have that you should have.*

*Q. What did the young men think of that?*

*A. The guys were kind of discouraging at first; they were saying that we don't deserve equal rights, what do we need rights for, we are all equal. They began to see that we weren't all equal [under the law], that women needed rights. They began to understand and some were really supportive.*

Among the many students who described similar changes in themselves or their friends, two others stand out. The first is a young woman from Indiana. We quote her here because, as a high school student, she will soon have the power to vote. It appears that, as a result of the *We the People...* program, she will try to use that power thoughtfully. Here is how she



responded when asked if the arguments she heard in class ever persuaded her to change her mind:

*Maybe an example would be our discussion of the presidential election. We had a lot of Republicans in the class, so hearing what they had to say made me think that maybe I hadn't thought of everything.*

A fellow Indiana student told us he "used to be very bullheaded, singleminded, but this opened me up." When we asked him for an example, he replied:

*Political issues, racism—before, I didn't put myself in other people's shoes, look around and see the other side. Before, I always just looked at my side, how I saw the world, my point of view, and that's not how the world is.*

He said that he was used to getting good grades already, so he would "look good on paper." We asked if he did the same for this class, that is, work solely for the grade. "No," he answered, "for this class it was to learn the material."

These changes were certainly not limited to high school students. In a Maryland middle school, students who were just being introduced to the course had put together folders of clippings from newspapers and magazines to illustrate concepts of the curriculum. They had been astute in noting injustice even when the victims bore no similarity to themselves. In a fifth grade Maryland classroom, the students learned that women didn't have the right to vote until the 20th century. One of the boys quickly said, "But that's dumb!" In the same classroom several months later, the students put on skits to illustrate citizens' rights and responsibilities. The students in most cases portrayed someone they were not in reality—handicapped, a member of a persecuted religion or race, a disrespected woman—with an empathetic presentation that made it clear the lessons of the curriculum had been more than merely memorized.

The habits of discourse established through the *We the People...* program had led these students consistently to examine and often defend points of view that were not their own. In the process, they began to see the validity of others' ideas and values and became less quick to dismiss or ridicule them.

- **Ability to think independently**

Another common theme in students' reflections upon the *We the People...* program was a growing sense that their own ideas were worthwhile and that they needn't follow in a parent's or a teacher's ideological footsteps simply because they were authority figures. It was evident from student responses that this was not defiance for defiance's sake—their ideas were based on substance, fact, and the process of debate. Several students in all four sites related instances in which they carried on a political argument with their parents because they had the knowledge to support their point of view. It is difficult to convey the tone of voice students used when describing this—it fell somewhere between wonder and pride, with a little arrogance.



Teachers observed the same changes. Following is a glimpse at the process of change in students as they react to parents, teachers, and classmates, excerpted from a conversation we had with a New Jersey teacher and his social studies coordinator:

*Q: What are the [students'] reactions to the concepts of government that are being taught?*

*A: Well, it provides a challenge to them. IPLE<sup>9</sup> has always been about pro/con discussions, assigning students to positions they wouldn't ordinarily defend. So we infuse that into this oral concept that we're getting from the Center for Civic Education, and they come to like it. Just today they're discussing church/state matters, and they like the open forum of it, because in order to do the Center for Civic Education model, you've got to be defending and presenting both sides of an issue.*

*Q. Do you find that having to take contrary roles has an impact on students' attitudes and tolerance? Do you think it has an impact beyond the classroom?*

*A. I think so. I wish you could have met one kid. He's a dyed-in-the-wool—well, I won't even tell you which side of the argument he's on most of the time. And it's not my job to make a student a liberal if he's a conservative, or vice versa, but just to have them see and think about things. But there was no way he was going to move from this position he'd inherited from his family. But every kid in the class was on his case because he'd never, ever—he'd want to know what the position was on "his" side of an issue, and he'd go to it whether he really felt that way or not. As a result of this [With Liberty and Justice for All] experience, he's begun to wonder, "how is it I'm always in the minority here, and could it be that I'm not listening to the argument?"*

*Q. What kind of comments do you get from teachers who work with these students in other classes, once the students have begun to argue and think and talk?*

*A. ...I think it's good; I don't think it's aggravated anybody, but sometimes it does make for great faculty conversation, because they'll come to me and say "Is Johnny Smith an IPLE student?" and I'll say "Well, yeah." And they'll say, "Well, I knew that because..." and inevitably it'll be because they're argumentative—in a positive way—they don't disrupt the class.*

We asked a young man in Denver if his participation in *We the People...* had affected his attitude towards government in any way. He replied:

*Yes, because I started to know what I was talking about; I wasn't just saying what I heard my parents say. I know the rights I have and when they are being violated.*

It is not only independence in thought from parents and teachers that students seem to gain. At all three levels, by self- and teacher-report, students read more critically, especially newspapers. A fifth-grade teacher in Indiana, for instance, reported that her students were much more aware of propaganda.

Another facet of this growth in the students is that they not only have opinions but are unafraid of expressing them. Though teachers and parents made the same observation, here are voices of three female Denver students expressing what they thought was the most important idea or personal attribute they took from the course:

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<sup>9</sup> Institute for Political and Legal Education, the course in which *With Liberty and Justice for All* is embedded at East Brunswick High School.

I think it's that I've lost the fear of expressing my opinions. Now I don't mind expressing my views—even if I think they sound ridiculous.

Well, I'm kind of a shy person, but now I am more comfortable speaking in front of a group.

I learned to take criticism without being discouraged, and to be more open to the Constitution. I had never read it or even bothered to look at it before now.

- **Development of intellectual curiosity and effective habits of discourse**

Related to the attributes listed above was a growing inclination in most students we interviewed to push themselves intellectually—to seek out knowledge and information, to question and pursue lines of thought, and to develop habits of articulateness in forming questions and answers. Most teachers commented to us that their students voluntarily read the newspaper regularly as a consequence of their participation in the *We the People...* program. When we asked students why this was so, they typically responded that they wanted to be able to keep up with class discussion and "not look stupid."

A Denver elementary teacher noted that students who didn't always do well in other academic areas "blossomed" with the *We the People...* program. When asked about the effectiveness of mock hearings, for instance, she told us that her students mainly used the process to practice caucusing and gathering information on bills. The effect, she said, was that:

*Children become experts—you wouldn't believe what they can do, and it's often not the best students. These students can create information [for their bills] within reason with great imagination, and they know enough to cite resources.*

Students also reported that they had become much more aware of current events. Because students have been required to do research, knowledge to support their arguments comes from a fairly wide range of sources. A number of students made reference to their surprise at how often things they read in the newspaper or heard discussed in their community bore a relation to what they were studying. At the least, most students said that they had developed a habit of reading the newspaper and newsmagazines. A female high school student said:

*I think the course makes you more aware of current events, what's going around, what the consequences are...It gives you both views and makes you more aware [of] what the actual issues are. It kind of takes away the smokescreen that the "pros" and the "cons" can set up and gives you a more fair view of things.*

An Indiana elementary school teacher and her students watched C-Span in their classroom to stay abreast of Supreme Court cases. She talked with us about the animation with which her students discussed the cases—though she had started the C-Span watching habit, they insisted on carrying it on. She also shared her pleasure in developing students who are knowledgeable about current issues facing the nation and who have learned how to discuss

different angles of these issues in a well-considered manner. Because of parental concerns, she sidestepped the issue of abortion, but her class did discuss capital punishment and gun control. According to this teacher:

*The students' stance on gun control really depends on the debate. The kids on the tougher side usually win because they've needed to do so much research, since they can't rely on their own opinion to carry the argument. This program really empowers kids.*

A young woman in Denver reflected that empowerment:

*[The class] really pushes you toward expressing your feelings, and when you are outside of class it becomes a normal thing to try to spark up an opposite opinion or just to bring up more controversy in conversation and hear everybody else's opinion.*

A middle school teacher, asked how she saw her students change, observed:

*You still have students who shoot off [with an unsubstantiated opinion], but I had more kids who say "That doesn't make sense," and "Why do you think that's so?." I would say, yes, on the whole, there's a real increase in those basic critical thinking skills.*

- **Carryover of study skills and ability to do research in other academic areas**

We had expected, based on the positive reports we were given about students' in-class participation and out-of-class interest, that we would find a carryover in improved study habits for other classes. On the whole, that did not appear to be true, at least for students' pre-collegiate courses. (The effects of the program on students once they are in college are discussed in a later section.) Instead, students reported with depressing regularity that they were not really expected to think in other classes, or that there was little if any opportunity to discuss issues outside of the *We the People...* classes. The following exchanges typify student responses when we asked them if the improved skills they'd gained in the program were being used in other classes:

*To start a discussion on government establishment of religion, a high school teacher we visited raised the possibility of teaching a class on the history of religion next year. When one student told the teacher they already did that in an English class, another student turned to the first and responded flatly, "Yeah, but we don't discuss."*

Later on, we asked those two students and their colleagues if they had to engage in discussion in the *We the People...* class. They all laughed and nodded their heads vigorously, and another student said:

*I think a good thing about the course is that you won't be asked a question where you just look in the book and the book has the answer there—all you have to do is either paraphrase it or just sit and quote it from the book to answer your question. You have to look at what the book says and then you have to interpret that into either the everyday situations going on right now or make it go together with what we're talking about in class.*



He made it plain that "paraphrasing or just sitting there quoting the book" was the norm, not the give-and-take of the civics curriculum.

We did, however, find a few instances in which students felt that the habits they were developing through the *We the People...* program could be accepted by teachers in other classes. If any class was cited as a place where the skills gained in *We the People...* played a role, it was literature. When questioned as to why they believed this was so, students replied either that the works they were studying had a natural overlap, or, more commonly, that literature was the only class they had which employed discussion. For example, when a high school student in

New Jersey was asked about the effect of the course on students' study habits or attitudes outside of class:

*Study habits probably not, but thought processes, maybe. Like you said [speaking to another student] you used knowledge of John Locke's philosophy in your history class? I don't have another history class where I could use it, but in logic and reasoning it plays a part.*

A colleague of his said in turn:

*I find that in my English class I'm analyzing the writing to better understand what they're saying.*

A bemused Denver student told us:

*It's kind of weird—I find myself wanting to do my homework, just wanting to do things now. It motivates me, knowing I can do things; I can do almost everything now.*

Those comments and the comments of the New Jersey teacher and his supervisor indicate that not all *We the People...* students leave their new intellectual habits at the door to other classrooms. However, we were disappointed to discover that, since it was not expected of them, most students did not consistently exercise their newly developed intellectual muscles in other classes. On the other hand, we hope we have made it clear that students did exercise those muscles outside of school and occasionally found opportunities and inspiration to use them in school.

