



WE THE PEOPLE: THE CITIZEN AND THE CONSTITUTION SUMMER INSTITUTE EVALUATION STUDY



Dr. Thomas Vontz, associate professor at Kansas State University, conducted a two-phase evaluation of the week-long We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution summer institutes during 2009. The institutes evaluated were the Grand Teton Institute, the Iowa Institute, the National Middle School Institute, and two National Elementary Institutes. A total of two hundred upper elementary, middle, and high school teachers participated in the study. The teachers were administered a pre- and post-test designed to measure civic content knowledge. In addition, the teachers were later surveyed on pedagogical questions and the simulated congressional hearing.

KEY FINDINGS

- Teachers identified the major components of the institutes as strengths. They specifically noted the scholar presentations, as well as pedagogy sessions, team discussions, the simulated congressional hearing, We the People resources and materials, and the development of professional relationships.
- Participation in a We the People summer institute reflected positive and statistically significant improvement in teachers' knowledge of civic concepts.
- Participation in an institute significantly increased elementary and middle school teachers' knowledge of civil society and representative democracy.
- The professional development experience increased teacher confidence at all grade levels in teaching core civic concepts of constitutionalism, representative democracy, human rights, citizenship, and civil society.
- When asked how their teaching was affected, respondents reported that the summer institutes increased their understanding of several important civic principles, including constitutional history, responsibilities of citizens, the Bill of Rights, purposes of government, and the importance of citizen participation.
- More than ninety-four percent of participants reported that the professional development positively influenced their ability to lead meaningful civics discussions in their classrooms.
- Ninety-three percent of respondents reported using the *We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution* textbook after returning to their classrooms.
- Eighty-one percent of respondents had either held or planned to hold a hearing within the school year following their institute.
- We the People summer institute participants were more positive about increases in their content knowledge but less positive about increases in their pedagogical knowledge.
- Ninety-three percent of participants reported that their attendance at the institute improved their teaching methods upon returning to the classroom.