

We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution
2005 National Finalists' Knowledge of and Support for
American Democratic Institutions and Processes

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I. Executive Summary

We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution is an educational program developed by the Center for Civic Education (the Center). The program instructs students on the history and principles of American constitutional democracy with the primary goal of promoting civic competence and responsibility among the nation's elementary, middle, and secondary students. Additionally, the instructional program is intended to enhance students' understanding of the institutions of American constitutional democracy and to reinforce the contemporary relevance of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The program utilizes highly acclaimed curricular materials developed by the Center.

At the high school level, classes can choose to enter a formal competition, advancing from congressional district and state competitions to national finals. The competition is structured as a simulated congressional hearing in which students' knowledge of the Constitution and American democratic institutions is tested, allowing students an opportunity to apply the knowledge they have acquired through the curriculum and to strengthen their analytical skills in a practical way.

In the spring of 2005, a survey was given to students participating in the national finals competition of the **We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution (We the People)** Program to assess its impact, at the highest level, on student knowledge of and support for democratic institutions and processes. This report compares the scores and responses of **We the People** national finalists to the relevant national sample. It should be noted that the **We the People** national finalists surveyed for this report represent a select, non-representative sample of often high-achieving students. Their results, however, will be compared to various representative national samples. Thus, the analyses of these comparative results are merely suggestive and not generalizable to a larger population.

Major Findings:

- Students participating in the national finals competition of the **We the People** program possess significantly more knowledge of American democratic institutions and processes than the average American.
- Compared to a representative national sample of high school students surveyed by the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics assessment, **We the People** national finalists, as a group, are more knowledgeable in *every* category of civic knowledge delineated in the survey, outperforming the representative NAEP sample on *every* survey question.
- Several questions were answered correctly by over 90% of **We the People** national finalists.
- In the knowledge section, the mean test performance for **We the People** national finalists was 18 questions correct out of 23, compared to a mean of 12 correct out of 23 for the national sample.

- Eighty-eight percent of **We the People** national finalists outperformed students who took the NAEP test.
- In a battery of five open-ended-response questions derived from the American Nation Election Studies, 72.9% of **We the People** national finalists answered all five questions correctly, whereas only 16.5% of a corresponding national sample of adults and 8.1% of high school students scored similarly.
- **We the People** national finalists were also nine times more likely to answer all questions correctly when compared with high school students in the national sample.
- The Center’s study found that students who participate in the national finals competition of the **We the People** program show less cynicism toward facets of American politics and government than a corresponding national sample of students possessing similar socio-demographic qualities.
- Compared with a representative national sample of college freshman, **We the People** national finalists assign much more importance to keeping track of political affairs, influencing the political structure, participating in community leadership, helping others in difficulty, and developing a meaningful philosophy of life.
- Ninety-one percent of **We the People** national finalists either *Mostly Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that the program increased their reasoned commitment to democratic institutions.

This survey included three questions that were recently used in the *Future of the First Amendment* high school student survey (FFA) sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation’s High School Initiative. The survey focused on the knowledge and attitudes of high school students, teachers and administrators, especially with respect to first amendment rights of free speech and press. **We the People** students showed an impressive respect for the First Amendment and its principles when compared to a representative sample of more than 100,000 high school students that participated in the *Future of the First Amendment* study.

- On a question asking whether people should be able to express unpopular opinions, 98% **We the People** students either *Strongly or Mildly Agreed*, while only 83% of the representative national sample did so.
- When asked whether newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval of a story, 83% of **We the People** students *Strongly or Mildly Agreed* (14% *Strongly or Mildly Disagreed*), while 51% of the national sample *Strongly or Mildly Agreed* (36% *Strongly or Mildly Disagreed*).
- When questioned on whether the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees (which appeared alongside the actual text from the First Amendment), only 10% of **We the People** students *Strongly or Mildly Agreed* (and 88% *Strongly or Mildly Disagreed*), while 35% of the nationally representative sample *Strongly or Mildly Agreed* (and 44% *Strongly or Mildly Disagreed*).

II. Introduction and Purpose of Survey

We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution is an educational program developed by the Center for Civic Education (the Center) on the history and principles of American constitutional democracy with the primary goal of promoting civic competence and responsibility among the nation's elementary, middle, and secondary students.