On a brighter note, teacher and students at all levels reported that the emphasis on research had made a significant impact on them. A young woman in Denver said:

*In English class when we are covering a certain book, it helps us to go into other resources other than just what we are given. We go to outside resources like libraries on weekends and stuff.*

Her comments were echoed by an Indiana girl when we asked her how she thought her study habits had changed since participating in *We the People...*:

*Going to the library became less intimidating; I knew where to look for things, and how to ask for help if I needed it. I learned how to take really good notes."*

A student from the same state reflected on her own growth beyond the immediate needs of the class:

*When I see things like that [about rights to privacy, her issue for the district competition], I think, "That has to do with my unit." I still look for things, and I read the newspaper, like I'm still in the competition.*

When asked if he had ever been surprised by what students accomplished in the program, a Maryland teacher related this story:

*We were in the state competition, and I will never forget this. The question was raised, "How was the word 'slaves' used in the Constitution?" And one girl said, "The word was never used." Well, that's something I didn't teach them because I didn't know it. She had read it, and quoted several different portions of the Constitution...Then she went on to say that James Madison would not allow that to be used. She knew this because she had done all this research on her own.*

In Maryland, one teacher's students felt they had enough background to take the AP exam, even without an AP government course available. He reports that some of them did very well. The Indiana teacher who started her students watching C-Span follows along to see what's happening to her students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. The teachers who have her students in those grades have noted how well-prepared the students are, how able to research and debate and discuss.

If one aspect of the program had to be chosen as having the greatest impact, we believe it would have to be the one highlighted in this section, that is, *changed habits of mind*. Without wishing in any way to detract from the significance of what students learn about our government's history, its documents, and their application in modern life, the single most striking effect of the program is that the students who participate in it become active, involved, engaged, independent thinkers. They are on the path to becoming lifelong learners.

#### Section 4.2 STUDENTS: Beyond the curriculum

*Because I'd already learned so much, learning came much easier to me, even when other people were having problems, since I'd had a full year on the Constitution.*

—Carrie Willis, aide to U. S. Representative Frank McCloskey

Students have felt the influence of the *We the People...* program in spheres which reach beyond the immediate intentions of the curriculum. As we have noted already, they are using the knowledge and skills they have gained through the *We the People...* program to stretch themselves further than they or their teachers expected they could.

The program's influence extends even beyond the high school—a number of teachers recounted successes their students had had in college because of the *We the People...* program. The program's impact on student citizenship is significant enough to merit a separate section in this report.

- **Outgrowth activities**

Activities grew out of the *We the People...* program largely as a result of teacher initiative and are covered in the section below on teachers. However, several students we encountered had put to use outside of the classroom the knowledge and independence gained from the program. A Denver seventh-grade student, for instance, participated in a community-wide essay contest on freedom. Though he grumbled through the entire writing process, he won the contest. When President Clinton was elected, *The Washington Post* asked students to write him letters of advice and published the best of them. A Maryland fifth grader, a student in the *We the People...* program, wrote one of the chosen letters.

High school students in East Brunswick, New Jersey, participate in a global studies program, an international studies program, and the national high school Model United Nations program. According to their teacher, "The whole concept of talking out and analyzing [in *We the People...*] really supports the students in this program."

After high school, the New Jersey students have worked on the staffs of Harvard's Model Congress and Model United Nations programs, and at University of Pennsylvania's and University of Virginia's Model United Nations programs. Former *We the People...* students at Rutgers initiated the Model United Nations and Model Congress programs there and serve as their chairs. Expressing a deep professional satisfaction, their teacher said:

*You can't help but feel like their dad. You've sweated with them over "Not that rule, this rule," and then they finally get there and it just comes naturally to them.*

- **College and careers**

Perhaps it is not surprising that a program with such an extensive reach into students' intellects would carry its influence beyond the pre-college years into colleges and universities. What do students say about college when they visit their old *We the People...* teachers? According to one of the high school teachers in Maryland:

*Two things happened. One was that they met other kids who had become involved in the program and that really excited them. But the other thing that happened was many of them decided to take many more political science courses or courses along that line, and some of them actually changed their major. They went into politics and law. They were going off to college and they were going to major in engineering or whatever, and they found they had grown such an interest in this type of stuff that they went ahead and changed their major altogether.*

An East Brunswick teacher gave an ironic evaluation of the lingering effects of the *We the People...* program:

*What winds up happening is they'll get to their Poli Sci 101 course, and they're disappointed, because they're talking about the same issues. They know Locke, they know Hobbes, they'll know Madison, Jefferson, and so on, they'll know the issues. But of course, in a lecture hall there's not the give-and-take, so they're a little disappointed—they can't work with panels. They're prepared, but they're not excited about the dynamics unless they're in a small group setting in a small liberal arts college.*



A high school teacher in Denver recounted how all of the senior students from one year's program went on in college to major in history. An elementary teacher in the same city who follows the progress of her students for years after they leave her class said she has had a number of students decide to be political science majors as a result of this course. A woman who taught in the earlier years of the New Brunswick program recalled that most of the students from her 1988 class were either in law school or working for some sort of political organization. When queried as to whether she thought that had anything to do with the program, she responded:

*I think it gave them a lot of confidence. There was a lot of interest already there—that's why they sign up for political and legal education. But the program gives them a lot of chance to do research. One thing my son said when he went to Cornell was that he was really prepared to do research and to get to the heart of an issue. The course helped him learn how to get rid of a lot of extraneous information.*

Her son now works for a political consulting firm in Washington, D.C.

We interviewed Carrie Willis in her office on Capitol Hill, where she is an aide for Indiana Congressman Frank McCloskey, a situation she attributes directly to the *We the People...* program and her visit to Washington for the national competition. Carrie participated in the *We the People...* program in the second year of Indianapolis, Indiana's involvement with the program. She told us that the first assignment in her college freshman writing class was to develop an essay on "People Get the Government They Deserve." She was able to construct a two-page essay on the spot, one so thorough that the professor asked whether she was a history major. When asked if she thought her experience in the *We the People...* program had had an effect in her college political science classes, Carrie replied, "Because I'd already learned so much, learning came much easier to me, even when other people were having problems, since I'd had a full year on the Constitution."

She told us that she has also used knowledge gained in the *We the People...* program in her job. When pressed for an example, she described a constituent letter asking some questions about the Constitution, and said, "It was easy to discuss the issue and how constitutional interpretation would apply."

When we interviewed one father, he told us that his son had telephoned that day. The son is a sophomore in college now, and had called his father to ask him to send to college his *We the People...* books for reference. Also, the son had run for fraternity office as a sophomore, something that is apparently rare. He is now running for a university council seat.

An Indiana girl talked about the effect she sees in her future as a result of the program—she has always liked history, but she now wants to major in it. Her research for the competition has inspired her to focus on social sciences aspects of history. Her example and the others cited above offer substantial evidence that students truly learn the concepts taught in the *We the People...* program, that this is not a course that students merely pass through on their way to college.

### Section 4.3 STUDENTS: Citizenship

*It made me more interested to vote. If I could I'd probably be the first person there!*  
—Denver high school student

Based on student comments, the nature of the material in the *We the People...* and *With Liberty and Justice for All* texts seems to generate or enhance a sense of citizenship. It would be reasonable to conclude from student responses that they have given more thought to rights than to responsibilities, but also fair to say that many did think about their attendant responsibilities as citizens.

#### • The power of the vote

Students gave evidence of an awareness that they would someday have a voice through their vote. At the high school level, we asked a student whether his enrollment in the class had had an effect on his perception of recent elections. He replied:

*When I get those mailers from the candidates for office, instead of throwing them away or recycling them, I look at them now. I look at these things, I open them up, they say "Dear Whoever," and I just read what they have to say. And I'll be laughing at [them], because most of them are so opinionated and so full of blank statements. From this class, you can see through the politics of it all and see the real issues.*

A classmate of this student echoed those thoughts about being a well-informed voter:

*Instead of just listening to what the candidates have to say on a television ad or what they have to say in a pamphlet, I'd research it a little.*

Yet another classmate told us she had campaigned for Clinton; now the Democrats know her and invite her to their events. When we asked her whether she had been interested in campaigning before she studied the *With Liberty and Justice for All* curriculum, she replied:

*I was interested in it then, but I was more interested in it as someone watching, and now I wanted a grasp of it. Also, if I watch C-Span I understand it now.*

We heard similar comments in Denver. Here are comments from two young women reflecting on the effects of the *We the People...* program on their perceptions of voting:

*[The class] has made me more informed about what goes on in the government. It made me more interested to vote. If I could I'd probably be the first person there! I used to not care very much about voting; I thought it didn't matter very much.*

*I know for sure it will affect me in my voting, because before this class I never really thought of voting as an option at all because I wasn't ever influenced to vote from [sic] my family or anybody. So I never went further in depth on the issues of what we would have to vote on. But, with this class, I can definitely see myself taking part in voting when I come of age, and I would really be interested in researching whatever bills or topics come up in the voting process.*

Even fifth graders thought about voting. As we observed a Maryland elementary classroom, the teacher asked her students how they could influence an issue in public policy and one young man volunteered, "I could vote." Since she wanted her students to be aware of what they could do even as ten-year-olds, she quickly responded, "No, you can't, not until you're eighteen. What can you do now?" The class moved on to talk about letter writing and peaceful protest.

- **The well-informed citizen**

The previous section suggests that students who participate in the **We the People...** program are well-prepared to vote. Their preparation certainly goes beyond that, though—they are well-informed and ready to use their knowledge wherever it may be needed—not just in the voting booth. An Indiana elementary teacher told us her students "go home and talk to their parents and use amazing vocabulary voluntarily—like 'civic virtue' and 'impeach'—in their conversation."

A competition judge in Indiana commented similarly on the ability of the students he judged to think about applications of their knowledge:

*I find that the [typical] first approach to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights is one of viewing it in its historical context rather than viewing them as issues that affect them every day. And I was quite encouraged to find that there were students who took an interest, who enjoyed this kind of competition and it didn't involve a ball or a net or a goal line. I find that they want to discuss in depth various First Amendment and other issues. They want to argue a point on censorship, that sort of thing. All the teams were able to be prepared on their three expected questions, like a research project. I think the more intriguing part of the competition was the more spontaneous, unprepared responses that required them to do a little analytical work.*

An elementary teacher in Denver told us of the time her Congressman came to visit her class. He became engaged in a serious and extended discussion on foreign policy with the fifth-grader who had taken on the role of Secretary of State in the class. She also told how the mayor of the next town lined up an expert on Russia to talk with the students. "The kids were primed for a foreign policy discussion, and he backed out—thought he was too advanced for them." Disgust with his lack of confidence in her students poured from her voice.

A girl in New Jersey received her driver's license while she was participating in the **We the People...** program. Now that she was a driver, not a passenger or pedestrian, she noticed that an intersection in town was dangerous. Armed with her confidence and knowledge gained in the **We the People...** program, she spoke up at a town meeting and was able to get the problem corrected. Without the class experience, she told us, she never would have spoken up.

