

The Civic Achievement Award Program

Through its learning, research, and civic projects, a new national program teaches young people to be informed, active citizens.

The Civic Achievement Award Program (CAAP), a citizenship education initiative established by the U.S. Congress, provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become responsible citizens. The program, which is now fully funded by Burger King Corporation, targets 5th through 8th graders because these are crucial years for inculcating the basic concepts and values that support our pluralistic democracy.

"Children have duties, rights, and choices; CAAP teaches them what these are as well as how to address issues, develop informed opinions, and take appropriate action," says Stephen A. Janger, president of the Close Up Foundation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan civic education organization that conducts CAAP with the cooperation of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. CAAP teaches citizenship through three interdisciplinary components—a Learning Project, a Research Project, and a Civic Project. For the program year beginning in January 1991, the basic CAAP materials are available at no cost, as well as a new version called "CAAP in Action." Both follow the same format, but "CAAP in Action" is shorter in length and focuses on the environment as a vehicle for teaching citizenship.

The CAAP Learning Project gives students a general overview of history, government, geography, economics, culture, and current events. It shows them—through the use of a timeline, essays, and study sheets—how these subjects are related and why citizens need to know about the people and events that shaped our country. After class discussions of topics covered in the Learning Project, many CAAP teachers have coordinated related activities. For example, 5th graders at

Yocum Elementary in El Dorado, Arkansas, held two class elections, one by secret ballot and the other with a show of hands. They then examined differences in the outcomes to try to understand why the U.S. holds elections by secret ballot.

CAAP's Research Project shows students how to use the library and other sources to conduct research and helps them understand why competent citizens need to be able to find information, process it, and communicate it to others. As a related activity, 6th graders at Hoover School in Schaumburg, Illinois, developed a list of questions about such things as the unrest in South Africa and the Iran-Contra scandal and, using a computer modem, surveyed students in other parts of the country. They then sent the results to their representative in Congress.

Finally, in the Civic Project, students learn about citizenship through direct civic action. For example, after researching the history of the Census, students at McCollum Elementary in

Wichita, Kansas, conducted an awareness campaign to urge community members to complete their Census forms. The children wrote one-minute public service announcement scripts and acted in their PSAs while the teacher videotaped them. After the PSAs were broadcast on a local educational cable channel, teacher Barbara Firestone observed, "The children learned they can participate as citizens, they learned a lot about the Census, and they performed a wonderful service to the community."

As a result of CAAP, thousands of students are applying the knowledge they've gained to address issues affecting their schools, their communities, and the nation. In short, they are beginning to act like and think like responsible citizens. □

Julie Dolenga is Editor/Writer, Civic Achievement Award Program, Close Up Foundation, 1235 Jefferson Davis Highway, Arlington, VA 22202. For information about the program, call the CAAP office toll free at 1-800-356-5136.

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