Additionally, the instructional program is intended to enhance students' understanding of the institutions of American constitutional democracy and to reinforce the contemporary relevance of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The program utilizes highly acclaimed curricular materials developed by the Center. At the high school level, classes may choose to enter a formal competition, advancing from congressional district and state competitions to national finals. The competition is structured as a simulated congressional hearing in which students' knowledge of the Constitution and American democratic institutions is tested, allowing students an opportunity to apply the knowledge they have acquired through the curriculum and to strengthen their analytical skills in a practical way. During the past 17 years, more than 82,000 teachers have taught the **We the People** curriculum to more than 26,500,000 students. In 2003, two million students participated in the program.

Past studies have shown that students who used the curriculum "significantly outperformed comparison students" on every topic studied (Educational Testing Service 1988, 1990, 1991). For example, a random sample of 900 high school students who studied the **We the People** curriculum outperformed 280 college sophomores and juniors enrolled in political science courses at a major university. **We the People** students

excelled in every topic area on almost every test item (Educational Testing Service 1988, 1990, 1991). Another study found that **We the People** high school students develop a stronger attachment to political beliefs, attitudes, and values essential to a functioning democracy than most other students and adults (Brody 1994).

In early spring 2005, a survey was given to students participating in the national finals competition of the Center's **We the People** program. The survey was designed to assess the impact of the program on student knowledge of and support for democratic institutions and processes. Students who compete in the national finals have, as a whole, participated in all levels of the program and have shown extraordinary mastery of the **We the People** curriculum. Consequently, this survey was designed to measure the impact of the program on this specific group of students.

III. Sampling and Methodology

Each spring, the Center for Civic Education conducts a national finals competition for the fifty-one classes that had won their state competition and earned the right to compete in Washington, D.C. The classes, one from each state and the District of Columbia, studied the Center's *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* text to prepare arguments for these simulated congressional hearings. Sixteen of the 51 classes that will compete at the 2005 national finals completed the survey (N = 258). Teachers administered the survey in classrooms between February and April, before participating in the annual national competition.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument utilizes items drawn from several widely used surveys and tests and was designed by the Center to measure political knowledge and support for democratic institutions and processes, as well as to canvass students for feedback on the program itself. The survey consists of 73 open- and close-ended questions (see Attachment A) culled from various national surveys. All questions on the Center survey have been used by at least one national survey and administered to high school seniors, college freshman, and/or adults. For this study, responses of **We the People** national finalists were compared to respondents' answers on the appropriate national survey from which the question was taken. This report compares the percentage of correct responses by **We the People** national finalists with those of the relevant national sample. The survey also contains two open-ended questions seeking student feedback on their experiences with the program, and a question asking students what principles of constitutional democracy they would discuss with the new leaders of Iraq if given the opportunity.

It should be noted that the **We the People** national finalists surveyed for this report represent a select, non-representative sample of often high-achieving students. Their results, however, will be compared to various representative national samples. Thus, the analyses of these comparative results are merely suggestive and not generalizable to a larger population.

IV. We the People versus NAEP

Political knowledge is a prerequisite for engaged citizenship and political participation because citizens must possess enough knowledge to effectively and responsibly participate in the political process. Previous studies have shown that young adults are less politically knowledgeable than older adults (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996:159), while older adults are themselves surprisingly ignorant of many facets of American government (Niemi and Junn 1998:9a). However, our survey results indicate that **We the People** national finalists are on their way to becoming informed, engaged, and politically active citizens, and community and political leaders.

Questions 1 through 23 of the **We the People** survey measure political knowledge. They have been selected from public-release items from the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics assessment that evaluated student knowledge and understanding of U.S. government and politics. NAEP is an ongoing, congressionally mandated project sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. The project assesses the educational achievements of American students in a variety of fields, including civics. The 1998 NAEP civics assessment surveyed 7,763 twelfth-grade students, a statistically representative sample of the entire nation.

The percentage of correct responses of **We the People** national finalists were compared to the responses of high school seniors in the nationally representative sample from the 1998 NAEP assessment. As noted earlier, the **We the People** sample represents a group of students who have excelled in the program and advanced to the national finals

competition, whereas NAEP is a representative sample of all students in the United States (hereafter in this section called the national sample).

The questions were broken down into five categories, each of which addresses knowledge of a specific area of civic education: the general rights of citizens; state and local government; political systems, parties, and interest groups; basic structure and functioning of the U.S. government; and the ability to reason and make inferences from text. It must be noted that on every question, **We the People** national finalists outscored the national sample; in several questions the difference was over 30 percentage points.

A. Knowledge of the General Rights of Citizens

In each of the five questions that address the general rights of citizens, **We the People** national finalists significantly outperformed the national sample.