An Indiana parent recounted a similar story of student involvement in community affairs:

*We had some things going on here in our area this past year with First Amendment rights and so forth in our school system. A group of parents was trying to quash a certain program because they*



*didn't like the books, yet the kids were very interested in it; they wanted to know more about it. All of a sudden, you saw them getting very vocal, and you saw kids taking maybe a different position from their parents because they were exercising that right and their beliefs because all of a sudden they had some knowledge. So I don't think the class was just a history lesson where they learned a bunch of stuff and then regurgitated the facts. We had a public forum on the whole topic, where both views were expressed—it filled an auditorium. I will say that probably the best speakers were the students.*

- **Elected office**

In light of the breadth of effect the *We the People...* program has on students, we were disappointed that few students showed any interest in—indeed, any thought of—elected office. We asked students if they had considered either school or public office. Perhaps, at the twelfth grade, the lack of effect on choice to run for school office is not surprising. Student elections are normally held early in the year, before students have had a significant period of time in the *We the People...* program. Still, that does not explain the little thought given to eventual public office.

A fifth grade teacher gave some insight to elementary school election. Elections in her school start in the fourth grade, so students are aware of them by the time they are participating in the *We the People...* program the following year. This teacher reported that:

*The kids think they'll win an election hands-down because they know stuff, they can organize a committee, but they learn that at that age election is based on popularity and are terribly disappointed.*

Much the same thing is reported to happen at the middle school/junior high school level. Middle and elementary school teachers were not aware of elected office held by their students in later years.

We did hear several encouraging comments from students. An Indiana girl is giving serious thought to doing an internship on Capitol Hill since she participated in the *We the People...* program.

A young man in Indiana told us:

*I never really paid much attention to the government; I just let the big guys take care of everything. After taking this course, I've really noticed how people need to take a part in the government process.*

A friend of his told us he would like to be more involved in government. Here is his explanation of how the program motivated him:

*Now I have a thorough understanding of how it came to be; we have a really strong tradition in the United States of politics and constitutional democracy. If you understand how it works, it really makes you interested. As a common person, you express your opinions when you vote, [but] you don't have a lot of say when it comes down to the time when the representatives vote. That interested me, and I would like to be the person who makes the decision.*

Perhaps part of the answer to the questions raised in this section can be found in the experience of the elementary teacher in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, where the fifth-grader wanted to vote. She has thoughtfully tried to capitalize on the concepts of civic virtue and citizens' responsibility embodied in the curriculum by bringing them outside the curriculum into the other work the children do. When she was asked about her efforts in that regard and other teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of her efforts, she said that she did everything she could to integrate, since the issues of citizenship, of rights and responsibilities, cross everything. Her walls were covered with posters and charts to make these concepts more concrete; among them were a large, class-determined constitution and bill of rights. She suggested, however, that using the curriculum in isolation from other areas of study may render those concepts nearly useless:

*I think it is extremely important that it [the teaching of rights and responsibilities and their historic background in our government] not happen in isolation. Then the kids will turn it off. It has a chance to make an impact where they are getting it from every side, so that it is integral, so that the whole concept of living in a democratic republic, where it is not mob rule, where the rights/responsibilities thing is tied in very very tightly in all the ways they interact with each other. Then it will have a changing effect.*

#### **Section 4.4 STUDENTS: Appreciation of the curricular methods and materials**

*[This class is] the only reason I come back to school, because I have lunch right before this class and I would much rather go home.*

—New Jersey high school student

The enthusiasm students expressed for concepts they learned through the **We the People...** program was equalled by their evaluation of the materials themselves and the way they are presented. As several students noted in previous sections, these classes were like no other they had ever taken. A district coordinator in Maryland related to us a comment made by a **We the People...** student several years ago. The student was in a class with a mixed level of academic interests and talents—the high school valedictorian was in the class; some students, like the this one, were in a vocational-technical program. This student came back after graduation to tell the coordinator that the **We the People...** program had been the only thing he had thought worthwhile in his schooling.

A young woman in Denver made a similarly definitive comment. She said to us, "I learned more in this class than any other." Later she said she would not be going to her public high school if it weren't for the **We the People...** program; she'd be at a private school.

Those are strong statements of approval for the **We the People...** program. The next several sections address students' perceptions of the motivating elements of the program, their appreciation for the depth of their understanding of the content, and their enjoyment of team work. The last section quotes student comments on their preferences within the content of the program.

- **Motivating elements: discussion, relevance, and research**

Classroom discussion, the relevance of the topics under discussion, and the need to pursue those topics through further research were key elements in the generally favorable evaluation students gave the *We the People...* program. Especially helpful to the students were the questions in the texts—many told us that they enjoyed being pushed by those questions to explore a concept, and appreciated the direction the questions gave them. We also heard from nearly every junior high school and high school student that they enjoyed learning about their rights. That comment was usually followed by a statement that they didn't really know they had rights before.

The participatory nature of the class contributed significantly, according to students' comments, to its effectiveness. We also found that this was an area particularly affected by the ability of the teacher. Some teachers we observed were exemplary, displaying a deft sense of the students' needs. They understood when to step into a discussion to enliven or redirect it, and when to step back and let the students develop their skills in reasoning. Other teachers seemed to lack that sense and let promising discussions wither or, worse yet, provided too much information, so the students need not do any thinking. This diminished the effectiveness of student participation.

The current teacher in East Brunswick for the *We the People...* program exemplifies the former sort of teacher. He persistently pushed his students to form, state, and defend opinions with clarity and specificity. This emphasis on thoughtful discussion generated energy in his classroom. As his students talked with us about how these classroom discussions affected their attitudes towards school in general and towards their other classes, one student said:

*I think it makes it more exciting. That's the only reason I come back to school, because I have lunch right before this class and I would much rather go home. But this class—my parents told me I had to take this class because this is what the school is known for. And I can see why. It's an interactive class; it's not like any of the other classes we take. You're learning but you also have fun—it's hard to believe.*

The same group of students, when asked whether they kept talking about the issues raised in the class once they were outside the classroom door, chorused "yes!" with a single emphatic voice. Students at all the schools where we conducted interviews indicated that other students in their class who normally didn't get involved in classroom discussions contributed actively.

We sought evidence of increased motivation stemming from the conduct of mock hearings or trials. Since students most enjoyed the interaction with classmates in debate, mock trials and congressional hearings were well received. Their impact, though, seems to vary depending on the effectiveness of the teacher. One group of students didn't know what I meant when I asked them about mock congressional hearings, though they eventually understood when their memories were prodded.



An elementary teacher in Indiana did hearings mainly to gather information on bills and to do caucusing. When we asked her what the effect on her students was, she answered:

*The kids become experts—you wouldn't believe. Often it's not the best kids. The others can create information within reason, have great imaginations, and they know enough to cite resources.*

- **Deeper understanding**

Students frequently praised the relevance of the curriculum content to their daily lives. Beyond that, though, they expressed pleasure in how well they were able to understand the key documents of our nation's foundation. Here, for example, is an excerpt from an interview with a student in Denver:

*I think it [the curriculum] helps to give you a better understanding of what's actually meant when people talk about the Constitution and different documents that base the foundation [sic] of our government today. It gives you insight to what's actually meant by the words and different cases that actually support and back up or contradict what was written down.*

We asked this student "How does it do that? You could just get it out of a book if you wanted to. What makes the difference in this program?" She responded:

*I think we look more at specific cases than in other history classes and instead of just looking at what one writer or a couple of writers' personal view is on the case, like we get in a textbook, we use our own personal insight and have discussions and debate on it. You get a thorough understanding of what the different points of view are on certain topics.*

A peer of hers said of *We the People*...:

*[We the People...] emphasizes one thing, rather than a traditional history class which tries to cover so much material that you don't really get an in-depth look.*

- **Team work**

Many students commented on how much they enjoyed the group work. One student, who wants to be an engineer, said he thought the group work was valuable to him because he would eventually have to work like that in his chosen field. Of another, we asked:

*Q. Has the program affected your attitude about school at all?*

*A. It pushes you, which is good for me because I can get lazy and just sit around in class, but this class pushes me.*

*Q. I'm glad to hear [your teacher] pushes you, but as a result of this program do you push yourself more?*

*A. Yes, I like to help out my team. It isn't just for me; it is for a group.*

These comments are typical of the student attitudes we found reflected in their appreciation of the classes. In the fifth grade classroom where the students were planning skits, the habits of the class were displayed in the students' swift assumption of a role within their group and the ease with which they exchanged, modified, and expanded upon each others' ideas. At the national competition, the comfort in exchanging ideas that most students exhibited during the open question phase attested to the effectiveness of the teamwork in bringing out the best in all the students.

Time and again, it was clear that it was not just the opportunity to exchange views with their teacher, or each other, as they read a text, that provided intellectual stimulation. In both their responses to us and in the classroom interactions we observed, there was generous evidence that they enjoyed talking with and learning from each other.

- **Student preferences for content**

The interviewed students who used both texts for the most part preferred *With Liberty and Justice for All*. They seemed to see more clearly the relevance of the Bill of Rights in their lives than they do the Constitution. None wanted to omit study of the Constitution, however; they did see its importance in understanding the Bill of Rights. Several students expressed the opinion that the text *With Liberty and Justice for All* was more up-to-date in its presentation and interesting in its discussion questions. According to a high school girl, "[I]t had better applications; it had questions that would refer to a specific situation where you had to apply what you learned." On the other hand, an Indiana boy said of the *We the People...* text, "It was easier to understand and the material was a little more straightforward."

Within both *We the People...* and *With Liberty and Justice for All*, according to both teacher and student reports, enthusiasm for particular areas of the curriculum seemed to depend largely on individual interests, not on the material itself. Below are some of the comments we received when we asked about preferences or areas they wished had been covered in more depth:

- A boy in Indiana said that it had been important to know that we didn't once enjoy the freedoms we do now and to know where those freedoms came from.
- Several students were interested in the death penalty and wished their classes had covered it more.
- Several wanted more coverage of unenumerated rights.
- According to one high school boy, he would like to have learned more about:

*The beginning. In revolutionary time, the beginning of the government. A little more on the Articles of Confederation. [It] would give us a little better understanding of the Constitution if you understand why the Articles of Confederation weren't effective. Those of us without a thorough background had trouble understanding the difference.*

- A teacher in Indiana said the most captivating content for students depended on the individual students, but that overall:

*They get most excited about the President and about Supreme Court justices and trying cases. Judicial review really excites them; they see how the Supreme Court shapes laws. They've tried to impeach the President and have failed to confirm people when the background wasn't strong enough. But then they're interested in the Senate, seeing what Senators actually do, doing the research, writing the bills, meeting in committee, and so on. One year I had two students who wrote cases and created plays from them. They also really get into the Bill of Rights.*

We asked her what she observed that the students learn most deeply. She responded, "The concepts of civic virtue and the judicial system." Did anything leave them flat? "No."