Survey Ques.	Knowledge of General Rights of Citizens (percentage correct)	WTP	NAEP	Difference
9.	Contrary to the time of the <i>Lochner</i> ruling, it is now generally accepted that the government should take some actions to defend the health and safety of workers.	72%	61%	11%
14.	The Supreme Court’s power to overturn unconstitutional laws is an example of the U.S. government’s limit on majorities.	71%	30%	41%
15.	The Framers of the Constitution wanted to limit the power of majorities in order to protect the rights of individuals and minorities.	92%	72%	20%
19.	The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and Article 22 of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, show a common concern for individual rights.	86%	76%	10%
20.	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been opposed by some Americans because of fear that international agreements will force the U.S. to act in ways not consistent with its interest.	82%	48%	34%

B. Knowledge of State and Local Government

Both groups were skilled at inferring from a graph the reason why local governments employ more people than do state or federal governments (93% and 83% respectively). However, the most significant difference in scores resulted from three questions based on a map of the congressional districts of Louisiana. Students were asked to examine the map and deduce the number of districts that should exist and what determines the size of a district.

Survey Ques.	Knowledge of State and Local Government (percentage correct)	WTP	NAEP	Difference
13.	The graph shows that local governments employ more people than do state or federal governments. This is because local governments meet the direct needs of so many people in so many different places.	95%	83%	12%
21.	A state's increase in population that is proportionally larger than that of other states is likely to increase the number of its congressional districts.	82%	59%	23%
22.	A state's legislature determines its congressional district boundaries.	74%	53%	21%
23.	A congressional district occupying a relatively small area may indicate that it includes a large urban area.	75%	47%	28%

C. Knowledge of Political Systems, Parties, and Interest Groups

In this category, **We the People** national finalists showed their superior knowledge, scoring considerably higher than the national sample in each question except for one, which generated the least difference between the two groups in the entire survey.

Survey Ques.	Knowledge of Political Systems, Parties, and Interest Groups (percentage correct)	WTP	NAEP	Difference
4.	The American Association of Retired Persons would be most concerned about and opposed to severe cutbacks in the Social Security program.	94%	90%	4%
12.	Congress has two houses, one in which state representation is based on population and one in which all states have equal representation. This was outlined in the Connecticut Compromise.	86%	55%	31%
16.	Countries with proportional representation systems tend to have more political parties than those with single-member districts because they do not have to win a majority of the vote.	71%	46%	25%
17.	The best argument in favor of proportional representation systems is that the legislature is more representative of the popular vote.	70%	39%	31%
18.	The best argument in favor of single-member district systems is that voters make choices based on individual candidate qualifications rather than party affiliations.	61%	40%	21%

D. Knowledge of the Basic Structure and Functioning of the U.S. Government

Three questions tested knowledge of the basic structure and functioning of the U.S. government.

Survey Ques.	Knowledge of the Basic Structure and Functioning of the U.S. Government (percentage correct)	WTP	NAEP	Difference
2.	While Congress and the courts have some authority over foreign policy, the president and the state department have the greatest authority.	64%	45%	19%
3.	The primary purpose of the Bill of Rights was to limit the power of the federal government.	96%	65%	31%
7.	Most of the bills introduced in the House of Representatives are never sent by committees to the full House.	67%	31%	36%

E. Ability to Reason and Make Inferences from Text

On each question in this section, **We the People** national finalists considerably outscored the national sample. These questions required students to analyze quotes and Supreme Court majority and dissenting opinions.

Survey Ques.	Ability to Reason and Make Inferences from Text (percentage correct)	WTP	NAEP	Difference
1.	Limited government power is a principle articulated by John Locke’s quote about the “ends of society and government.”	76%	58%	18%
5.	“Individual liberties depend on citizens committed to the protection of those liberties” best summarizes Judge Learned Hand’s argument about the state of the American democracy.	92%	69%	23%
6.	Judge Learned Hand believed it was most important that citizens protect their freedoms through political participation.	91%	59%	32%
8.	The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in <i>Lochner v. New York</i> that the law limiting the numbers of hours people could work was unconstitutional.	68%	30%	38%
10.	The principle that government should play as small a role as possible in civil society and the economy is directly consistent with the reasoning behind the <i>Lochner</i> ruling.	60%	25%	35%
11.	In <i>Lochner</i> , Peckham argues for judicial activism to limit government power while Harlan argues for judicial restraint but a more active role by government.	61%	35%	26%