The last answer could just as easily be applied to any of the other students we interviewed and observed. While there were favorite topics and wishes for greater coverage in some cases, there were no suggestions that something be eliminated or covered in less depth. Though they were surprised that it was so, the students enjoyed all of the content of the program.

#### Section 4.5 STUDENTS: Comparison to other history/social studies courses

After all of the preceding student comments, it should come as no surprise to the reader that students of all ages unanimously preferred the *We the People...* program to any other history, social studies, or civics class they had ever had. Here are three high school girls speaking about their impressions of the program:

I've taken two other advanced history courses, but with this course they really incorporate everything together; they don't just give you facts. In this one we learn about actual cases and the workings into the cases [sic] and what the thought was. I think it's good, because when you walk into a regular history class, it's all facts and there's nothing to really think about, but in this one you can think about why people do certain things.

Nothing else I have ever taken can compare. I've never taken a class like this. It allows you to excel, and [in] most classes you sit there and take notes, you don't have to do any debates, and other stuff. Other classes don't have this kind of freedom.

This [class] is way more interesting. It is fun to learn, and in the other ones all they do is lecture, lecture, lecture.

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Student response to the *We the People...* program can generally be described as highly positive. At fifth, eighth, and twelfth grades, students reported they acquired through the program a deep understanding of the foundations of our government. Beyond that, they develop habits of mind that should sustain these students not only through the remainder of their schooling, but through life. As they work in teams, as they debate, do research, and become engaged in intellectual work, they become independent and responsible. There is



little student criticism of either program, even when a teacher is less than exemplary. The materials themselves, and even a diluted form of structured debate, are perceived as exciting and worthwhile. The only change consistently requested by students was that their favorite topic be covered in greater depth. From the point of view of the students, this is a program that works.



## Section V

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: TEACHERS

The teachers we observed and interviewed were, for the most part, sterling examples of excellence in practice. Their students evidently thought so, too. With the exception of one class, all the students interviewed revered their teacher, appreciated the work their teacher did on the students' behalf, and thought they were lucky to have worked with them. Perhaps that last phrase offers a clue to the students' appreciation—students were able to work with, not for, teachers. As we saw in the previous section, teachers in this program made an enormous effort to make students think, be active in and out of the classroom, take an opposing point of view for the mental exercise.

We were interested in hearing from teachers how the program has affected them as professionals and how they evaluated the program. Did they change? Did they see their students change? Did the program compare favorably or not to other history or civics or social studies curricula? Our interviews and classroom visits led us to two conclusions. First, the *We the People...* program does make a difference in these teachers' lives by keeping them intellectually excited and engaged and by helping them give their students the same gift. Second, though the *We the People...* program is excellent, the quality of the teachers who use them makes a readily apparent difference in both the quality of the experience the students have and how much a teacher will grow professionally.

The best of the teachers make the *We the People...* program a lively opportunity to enrich the mind and bring the principles and foundations of our government to life. At the opposite end of the spectrum was a teacher who told us, during the initial contact, that he only used the *We the People...* program for his strongest students because the other ones were part of the "redneck" mentality of the local area and were "just going to work in the mines, anyway." He complained that most of those students didn't even know what a legislator was, without stopping to consider that it might be his responsibility to teach them. We did not follow through and interview him later in the semester because he planned to use only a small amount of the curriculum and not begin it until the study had concluded.

In between the two poles were a couple of teachers who struggled to let go of the traditional teacher role and make full use of the teaching strategies encouraged by the program. They made an effort to get their classes engaged in discussion, but were not always able to refrain from providing too much information. Because of that unnecessary support, students in their classes seemed to have developed less independence and initiative in their classroom discussions.

The following several sections look at the changes initiated by teachers and the changes that have occurred in teachers subsequent to their participation in the *We the People...* program. We also consider teachers' evaluation of the program in its own right and in comparison to other curricula.



## Section 5.1 TEACHERS: Effect on their professional lives

Sorting out the effects of the *We the People...* program is a bit like answering the old question, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" It appears, from conversations with both teachers and district coordinators, that teachers who elect to participate in this program are already motivated and hardworking and constantly seek professional improvement. They have most likely taught in ways congruent with the program. An elementary teacher in Maryland said as much when we asked her about the perceptions of other teachers of changes in her students once the students began discussing some of the principles embedded in *We the People...*:

*It would be hard for me to answer that because this fits in with other things in the curriculum that I do, so it isn't in isolation. I would be able to answer that if the discussions had never taken place, and then we did this. It has been built in all the way along. It is hard to say.*

Similarly, a dynamic, innovative teacher in New Jersey spoke semi-apologetically about the "traditional teaching" we had observed in his classroom—teaching that was, in fact, far from traditional. He was a teacher who naturally got his students engaged in ideas.

Nevertheless, there was clear evidence that in one way or another, the *We the People...* program had a discernible positive impact on the professional lives of teachers. A touching comment on professional change came from a high school teacher in Indiana, a man who did not come to the program because it was such a natural fit with his didactic style. He reflected on how he had changed as a teacher in response to the program in this comment:

*After the thirty-seven years of teaching that I have had, I have been more or less a dictatorial teacher, and as a consequence when I initiated this and started using it, it was very difficult for me to become accustomed to all the noise, confusion, movement—what I would call "non-settling." Once I became accustomed to it, I could see the kids changing more and more. And I have become more tolerant.*

The student teamwork which is central to the program forced this teacher to think more deliberately about the needs of his students. His success in getting three highly competitive National Merit Scholar semi-finalists to work cooperatively together was significant enough to prompt other teachers ask him how he "ever got those three to work together!"

The comments of one Indiana elementary teacher reflect a crucial element of professional growth. She spoke, as so many students did, about the fact that *We the People...* gave her a "spark." That spark produced a chain reaction in her students. Here are that elementary teacher's words:

*It fueled me, kept my fires burning. The material is so well written. The discussion questions are fantastic—they should do more of them.*

Each of the elementary teachers interviewed said that the influence of the curriculum was not isolated to a short period each day devoted to social studies. They indicated that other teachers in their schools worked collaboratively on projects to support *We the People...*,

multiplying its influence. The Indiana teacher, for instance, told us that music and art teachers helped work on the lessons with her students. Although she now teaches a fourth-grade class, when we asked if the influence of *We the People...* was being brought into her new classroom, her response was, "Naturally—through student research, student political parties, you name it."

The changes teachers saw in themselves covered a spectrum. Some found themselves working on new projects and branching out of their classroom—we cite examples of this in Section 5.4, *Beyond the Curriculum*, below. Others were pleased to see changes in their performance in the classroom. A teacher in Maryland (who is now an administrator) said of his experience:

*The program was wonderful. Each year that I did the program—I did We the People... for four years—I learned so much. I benefitted a great deal. Each year I did the program I did a better job with it. At the time [that I began] I was teaching a course called Constitutional History [and] Law, which worked well, and at the time I found I was in a lecture mode. As time evolved and I used the materials more—and I wouldn't say it happened much the first year because I had to go through it—but by the time I got to the second year, and third year, I had changed quite a bit, my technique, my approach.*

The next section addresses one of the primary catalysts for the change this teacher and other experienced—the nature of the materials and the methods of the curriculum.

## **Section 5.2 TEACHERS: Evaluation of materials and methods**

All the teachers interviewed or observed reported significant satisfaction in working with *We the People...* and *With Liberty and Justice for All*. They commented favorably on the structure the curriculum gave to what could otherwise be cumbersome subjects. As we have noted above, when we asked teachers if deviating from a lecture format, engaging students in debate, and so on represented a change in teaching style for them (or if they had noticed any other changes in their teaching), most responded that they taught that way already. That was why they wanted to use the curriculum in the first place—it fit with their teaching style and provided an excellent course that they did not have to create entirely on their own.

There were two exceptions to this pattern. One was a Denver student teacher working under the direction of a teacher experienced for several years with the *We the People...* program. The class discussion and drawing outside influences into the classroom to highlight and illustrate concepts covered in the curriculum were novelties to her. She struggled with them but felt she had learned a great deal by the end. Unfortunately, because she wasn't in graduate classes concurrently with her student teaching, she did not yet have any sense of whether her experience was better than that of her student peers. The second exception was the thirty-seven year veteran teacher from Indiana mentioned in the previous section who expressed contempt for some of his students.



• **Methods**

One of the strongest endorsements for the *We the People...* program came from a teacher who found the *With Liberty and Justice for All* curriculum worked well for all his students. He told us they are encouraged to sign up for the program by word of mouth from other students who have already taken the course, or who studied the *We the People...* curriculum in the eleventh grade:

*We have everyone from the average learner on up. Insofar as this is an elective, I can't go out there and recruit. Even though they call it an honors course, there are no prerequisites. You just have to be willing to live up to what it is—it's not as though we've ever blocked anyone from being in there. I see it having a great effect, especially for the educationally challenged or the average kid who hasn't had the opportunity to work in groups. They've always been sitting in classes, taking notes, listening to lectures. This is an alternative learning experience—it can only be good for them.*

Unfortunately, much as we see in school reform today,<sup>10</sup> we sometimes saw evidence that teachers believed that their own classroom practices and the methods of the *We the People...* program were congruent when they were not. The best of the teachers we observed and interviewed made creative use of their students' differences and used the curricula to nurture intellectual curiosity. Though praised by all teachers, student group work and debate were sometimes given little more than lip service. A high school teacher we observed had a class full of lackluster students arranged in neat rows. Though she did try to engage her students in discussion, her inability to capture her students' interest and imaginations was striking. Her students seemed to have caught on to the fact that, if they sat passively enough, she would provide the answers for them and they wouldn't have to work. Yet she did expect them to do research on sections of each unit and report to the class, and students were required to keep a journal for their own benefit, to reflect on what they were learning.

Another teacher had organized her students into clusters of desks so they could work in groups. Having found it nearly impossible to get through substantial amounts of material with many students and little time in the school day, she often had her students work individually and then share what they had learned with the class. While we were observing her class, she had the students do "group work and discussion" which entailed three minutes of looking through the *We the People...* text for certain information by themselves in strictly controlled silence, followed by thirty seconds of discussion. During the remainder of the time, she tended to give rather than elicit answers. In fairness to this teacher, a return visit showed a markedly different pattern of student/teacher interaction, one which emphasized guidance and gave the students greater freedom to talk and learn amongst themselves.

A third teacher admitted that traditional lecturing was all but unavoidable at the beginning, but added a qualifier:

*At the beginning of the year I do some traditional teaching when I talk about philosophers, when I*

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<sup>10</sup> David K. Cohen. *American Educator*, Fall 1991, Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, 16-48.



*talk about Plato, Socrates, all the way up to Locke and Hobbes. You have to do that then. But even then, I think you're duty-bound to get them involved and talking about Plato's Guardians. They always want to talk—how could you keep them quiet? Why would you want to?*

One of the most frequently praised elements of the **We the People...** program was the four-minute presentation, an element of the program's optional competition activity. During a competition, student teams use four minutes of a ten-minute period to answer the competition judges' choice of one out of three questions. Students are told several weeks ahead of time what the three questions will be so they can prepare a response, but they do not know which of the questions the judges will choose. Students may use notes and are not required to memorize their responses.