F. Overall Summary

We the People national finalists scored higher on every knowledge question than the representative national sample of high school students. Their superior knowledge of American government, as evinced by their higher percentage of correct responses to every question, reflects the detailed curricular content of the program that instructs

students in political processes, the nature and history of democratic institutions, and the U.S. Constitution. The average percentage of correct responses for the entire section of knowledge questions for **We the People** national finalists is 78%, compared to 53% of the national sample. The mean of correct responses for **We the People** national finalists is 18 out of 23 total questions, while the mean of correct responses for the national sample is 12 out of 23. Eighty-eight percent of participants outperformed the national sample as tested by NAEP. The results of the survey show that **We the People** national finalists know more than students in the national sample about civics and government in every aspect of civic education tested by the NAEP items.

V. We the People versus Adults: More Knowledge Questions

Five open-ended questions on the **We the People** survey were derived from the American National Election Studies (ANES), a collection of national surveys conducted annually since 1952. Funded by the National Science Foundation, ANES are designed to present data on issues such as Americans' enduring political positions, social and political values, and participation in political life. Each study contains information culled from interviews conducted with 1,000 to 2,000 respondents, aged from 18 to more than 80. The samples are representative of the major regions of the contiguous United States as designed by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The open-ended questions were chosen because Delli Carpini and Keeter (1989:304-6) suggest that this five-item index has strong construct validity and is an excellent measurement to gauge political knowledge. Responses of **We the People**

national finalists were compared to the 2005 and 1991 NES samples. Students in the **We the People** program outscored the national sample of adults on all five questions.

Survey Ques.	Five Item Knowledge Index (percentage correct)	WTP	1991 NES (age 18-80+)	2005 NES (age 18-80+)
24a.	The job or political office held by Dick Cheney	98%	74%	76%
24b.	Branch which determines constitutionality of laws	98%	66%	Not Asked
24c.	Veto override percentage	81%	34%	Not Asked
24d.	Party control of the house	93%	68%	49%
24e.	Party ideological location	93%	57%	61%

These same five questions were asked of 9th-12th grade students and their parents in 55,708 randomly selected households for the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES). NHES is a large national study of adults and youth conducted by Westat for the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. The results were reported in Niemi and Junn's (1998a) *The Civic Development of 9th through 12th Grade Students in the United States: 1996*.

Comparing the responses of **We the People** national finalists to those of 9th-12th grade students and their parents, **We the People** national finalists easily outperformed both the students and adults of the national sample. In fact, 72.9% of **We the People** national finalists answered all five questions correctly while only 8.1% of the national sample of high school seniors and 16.5% of the national sample of their parents did the same.

Correct answers Range 0 to 5	WTP students (mostly 12 th grade)	9 th -12 th grade students, from the NHES	NHES parents
0 correct	0.4%	24.2%	16.0%
1 correct	0.0%	24.9%	15.7%
2 correct	1.9%	16.5%	16.2%
3 correct	4.7%	14.8%	16.8%
4 correct	20.2%	11.5%	18.8%
5 correct	72.9%	8.1%	16.5%

VI. We the People and Monitoring the Future: Political Attitudes

Questions 25-29 and 32 of the **We the People** survey were designed to measure students' attitudes toward American politics. The questions were taken from Johnston, Bauchman, and O'Malley's (1997) *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth* (MTF) as part of a survey administered to approximately 16,200 high school seniors. Begun in 1975, the MTF annual surveys explore changes in values, behaviors, and lifestyle orientations of contemporary American youth. MTF is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Of the **We the People** national finalists surveyed, 74% identified themselves as being white, and approximately 98% responded that they intended to go to a four-year college or college and graduate school. Because of the vast majority of national finalists are white and college-bound, we compared them to white, college-bound respondents on the MTF survey (N = 917).

The questions in the MTF survey measure cynicism by addressing a number of different ways to participate in the political process. Across all five questions, **We the People** national finalists expressed less cynicism than the white, college-bound national sample of students.

Survey Ques.	Question	WTP	MTF
25.	All or most people running the government are crooked or dishonest.	18.2%	62.8%
26.	All or most tax money is wasted.	21.0%	62.2%
27.	Can trust government in Washington to do what is right all or a majority of the time.	42.2%	33.3%
28.	Very or somewhat confident that people running the government know what they are doing.	57.4%	60.2%
29.	Government is mostly or always run for the benefit of all people.	23.3%	13.1%

We the People national finalists and students in the national sample were questioned regarding their intent to participate in certain political activities, such as registering to vote, donating to a political candidate or cause, working in a political campaign, participating in a lawful demonstration, and boycotting products or stores. **We the People** national finalists were more likely than students in the national sample to declare that they will participate in any given political activity. In virtually all of the measures questioned, **We the People** national finalists were significantly more likely than white college-bound students in the national sample to declare that they will participate or have already participated in all types of political activities measured in the MTF survey.