Teachers saw the value of the four-minute time limit in forcing the students to be clear, sharp, and concise about the points they wished to make. The time limit forced the students into extensive research so they would have the best possible evidence for their presentation. This process of being selective pushed the students to evaluate their stance and their information. A Maryland teacher told how the English teacher had noticed that he (the teacher for the **We the People...** program) had gotten the students to write more and she was very happy about that:

*She was pleased with the way the kids were able to approach things, analytically, not just with off-the-wall comments. The four-minute presentation really places limits on the students and how they use their time. They have to know what the important information is and how to convey it in a short period of time.*

Several teachers admitted that they struggled to get all students to feel involved, especially the "slower" ones. Most then said that they would organize their students' groups more deliberately next time. One teacher got around this difficulty by rotating his students through all groups, so by the end of the semester, everyone had worked with everyone else and seen each other's strengths and weaknesses. Along the way, he asks students to reflect on the value of this process.

- **Texts**

*[Our] county curriculum guides are open-ended, so I really like the way the program is set up, that is what I like about it. What it does is cover the fundamentals, then you go off and do what you are interested in. That is the kind of curriculum guide I like.*

Though a few suggestions for improvement were offered, the materials provided by the Center for Civic Education were extremely well received by the teachers. Teachers interviewed said they felt the content of both texts was presented in a clear, understandable, interesting way. Only two teachers voiced any outright criticism.

The first criticism came from an inner city middle school teacher. She commented on what she felt was a lack of professionalism in the text graphics. She had a graphic design background and said the screens in some cases were so harsh that it detracted from one's ability to read them. She also reported that her students had said the cartoons were too "60s, not up to date." This teacher noted that her students were very much a product of the MTV generation and have come to expect sophisticated presentation. Age and sophistication of the students may be the key, for an elementary teacher from a rural community singled out the cartoons as being an excellent means of getting the point of the lessons across to her students:

*They're funny, and yet, once you've got the "hook," the attention, the comics are a very powerful communication tool—very succinct, very precise, very powerful.*

A high school teacher initially had much the same reaction to the graphics as the middle school student teacher, but then came to a different conclusion:

*I like the way the book was broken down. At first I thought it looked like a pretty stupid book, like a comic book, really. But when I got into it, when I started doing research, I found out how technically involved it really was. There was quite a bit of condensed information.*

The middle school student teacher and the high school teacher mentioned that they had students who would profit from some kind of graphic organizer. The middle school teacher meant by that comment that additional materials which provided concrete illustrations of some of the program's ideas and information would be welcome. She suggested such things as timelines and diagrams that illustrate compromise, for example, between equal versus proportional representation. The elementary teacher thought that structured assignments to create graphic organizers (for example, illustrate how a bill comes together, etc.), and suggestions for skits would engage the students further. She struggled with making what she termed the "drier" information—e.g., how a bill becomes a law—a bit more immediate and interesting. To convey that information effectively to her fifth-graders, she created a small character on her chalkboard, told her students he was applying for citizenship, and asked them to teach him all he would have to know about the background of U.S. government. When the students had to do the teaching, she reported, they blossomed.

The second criticism of the materials came from a high school teacher. He told us:

*I would have liked a little more in-depth in some areas, especially the last chapter on rights and responsibilities. It almost looked like you ran out of time. There wasn't enough substance there and it required a lot on our part in finding materials so it was easy to let that one go, but it was so good I would have liked to see more on not just rights, but more on responsibilities—what makes a good citizen, what good citizens do.*

Said one teacher:

*The materials are very good, especially the support materials, the handouts. They foster creativity, so they enhance some of these skills that will bring the students along and not just give them facts.*

The discussion questions received especially favorable review from all teachers. One teacher, who has the gift of seeing enormous potential in her students, said she feels the book plus the conflict resolution "really pushes the kids." Yet, as we have noted above, even the excellent quality of questions that push the students can be lost in the classroom of an inexperienced or poor teacher. One teacher commented:

*For teachers who naturally find a way to engage all kids, the program is fine, but it may need to be more explicit about methods for doing so with other teachers.*

An unsolicited affirmation of that observation came from the inner city middle school student teacher:

*The majority of these kids come from a background where there probably aren't even daily newspapers lying around, and they tend to struggle with thinking; they resent having to think. I especially emphasized the thinking questions [from *We the People...*]. I would break them down: "This is how you deal with this," and "These are alternatives." I tried to explore the process with them, and they complained bitterly.*

Another concern raised by several teachers was the sheer volume of the information to be covered. More than one teacher told us that the six weeks they were normally able to devote to the *We the People...* program was insufficient to do it well. Some get around this problem by having different groups read for information and report to the other students. The wealth of material became a greater issue when teachers used both texts. We understand that the Center for Civic Education has already considered this problem and is developing a combined version of the two texts. That will please the several teachers who told us that it didn't make sense to use one text without the other.

The comments from the students whom we interviewed were especially striking in their enthusiasm for the relevance of the curricula to their lives. Three last observations from teachers about the *We the People...* and *With Liberty and Justice for All* materials bolster those positive evaluations:

From a fifth-grade teacher:

I love the text because the issues it raises and the ways it deals with them aren't classroom-bound.

Supporting that, a Denver middle school teacher related:

*The French teacher [in our school] used to say "What are you teaching these kids now?" They were coming into his class arguing about Montesquieu and laissez-faire economics.*

A high school teacher said:

*One of the fun parts that can usually be deadly to teach is the concept of federalism. I learned more about federalism through teaching the kids about it and then getting into the 14th Amendment. *We the People...* does a great job with the 14th Amendment and then you tie federalism in, and everything just falls into place.*



This last comment affirms the value of what the Center does in passing on their love for our government's foundations. Several teachers commented on how much they and their students appreciated the documents they studied, not just their effects today. They appreciated the thought, the compromise, how the documents have managed to endure and be a model for other countries.

### Section 5.3 TEACHERS: Comparison to other curricula

Besides inquiring of teachers what they thought of *We the People...* and *With Liberty and Justice for All* in their own right, we also asked how the curricula compared to other history, civics, or social studies curricula. The results of our interviews were unequivocal: the curricula developed by the Center for Civic Education were the best the teachers had encountered. Compared to other history, civics, or social studies texts or programs they had used, *We the People...* and *With Liberty and Justice for All* were emphatically preferred. Even the Denver student teacher had a bit of experience with other texts, and found *We the People...* much clearer and more useful to the students. A Maryland teacher said:

*I've never seen anything like this. Most history and government textbooks for the most part are deadly.... Our local curriculum guides are open-ended, so I really like the way the program is set up. What it does is cover the fundamentals—then you go off and do what you are interested in. I have seen curriculum guides where it is regimented: day 1, day 2, day 3. To me that is too restrictive for a teacher, so I am very much in favor of the way the book is set up.*

Similarly, a Denver middle school teacher said:

*As far as materials go, they are a lot different. Most textbooks deal with, "in 1819 this happened; in 1820 this happened." It's dry, it's dull, you have to hand out glasses of water to get the kids to swallow it. [We the People...] brings out the ideas and the thoughts, sets a wonderful foundation. The Constitution in most textbooks is so dull. It talks about the balance of powers, but none of the world experience these men were resting on when they wrote that document.*

Like their students, teachers were also pleased with the freedom offered by the curriculum to change delivery methods, as evidenced in the comment from the Maryland teacher above. The social studies coordinator for the New Jersey teachers could have been speaking for everyone we interviewed when he said:

*I think that of all the programs I've seen, it's the most impressive example of student involvement in a class. The students are the whole framework. [The teacher] does a tremendous amount of preparation, but when he's in there with the students, he lets them take charge. There's some control necessary, but these students are in charge of what they're supposed to be doing. The interaction is among the students, with [the teacher] as moderator.*

A compliment common to all the teachers was that the materials were both rich and clear. Though they were never interviewed in the proximity of their students, the results on this issue might have come from a single group interview conducted with all sites and all participants at once. Teachers and students alike complained about the dryness of other texts in their presentation of the foundations of our government.

#### Section 5.4 TEACHERS: Beyond the curriculum

Much of the evidence for the positive effect of the *We the People...* program on teachers is in the inspiration it gave them to expand the program for their students. Teachers have created activities which are a direct outgrowth of the program; in some cases the impact of those activities goes far beyond their own classroom. The following items describe what we discovered happening beyond the curriculum but with roots firmly in it.

- One Indiana elementary teacher involved each fifth grade homeroom in her school in activities designed to help students understand the philosophy she believes undergirds all the lessons of *We the People...*: "In a democracy, you get the government you deserve. You are either part of it or you lose." To help students understand what that means, she has created a program wherein they create a simulation of the federal government. To do this, she drew heavily on the *We the People...* materials. To teach her students the necessary principles of governance. Encouraged by this, students have written up their own "Supreme Court" cases and produced plays.

She received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to write materials about creating simulations. In fulfillment of the grant's requirements, she had to do something for the community. She chose to create a simulation of the Constitutional Convention to celebrate its anniversary. The teacher and her students recreated the event with the community. The Convention took place in a church hall, with her students scattered among the audience. High school *We the People...* students engaged in a debate, complete with a song between the Federalists and Antifederalists. Debate was opened up to the audience, whereupon her fifth graders reportedly "leapt in." Even third graders responded. Community members sat with her students and acted as delegates. When we asked what the audience reaction was, she related that they were "amazed at what the kids could do—the vocabulary they used, the concepts they understood."

New Indiana guidelines mean that she will need to be teaching Indiana history next year. She now has fourth graders, and plans to develop the curriculum of Indiana history based on her experience with *We the People...*

- East Brunswick, New Jersey students in the *We the People...* program held gubernatorial debates during the difficult campaign in the fall of 1993. Their teacher and the social studies department coordinator described the process:

*We had three students representing the Florio side and three representing the Whitman side. We had good questions from the audience. An AP history teacher is also student council moderator. He initiated debates for most of the student body—about 700 kids—to listen and review the debates. The candidates who represented the different sides really wrote a lot of good questions and brought some of the ideas in the campaign to light. They showed some of the skills they'd been working on in the [We the People...] program. All the students in the debate were from [the We the People... classes] and it gave them an early opportunity to be in front of a large audience...At the end, they had questions they were going to have to respond to. These kids did a marvelous job. They were well prepared and they were ready to answer the questions.*

*The two teams chose the issues they were going to address. They were gun control, welfare reform,*



*and taxes. What I was most pleased with, aside from their performance, which I thought was very high, was that the audience was really listening. Oftentimes, in any school, you get a certain part of the audience that's sitting in the back, busy with other things, but they all listened.*

- East Brunswick is also launching a program of assessment this year for grades five through seven based on **We the People...** The district coordinator said about the program, "It was a given that we would use the **We the People...** competition as a model and have performance assessments." Student evaluations will be based on five areas: student self-evaluation of their work in cooperative groups; research; a paper; group grade for overall participation; and a grade for their audience participation.

We asked a teacher who was participating in the pilot program this fall how she thought her colleagues felt about the program. She told us that the fifth and sixth grade teachers initially did not like the idea of "pushing" students based on the **We the People...** model. Now, she says, "They love it and think it is wonderful even though it is much more work—they think the kids need to be able to think on their feet."

Among other reasons, East Brunswick created this program to prepare the students to participate in the **We the People...** program in high school, to prepare them to think and defend research. One of the middle school teachers piloting this program especially praised the student self-evaluations which had developed out of the high school course:

*[The students] are much tougher on themselves than we are on them...I can see them working differently in a group now than in the beginning of the year because now they know what to look for. When I say "work as a group," I don't mean just sit down and discuss it. I want them to do certain things and take on certain roles of leadership. It's amazing; they really have looked at the assessment forms and used it as a model: "Someone really should take on the role of the leader and we all better be participants, and one person can't do it all." I think they've really grown from it a lot.*

- Within East Brunswick High School, other social studies teachers have seen the success of the **We the People...** program and are beginning to model their classes on it. One of the former instructors for **We the People...** already does that:

*I teach mostly world history, and I incorporate the discussions into the material. I find it a great way to do things. In fact, I copied the [**We the People...**] model for my world history class; I used the same format. It works tremendously.*

- A Maryland administrator who used the **We the People...** program when he was a teacher expressed an interest in developing an inservice course model based on it. He hopes to get more people learning about government and "get teachers stimulated." We told him about East Brunswick's new program and gave him telephone numbers.



- An Indiana teacher told us that two of the moderators for IACES<sup>11</sup> saw a student using the *With Liberty and Justice for All* text and asked if they could get a copy for the IACES program. One of the competition topics this year was the Bill of Rights, and they had never seen anything so well written on the subject.

- **Spreading the word**

We were curious to learn what efforts teachers made to encourage colleagues to participate in the **We the People...** program. Given what we had heard from the start—that the program was highly regarded by teachers—we expected that the teachers would be able to have a strong positive effect on the growth of the program. They did. Enthusiastic word of mouth from either teachers or district coordinators seems to be a significant means of seeding the program. Sometimes that word of mouth is electronic—one teacher found out about the **We the People...** program through e-mail. One teacher in Maryland said that she would have pushed it harder, but that her district coordinator was so enthusiastic that she was confident word was getting around.

An Indiana elementary school teacher gave a presentation on the **We the People...** program at a district social studies convention. She told the teachers that:

*It's awesome; you can't believe what can be done.*

So why, we asked her, didn't many teachers respond?

She replied that the teachers who see what's required sometimes feel inadequate and comment that the material is "above them." "Oh, no," she responds to them, "You just have to have a great love for it. You just have to listen to the news—you don't have to go to a fancy library to get information." Other teachers made similar observations, citing the fear on teachers' part of material they don't understand well. And yet another possibility was offered by a high school teacher, now administrator:

*I think, to be honest, it has nothing to do with the materials, but older teachers tend to get into a pattern and once they get in that pattern, they won't change.*

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On balance, the reaction of teachers to the **We the People...** program is overwhelmingly positive. The influence of this program on teachers, as on students, is uniformly salutary. Few criticisms were to be found. Those which were mentioned tended to fall into two categories. Either teachers were concerned because there was too much to cover in the little time many could devote to the program they were teaching, or they wished that specific elements of the curriculum had been covered in greater depth.

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<sup>11</sup> Indiana State Competition for Excellence, a statewide competition in five subject areas, in which students compete in teams of three.

There is sufficient enthusiasm on the part of teachers to make them willing advocates for the curricula with their colleagues. However, there appears to be a perception that the material covered is too difficult for a teacher with little background.

It was more difficult to determine the effects of teaching the **We the People...** program. We asked all teachers what they perceived to be changes in their professional lives stemming from this program. We could uncover no effect on teachers' career patterns, nor was there evidence that teachers took on other rigorous curricula because of their satisfaction with **We the People...** The latter point seems attributable to two factors. First, in the event that a class of students goes on to increasingly higher levels of competition, their teacher will be devoting nearly all of his or her attention to that course alone. Second, teachers told us that there simply wasn't another program like **We the People...** It stands alone.

## Section VI

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: THE COMPETITION

*We won just by being here.*

—Denver high school girl, speaking at the national competition after her team took second place

In order to come to Washington, D.C., the Denver student quoted above and her twelve classmates, described by their teacher as "poor but brilliant," needed not only to win the state competition but also had to raise \$26,000. We asked how thirteen students managed to raise such a large sum. "They did everything they could think of," the teacher told us. "Candy sales, walkathons, letters to foundations, educational support groups—anything." For her students, the competition mattered. In fact, without exception, teachers and students asserted that the competition had a significant effect on the students' learning. One teacher, trying to convey why it made such a difference, likened the competition to sports:

*I think there has to be a goal. It would be like a basketball team practicing without the game.*

A teacher in Denver made a similar observation, saying:

The competition shows a result—[students feel] "Now I've produced something."

One student did compare the competition directly to sports, and found the competition to be the more satisfying of the two. His teacher told us he had said that "This was better than any football game I've ever won." When we followed up with the boy and asked why he felt that way, he said:

*I have a lot of respect for knowledge and [the competition] was a better thing and more worthy of respect than a sporting event.*

These competitions, like the curriculum, focus on the principles embodied in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and their application to both historical and contemporary issues. Participation in the competition depends upon the decision of the teacher, the students, or a joint decision by both teacher and students. If a class is to be part of the competition, everyone must participate. The class divides into six teams, each of which studies in depth an element of the curriculum. At the competition, the presenting team faces three judges, chosen at the local, state, or national level, depending on the level of competition. The judges are professional people who volunteer their time to make themselves familiar with the text and to spend the day (or weekend, at the national level) judging. This arrangement highlights the outreach of the *We the People...* program into the community.

Teachers reported that, if it was decided early on that only one of a teacher's several classes would be entering the competition, the students in that class outstripped the others in motivation, extent of research, and depth of learning. To a certain extent that would be expected, since presumably the strongest class would be chosen to compete. However,



teachers uniformly expressed a conviction that the competition made an important difference in any case. As a high school teacher in New Jersey said:

*They think it's a neat thing, but even the sections who won't compete get enthusiastic about it. They like the format. I like the format.*

One of the Indiana teachers was asked, only hours after he and his students had returned from the district competition, whether any of his students had, as a result of the program, put forth more academic effort than he would have expected. He replied, "Yes, there sure were," and gave this example:

*I had one kid who couldn't make it today because he had a 105° fever and they had to put him in the hospital to keep him from coming to school. His mother showed up last night to tell me he was very sick. I told her to keep him home and she said, "I can't—I'm just asking you to carry his medicine and give it to him." And then this morning she came and said they had put him in the hospital as a way of keeping him out of here.*

Here are the voices of three students lending weight to the idea that the competition was a considerable motivating force for all students. The first student is a Denver girl:

*I think the competition made us work that much harder because when you get to the competition, you are striving to win. We are an advanced class, so we were striving to get the best possible grade, but the competition made us work that much harder.*

And an Indiana boy in another high school told us:

*It's a really good program. First of all, the competition really forces you to learn. You have certain people who are willing to learn the information and get ready, and are really interested in education, and then you have people who are basically doing it to avoid embarrassing themselves.*

That last reason, though not an ideal prompt for striving to do one's best, was reported to be a significant issue for students in several other schools, as well.

An Indiana girl said:

*It made a big difference [in how hard I worked], because I had to learn it, because I wanted to win. And once I started learning it, it became fun. It was a lot of work, all the research that went into our papers, and how many times we changed our opening statements because of new facts that came up.*

Her comments support the observation made in the Section 4.1 by a mother who was pleasantly surprised to discover that her daughter cared enough about what she was learning in preparation for the competition that she and her friends called each other to pass along new insights or information. Other statements from teachers and students pointed out that, in the long run, competition will also matter because it will mean a much longer and more intensive coverage of the content. Rather than studying the curriculum for a typical six weeks, students who win at one level of competition have the opportunity to continue with the curriculum until the next phase of competition. In an extension of that, one of the Indiana

students said she felt that she learned even during the competition, from the way judges framed questions.

It is difficult to dissect students' comments to discover which is the larger influence of the competition—the sheer drive to win, or the pleasure students are gaining as they develop their intellect. This probably different for each student, and perhaps in any individual student the motivating forces vary over the course of study and competition. Whichever carries true for any student or class, however, it is clear that the competition holds enormous weight with the students and teachers and serves as a force which pushes both groups to excellence—often beyond what they thought was possible.





## Section VII

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: PARENTS AND JUDGES

*I've been practicing law for over fifteen years, and I know lawyers who've argued before the Supreme Court who don't have the poise some of these kids have.*

—New Jersey parent, speaking of the students at the national competition

*I don't know how long this program is going to continue, but it would be a shame if it didn't. It's a great experience, and I'm willing to donate a portion of my time to be involved.*

—Indiana parent and judge

The students in the study could only comment upon their own teacher; the teachers could only comment on their own students, and the parents, by and large, could talk about one student and one teacher. Judges' comments, therefore, were particularly valuable in this study because they were the sole cohort with the opportunity to see many teachers and many students. They and the district coordinators were the only people we spoke with who had the perspective needed to either confirm or negate the large-scale impressions of the program that we were forming.

As with the students and their teachers, the general reaction of the parents and judges to the *We the People...* program was significant approval. While the influences of the program were considerably less marked in the parents and judges than in the first two groups, there were some self-reported changes. Even when parents or judges could detect no personal change attributable to the program, they were still able to speak about their impressions of it. The following sections describe those impressions and the changes that did get reported to us.

#### Section 7.1 PARENTS: Reactions to their children's participation

Most parents were interviewed when their children were well into the curriculum, but had not yet participated in a competition. We did have the opportunity, however, to interview several parents during the national competition, as well as a parent who served as a judge after his son graduated from high school. The difference between the two sets of interviews was striking.