Survey Ques.	Question	WTP	MTF
37a.	Will or have already registered to vote	95.7%	95.6%
37c.	Will or have already written to a public official	64.0%	43.6%
37d.	Will or have already donated to a political candidate or cause	52.0%	18.8%
37e.	Will or have already worked in a political campaign	50.8%	14.6%
37f.	Will or have already participated in a lawful demonstration	54.7%	25.8%
37g.	Will or have already boycotted certain products or stores	48.1%	34.1%

These findings indicate that **We the People** national finalists are more politically engaged in every regard than the representative national survey, and suggest that the **We the People** program motivates students to become politically informed and active in civic life.

VII. We the People versus American College Freshman

The Higher Education Research Institute at University of California, Los Angeles publishes an annual report entitled, *The American Freshman: National Norms*. These reports are based on surveys of freshmen attending colleges and universities. The data shown below are taken from the **We the People** sample and from the thirty-ninth *American Freshman: National Norms* for the Fall 2004 report, published in December 2004. The survey encompassed 289,452 students at 440 of the nation’s two- and four-year colleges and universities.

Survey Ques.	Objectives Considered Essential or Very Important	WTP	Freshmen 2004
38a.	Keep up to date with political affairs	83.7%	34.3%
38b	Influence the political structure	64.6%	19.07%
38c.	Be very well off financially	67.1%	73.6%
38d.	Develop a meaningful philosophy of life	52.0%	42.1%
38e.	Become a community leader	57.7%	30.7%
38f.	Help others who are in difficulty	83.7%	62.4%

Compared to American freshmen nationally, **We the People** national finalists place less value on wealth and place more importance on developing a meaningful philosophy of life, becoming a community leader, and helping others in difficulty. **We the People** national finalists have a positive attitude toward political institutions.

VIII. Future of the First Amendment

Three questions were culled from the *Future of the First Amendment* high school student survey (FFA) sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation’s High School Initiative. The survey focused on the knowledge and attitudes of high school students, teachers and administrators, especially with respect to first amendment rights of free speech and press. The project surveyed more than 100,000 high school students, nearly 8,000 teachers and more than 500 administrators and principals at 544 high schools across the United States.

According to the publishers of the report:

In recent years, in fact, annual surveys of adult Americans conducted by The Freedom Forum show that public support for the First Amendment is neither universal nor stable: it rises and falls during times of national crisis. In the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks, the nation was almost evenly split on the question of whether or not the First Amendment “goes too far in the rights it guarantees.” Not until 2004 did America’s support for the First Amendment return to pre 9-11 levels, when it received support from only about two-thirds of the population. Even in the best of times, 30 percent of Americans feel that the First Amendment, the centuries-old cornerstone of our Bill of Rights, “goes too far.”

Survey Ques.	Question	WTP	FFA
30.	People should be able to express unpopular opinions	Strongly or Mildly Agree: 98% Strongly or Mildly Disagree: 2%	Strongly or Mildly Agree: 83% Strongly or Mildly Disagree: 7%
31.	Newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval of a story	Strongly or Mildly Agree: 83% Strongly or Mildly Disagree: 14%	Strongly or Mildly Agree: 51% Strongly or Mildly Disagree: 36%
34.	The First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees	Strongly or Mildly Agree: 10% Strongly or Mildly Disagree: 88%	Strongly or Mildly Agree: 35% Strongly or Mildly Disagree: 44%

VIII. Student Feedback on the We the People Program

In our survey, we asked students to provide short answers to two questions: the first sought to find out what principles of constitutional democracy they would discuss with the new leaders of Iraq, if given the opportunity, to guide them in the challenging

task of writing a new constitution; the second question elicited students' feedback on whether they believed that participating in the **We the People** program has increased their reasoned commitment to democratic institutions.