Most parents interviewed in the fall and early winter told us they felt that their children had benefitted from the program, and several said they had noticed that their son or daughter was reading the paper more. However, parents were vague about what was involved in the *We the People...* program and why their children might therefore have gained something from it. Carrie Willis, the Capitol Hill staff member, gave a clue to understanding this when she said that her parents didn't really start paying attention until her class began to win in the competitions. A number of the parents interviewed listed so many activities that their son

or daughter participated in that the parents brought particular activities into focus only when they became "high-stake." One boy gave us an unsolicited confirmation of this:

*My parents went to the competition that we were in (district level) and were really impressed. They were impressed with all the knowledge we had. Outside of class I really keep to myself, so they really didn't know until we went to the competition.*

We also heard a similar comment from one of the parents interviewed at the national competition. We asked this father whether, like other parents, he had been largely unaware of the program until his child's class began to win competitions. He responded:

*That's pretty much the case with us. They'd go to these competitions, [we'd ask] "how'd you do?" "We won"—but we didn't really focus on it. And then when they won the state championship—Whoa! Where?*

His wife jumped into the conversation to say:

*...and I'm sorry. I'm sorry; I wish now I'd known about it all along.*

The next section of the tape for this interview is undecipherable because all the parents present began talking at the same time, everyone expressing regret.

Besides over-full lives, other explanations for this lack of awareness on parents' part have been difficult to come by. Still, it was jarring to interview students and record nearly uniformly enthusiastic reaction, as we have described in Section III, and then to get their parents on the telephone and struggle to elicit any reaction at all.

Better, albeit indirect, information on parents' evaluation of the program came from the teachers, who were able to draw on the memory of years of full program participation. As part of the interview protocol, teachers were asked how the parents of their students reacted to the students' participation in the program. One teacher paid *We the People*... a compliment when he told us his school didn't usually "announce" it to the parents. If that seems odd, here is his reasoning:

*If you announce it and the parents get all excited about it, all the parents want to know, "Why isn't my son or daughter being permitted to participate?"*

"All excited" does describe typical parents' reactions, according to the teachers we interviewed. No teacher reported negative comments from parents; in fact, most teachers we interviewed said they often heard positive—sometimes incredulous—comments from parents about their children's participation. An elementary teacher, for instance, told us that parents were astonished to find their children talking to them about impeachment and civic virtue. The mother of a high school student who went to the national competition was delighted simply that her son had learned to be clear and careful in his speech. She said, "I didn't know he could talk like this. My son gets on the phone [normally] and I don't understand him. He grunts."

Similarly, a high school teacher told us that the mother of one of his students called him the first year he taught the course—and, as it happened, won the state competition. The mother wanted to tell him how grateful she was because this was the first time her son had been involved in or excited about anything.

In addition to the teacher comments, students' observations gave us some evidence that the parents are paying attention to the *We the People...* program and are pleased with what they see. Here are a couple of these exchanges with students. The first is with a high school boy from New Jersey. We asked him if his parents had commented on his participation in this program. He responded:

*My dad. He went to law school and got his degree and all of that and passed the bar, but he does accounting. And when he heard I was taking this class, he was really excited. He got out all his old law books and he said, "We'll just sit down and we'll read them".... So my dad's excited about this class because he wants to help me learn it.*

The second is from a Denver girl, who told us she thinks about issues involving the Bill of Rights outside of class. Pressed for an example, she said:

*At home, when I read the newspaper, they talk about how gays shouldn't be in the military, and we have discussions at home. We have very big debates.*

*Q. Do you participate in those debates?*

*A. Oh, yes.*

*Q. What do your parents think about that?*

*A. They think I've gone crazy.*

*Q. In a good way or a bad way?*

*A. In a good way.*

*Q. Why is that?*

*A. Because I'm expressing myself and I'm not so shy any more.*

We heard two frequent observations regarding parents' reactions to the *We the People...* program. First, parents said their son or daughter seemed to be reading the newspaper much more. The second observation was an echo of students' comments such as the exchange above—children were much more inclined to discuss, argue, or disagree with their parents on issues touched by the *We the People...* or *With Liberty and Justice for All* curricula. A New Jersey teacher, for example, said:

*The most fun is when parents come to Parent Night and they tell me their kids are always fighting with them about politics. So I'll say "You don't mean 'fighting,' do you?" And they'll say, "Well, I mean heated discussions. What's going on here?"*

Another teacher told us he would get notes from the parents, thanking him and saying how involved their children were, how nice it was to see their children involved in something so interesting. He added:

*A couple of parents teased me because the kids come from a fairly conservative area, a Republican area, and it would often end up that these kids would hold liberal Democratic views. They weren't*



*angry, because the kids were arguing with their parents in a very empirical and logical way. The parents were really pleased with that. This was one of the great parts of the program, for the kids to be able to sit down and actually communicate with their parents without them flying off the handle.*

Here also is an excerpt from an interview with four parents at the national competition:

*Q. Several of the students I interviewed when I was visiting their class up in East Brunswick told me they were increasingly willing to disagree politically with their parents. Have any of you noticed that?*

*A. (All four parents): Yes.*

*Mother 1: And they have the skills to win most any argument.*

*Mother 2: I wonder sometimes if this class doesn't have its drawbacks (laughter from all four) because everything has become a political debate in the house.*

The two mothers went on to note other changes they had observed in their son and daughter:

*Mother 2: Actually, it's helped them develop study skills and they're able to absorb [the material], take it out and digest it, and then to hone in on it. And that's what's surprised me a lot. I see my daughter staying up late at night—when we're dead tired—and she'll just rattle off a paper and she's able to digest the material and be succinct. That's why she was talking succinctly [in the competition], to the point, something which most people can't do.*

*Mother 1: And suddenly they have to get on the phone again because they've gathered information and they realize there are better answers for their colleagues' questions and they're drawing from a reference point and going back in their book.*

Two Indiana parents made related points. One father commented to us about how pleased he was to see his son become able to work as part of a team. A mother told us that she asks her daughter many more questions now that her daughter is in this program, because she—the mother—finds it personally interesting. Though she could not tell us what in particular her daughter was better informed about, she did relate her surprise at what her daughter knew.

Another parent expressed to us his pleasure in seeing what all the students at the national competition could do:

*They say a lawyer thinks best on his feet. These kids are sitting down, and it's awesome to see the way they come back and they can go on both sides of the topic and they don't have to agree. Everybody has a different style.*

## Section 7.2 PARENTS: Reactions to the curricula

Because of the limited knowledge of the curricula on the part of most parents we interviewed, we do not have extensive information on parents' reactions to either *We the People...* or *With Liberty and Justice for All*. Informal, unrecorded conversations with parents at the national competition revealed a predictable enthusiasm for the curricula. Since these are parents of students who have done extremely well with the curricula, and are not necessarily representative, we hesitate to draw broad conclusions about parents' reactions.

Still, we saw nothing in our earlier interviews that would lead us to expect significant, if any, negative criticism of either *We the People...* or *With Liberty and Justice for All*. For that reason, we include here portions of our interview with four parents of students in New Jersey whose children went to the national competition. We spoke with them in the elated moments immediately after the entire New Jersey team had completed their part in the competition and nothing remained ahead but to wait for the results at the awards dinner. The audiotapes of their conversation reveal much about their animation and pleasure in their children's performance and the curriculum that made it possible.

Father 1, speaking of his daughter, said:

*She came up to me and she asked me a question [about a case she was studying for her We the People... research]. She said "Is this a well known case?" [I told her that] I remembered reading something about it, and she said it tied into a particular area that she'd been studying. I said, "Well, yes, that [issue] carried on to a more well known case—it brought it up to date. Their research brings issues home—they can discuss things in today's politics. It really makes them aware.*

Later on when we asked the parents if the course had affected them personally, we received the following responses:

*Father 1: Well, you pay more attention to issues in the media; you read the papers. You find that your children look for more things, that there are more things that they discuss with you. They're more mature. Everything means something to them—like the recent death of Nixon. How are his actions being portrayed now? [My son] did not agree [as the media did] that "this is not a man who took the Constitution and threw it in the garbage." And there was a holiday for his funeral. So the kids [in my son's class] ask "Is this revisionist history?" That I find interesting.*

*Mother 2: You know, my husband is an environmental consultant, and my husband and my son have talked many times...*

*Father 2: Well, we've talked about cases that he's studied—some of the property rights issues that they've talked about [in class] were things I deal with as a consultant. So we talk about those issues from the standpoint of what I do on a daily basis—interesting things that come up in a law practice.*

*Mother 1: I'll rip an editorial out of the Times because I know it's something that she's dealing with and throw it on the refrigerator. I mean, this is weird. (laughs)*

When we asked them for their impressions of the program as a whole and whether they expected to have a continuing interest in or involvement with the program, we were told the following:

*Mother 1: I was just thinking to myself yesterday, this is one of the best things I have seen in four years, one of the most important things. And it pulls issues together a lot more than some other classes they end up taking.*

*Father 1: One of the things that was interesting was that some parents whose children have gone [to the competition] in years before were more concerned with telling us about how important it was—I mean, really, we were getting calls yesterday from people who had children in years past saying—we didn't know they were going to make the finals [of the national competition]—saying call your home newspaper. The fact of the matter is, this carries over. Once your child has gone through this, you're addicted.*

*Mother 2: I was so excited about this, and I would love to spread the news to all parents next year to get involved earlier, to be there for the students.*

The reactions of parents we have outlined above can all be comfortably categorized as appreciative of the We the People... program. No parent could offer any suggestion for change or improvement. Even when parents had little grasp of the particulars of the program, they were able to perceive change in their own children. The changes that they saw were approved of—parents appreciated their children's interest in current events and their inclination to pick up the newspaper for something besides the comics or the sports section. Though sometimes ruefully, they appreciated their children's ability to construct a well-supported argument. The evidence given by students and teachers supports those observations.

### Section 7.3 JUDGES: Evaluation of the program and teachers

From the comments we received from judges, it appears that they consider the We the People... program and its delivery by teachers to be completely interwoven influences on the students. When they were asked to give an overall evaluation of the program, or to comment on aspects that had particularly struck them, they always mentioned the teachers. For this reason, we have not created separate reporting categories for teachers and the program in this section.

The above comments notwithstanding, the judges did have distinct impressions of the We the People...The Citizen and the Constitution program itself. The quality of the work that the Center for Civic Education does was an important factor in the judges' decisions to participate. Here is one judge's response to our query about his reasons for choosing to be a judge:

*In February of '86 the [Bicentennial] Commission had a meeting in San Diego and Chuck and Margaret and Duane were there. I remember that Margaret Branson spoke—she gave a wonderful talk about The Federalist Papers—it was just terrific. And I thought, "Boy, there's an organization that really knows about the Constitution and knows about the founding." So I've been impressed with their quality from the very beginning, from before the beginning.*



Another judge took on that role after learning about the **We the People...** program as a parent. His son's experience was extremely positive and led directly to his father's willingness to act as a judge. A third judge had done work in earlier years preparing students for the competition and had been impressed with what he had seen, so he, too, was willing to judge when asked.

All of the judges were asked if their work with **We the People...** had altered their perceptions of American public education. It was in the responses to this question, especially, that the judges' perception of the influence of teachers was most in evidence. One of the judges in Indiana told us, for example:

*I think that it reinforced a belief that I had that...good programs are the result of good teachers. It's a leadership thing. I think every school has a core group of kids who, if given the material and a teacher who cares enough, could be competitive.*

A fellow Indianan, the judge who was introduced to the competition when his son was in it, made a similar observation:

*The teachers who are working in this program are dedicating an awful lot of time and energy [to it]. Plus, the subject is difficult, and therefore, I think it has improved my impression that the history, social studies, and poli sci high school teachers have to be a heck of a lot more knowledgeable than what I first thought. You can't get by in this course by just doing the basics. Also, as a judge, I was impressed with a lot of the kids from different schools. It's not easy for them to be seated in front of four adults, ranging from judges to college professors, and have the poise to answer questions. Somebody did something right with those kids.*

A third judge noted that, just as a good teacher has an large influence, so does a teacher who is not achieving a standard of excellence. On the last day of the national competition, we asked him whether, when he first began judging the competition, it surprised him to see what high school age students were able to do. He answered:

No. I taught high school Latin and civics, and my impression of the students I taught was that they were really capable of handling a lot more than most teachers expect of them. And I've seen in the program, too, that the differences in preparation, or the differences in performance, really have less to do with the kids than with the teachers. For example, we had a team yesterday where in their opening remarks—in their prepared remarks—it was clear that they were going on the assumption—in fact, they may have explicitly stated—that the Supreme Court impeaches the President. Now, that's something that a teacher should catch. Once you hear something like that in the opening statement, as a judge, you say, "Oh, man. We're not working with a very high level of preparation and sophistication." And so I really do think that the main qualitative difference is the teachers themselves.

We were interested to hear whether he thought the root of the situation he described was entirely due to shortcomings in some teachers, or whether the We the People... program was a factor in some way. Here is his analysis:

*I think there's potential for the material to threaten the average teacher. We were talking yesterday, a justice and I, about how you can see a difference between a school where the teacher is also the football coach, and a school that has a social studies teacher, maybe someone that might have a masters, maybe in political science or something like that. It would be nice if we could find a way to reduce the threat level of the material to the teachers. I don't know how to do that—I don't know enough about curriculum design or about teacher education itself to know how that might be done. But that's a concern that I have. And we saw this at the Bicentennial Commission, too. Teachers will sometimes say, "Well, it's too hard for the kids," and what they mean is, "it's too hard for me." But short of sending them back for a masters, what do you do?*

#### Section 7.4 JUDGES: Evaluation of the students

Judges' evaluations of the students were generally positive. Lacking a personal attachment to the students, and with the perspective gained from seeing many students compete, the judges were perhaps more evenhanded in their praise and criticism than the teachers. Here, for example, are the comments of a judge from Maryland:

*Of course, I enjoyed just seeing the students perform. They performed, I think, above my expectations in terms of their knowledge of the material. I did find at the national level that there was a lot of variation from area to area and also that there was a fair amount of rote learning. They knew the material, but in a number of cases you could throw them off fairly quickly by giving them a new twist. They were comfortable with their prepared presentation, but they often had difficulty when you tried to apply it to a very practical [situation].*

*There did also tend to be some sense in my mind that there were some expectations on the part of the students and the faculty who were preparing them of what the acceptable answer was. In many cases, we found as judges that when students went off in a very liberal direction, we tended then to take a more conservative perspective and try to see how they could handle it. And if they went the other way, we went the other way.*

*Q. When you say that there was something they expected, did that also vary from school to school—was there a liberal trend in some cases and a conservative trend in others?*

*To some degree, but I think also there was an assumption—they were coming to the East and all these "liberals" were going to have our own idea of what the answer would be, and they would give an answer to impress us. And as I said, our idea as judges was to kind of flip back and forth and see how they could think on their feet.*

Here also is an evaluation of the students that clearly shows a judge's approval for the students and what they have accomplished through their work in the We the People... program, yet shows his concern for some elements of student performance in the competition:

I was impressed with what students had learned. I particularly was impressed when I was dealing with schools that were obviously not from the wealthiest school districts—the students in a way were diamonds in the rough. I remember we had one team from, I think, Montana. It had been explained to us ahead of time that there had been some kind of mix-up, and they had only gotten in the program a month before, and they weren't smooth, but boy, they were sharp kids—they had been taught well. You know, I'm a little bit concerned about the kids who come in and who are so heavily prepared—they're really kind of putting on a performance rather than thinking through the issues. But I was impressed with some of the groups.

One judge we spoke with told us of the students' interest in engaging him in detailed discussions about the Bill of Rights. He commented that he has observed that discussions about First Amendment rights in the *We the People...* program has produced local students who are willing, in their school newspapers, to push to the limits in journalism. He added that he hopes his own children become involved in the program.

One last comment from a judge rounds out the picture of the judges' perceptions of the students who participate in *We the People...* and the competition. The first comes from a judge who was asked whether he had heard of anyone else's impressions of the students or the program. He said:

*Well, I've heard teachers talk about particular students who were so turned on by this—students who had not performed terribly well before—were now all of a sudden into something they were very excited about. And I think it's important that they maintain in the program this idea that everybody in the class participates and it's not let's just skim the cream off the top and let a few students get it. I think it's important that it's a class effort.*

### Section 7.5 JUDGES: Suggestions for change

*I want to find a suggestion [for improvement]; that's in my nature, but no—the darn thing is good.*  
—Indiana judge

Some of the judges' suggestions for changes reflected the same comments students and teachers made; others reflected their particular professional knowledge. In the latter category came this statement from a lawyer:

*I think that maybe one point that could be stressed more is that too many times in Supreme Court decision making, we say "This was the decision and therefore this is the rule, this is the law," and sometimes students take it that "This is right versus wrong." I try to stress with them that most Supreme Court decisions—the vast majority—are 6-3, 5-4, 7-2—that there's always another side, votes change, politics change. I think that the textbooks perhaps could do a little better job of arguing both sides of an issue.*



Like some of the teachers, the judges also thought that there were good elements in both the *With Liberty and Justice for All* and *We the People...* texts, but that the materials in either case might be intimidating to some teachers. One judge addresses the former concern:

*I've been working on the revised text. I think that will be helpful. Right now the With Liberty and Justice for All text I think probably has too much of a focus on rights and less structure than it should have on the structure of the government and so forth. So I think that to be able to combine those things will be a good step.*

A second judge speaks of the latter problem:

*Q. My sense of the dilemma [of teachers feeling intimidated] is that it is less an issue of the way the Center for Civic Education has presented and organized the materials than a matter of the subject matter itself. What do you think?*

*A. I think so. They see John Locke's name mentioned and they think, "Well, I've got to know more than just what's here—where do I go? Where do I start?" Maybe more teacher workshops, maybe videos, maybe suggestions for a bibliography might be helpful.*

In a related vein, one judge spoke of his efforts and occasional frustration in getting more teachers interested in using the *We the People...* program in their classroom:

*I've talked to some of my friends who teach in the high school level. One of my personal concerns in Maryland has been the fact that we have so few schools that participate. I'm not sure quite what the trick is. I'm impressed with [the district coordinator] and his efforts, but for some reason we seldom get more than two or three or four schools throughout the state who get involved, and there are other states where there are huge numbers, and I'm not sure what the difference is.*

*Q. When you say you've talked with high school teachers, do you mean you've tried to encourage them to consider participating in the program?*

*A. Right. I do a fair amount of training of high school teachers on the use of C-Span in the classroom. When I do that, as I start talking with teachers about what they can do to get their students more interested in public affairs kinds of issues, I mention this program. So I think it's a really good program.*

The last two comments relating to change concern the students rather than the teachers. One thoughtful judge said:

*I found that the students appreciated the chance to have an actual judge come out and evaluate them before it really counted. In fact, one student I know personally who is on one of the teams had said that she was so frightened of the idea of going and being judged—it was much more comforting having gone through it in a kind of a mock situation and kind of realize that the judges weren't there to eat them up. The judges were there to try to push them but also be helpful.*

The second comment comes from a student. She told us that she'd rate the class a nine out of ten—high praise in view of her opinion that no other class she had deserved a nine. Asked what would make the *We the People...* program a "ten," she said:

*I think maybe the judges at the competition. I didn't think they were really into what we were saying. They didn't seem totally involved in what was going on, or seem to have in-depth knowledge of the subject. (She said this comment was based on the sorts of follow-up questions they asked.)*

All of the judges we interviewed told us that they would like to continue serving in that role. One judge indicated that that was at least in part because of the other judges:

*I also enjoyed getting to meet the other judges. There were some very interesting people from very interesting and impressive backgrounds who were doing the judging, so that was quite good.*

No judge told us that participation has spurred them on to other community involvement or any other kind of work related to their judging experience, but all said that that was because they couldn't squeeze anything else into their schedules.

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As with the student and teacher sections, we conclude here that parents and judges give an overall highly positive evaluation to the **We the People...** program and the teachers and students who are the heart of it. Though their roles are not central ones, those who do not participate in the classroom are still able to perceive personal benefit from the program and are eager to see it continue.





## Section VIII

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The most urgent recommendation, voiced by nearly every participant in this study, was "continue the program." The most common response to the question "Are there any changes you would like to see?" was "No." We received suggestions from students, teachers, and judges, but few in each category. Parents made no suggestions. Still, a number of specific recommendations have emerged from this study. Most can be found in the body of the report, but are repeated here:

- Combine the *We the People...* and *With Liberty and Justice for All* texts.
- Reconsider the graphics in view of the sophistication to which students have become accustomed.
- Add more graphic organizers such as timelines. Alternatively, these might be accomplished as student activities.
- Consider including more on the death penalty, the Fourteenth Amendment, citizens' responsibilities, and unenumerated rights.
- Encourage the judges to come in to speak with classes who are about to compete. Setting students at ease will diminish the fear which may impede best student performance.

The remaining suggestions relate to teachers. The quality of the teacher who leads a class through the *We the People...* program can make a large difference in how much and how well the students learn. One teacher, for example, misunderstood (according to one of his students) the process of the competition. He thought the team would pick the question, not the judges. His students seemed less informed than others interviewed for this study, as he did himself. His students didn't seem to fully understand the importance of the competition until they actually got to it. In the words of one of his students:

*We really didn't know anything about it. We went up there and it was our first time, and we thought we'd just go up there and compete. We didn't realize it was this big deal until we got up there and we didn't realize what was going on. I think next year will be different because we will know what is going on.*

Later, when asked what should be changed, she said:

*I think at least in our class, that we should have worked a little harder. We might have wanted to start a little earlier so we could have made it through more of the book, because we only made it through half of the book.*

For that reason, we suggest the following:

- Gear training to teachers' level of experience.
- Conduct follow-up workshops, again geared to a teacher's experience.
- Consider/encourage team teaching with teachers from other disciplines.

We also suggest that a possible follow-up study might focus on the teachers. What factors make the difference between good and poor teachers? How effective is the training for them? What kind of in-service would be most useful? Does that vary depending on a teacher's experience? How big a role does the district coordinator and principal play in helping a teacher be successful with these curricula?

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