With regard to the question on Iraq, many students provided exceptionally thoughtful responses. One student from Illinois offered the following suggestion: "I would want to advise them to ensure that districting boundaries are drawn fairly—along ethnic and religious [lines] to ensure that all groups have a say in government." Another student suggested a "separation of powers [like in the] U.S., but under a unitary system, with local government [structures] rather than states. I would also propose proportional representation in the legislature and...a free exercise clause in the constitution." A student from Idaho indicated that if he were to talk with the newly elected Iraqi council, he would "stress the importance of safeguards for individual liberties and limitations on government. Given the conflict between the Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds, if one group gained power in the national legislature, it would be all too tempting to repress another group." Similar concerns about the factional nature of the Iraqi political landscape were expressed by a number of students. One Oregon student indicated that he would advise the new government to closely review Federalist 10, which he indicated offered constructive guidance on controlling political factions in emerging democracies. An Idaho student urged the new government to take into account past abuses by Iraqi officials and "establish a strong system of checks and balances. I would also advocate separation of powers among the government." According to one student: "Obviously religion will be a major part of the new Iraqi constitution, so there can be no establishment clause. However, I would discuss a free exercise clause, a due process

clause, and an equal privileges and immunities clause” for which she cited Section 20 of the Oregon Constitution as an example. Other students echoed all these suggestions, many emphasizing the creation of a Bill of Rights, a free exercise clause, provisions establishing due process, the protection of minority rights, and the need to guarantee the rule of law for the protection of all Iraqi citizens.

With regard to the second question eliciting students’ feedback on whether they believed that participating in the **We the People** program has increased their reasoned commitment to democratic institutions, 90% percent of students indicated that the program had an effect in this regard. Overwhelmingly, students offered very positive feedback, indicating that the program had not only increased their knowledge of civics and government, but also positively affected their desire to learn more about politics. A student from Kentucky noted: “I had no idea when I began this class how the **We the People** program would increase my knowledge and dedication to the democratic institutions of our great country.” One Texas student indicated that the program has allowed her “to learn the principle foundations of our government, which has, in turn, showed that a citizen can make a difference in government,” while another indicated that she is “more tuned in to what is going on in our government and how [she] is being affected. [She] respect[s] political officials more and now understand[s] what our Constitution stands for.” An Arizona student indicated that she has learned so much through the program that she feels “obliged to keep up with current events and politics.” An Oregon student noted: “I was not interested in politics before this year, but the program drew me into the past and present political issues, and now I see the importance of being involved in civic and political organization, and how it is an essential part of a

functional, healthy democracy.” A student from Illinois echoed this sentiment and added that he believes that “all people deserve and education like the one provided in **We the People**.”

Some students indicated that though they enjoyed the program, their initial level of commitment was neither positively nor negatively affected—though most still agreed that they learned a great deal about the foundations and processes of the U.S. government. One Arizona student noted: “While I have always had an interest in law and staying up-to-date with current events, participating in the WTP program has actually caused me to learn and be more knowledgeable about our country. [Learning about] rights, advancements, reforms, and even problems [in our country] has made me more eager to turn 18 and become an active citizen.” A student from Maine echoed this sentiment: “Though politics has been a big part of my life so far, participating in this program has increased my interest in getting involved in the political process, as well as broadened by interest in other democratic institutions.”

Several students noted that they not only gained political knowledge, but learned how to become more politically engaged through their participation in the program. Many such comments are eloquently encapsulated in the feedback provided by an Oregon student: “**We the People** has not only informed me of specific ways I can get involved with my government, but it has also shown me why I need to and what needs to change. It has instilled in me a genuine passion for civic involvement, human rights, and [engagement] in the United States governmental [processes].”

IX. Conclusion

This report was designed to measure political knowledge and support for democratic institutions and processes among students participating in the national finals competition of the **We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution** program administered by the Center for Civic Education. Classes that compete in the program's national finals have received the most in-depth exposure to the materials. Therefore, these students were surveyed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program at the highest level—students who competed at the annual National Finals in Washington, D.C.

Measures included here show that **We the People** national finalists are better informed in every aspect of political knowledge measured than national samples of high school seniors, college freshmen, and adults. Knowledge and skills gained through program participation both empower students and strengthen American democracy, which relies on at least a minimally informed public (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Furthermore, **We the People** national finalists are far less cynical about American politics and government than a corresponding national sample of high school seniors, resulting in higher political participation.

These findings, as well as students' own written feedback, suggest that **We the People** national finalists have far more positive attitudes toward democratic institutions than other high school seniors, college students, and adults. Increased knowledge can help young citizens analyze decisions made by government officials and help them to make informed decisions. The survey shows that this knowledge increases their support for American government and its institutions. Many students noted that the political

knowledge amassed from the **We the People** program increased their political engagement and created a more positive attitude toward democracy. Also, meeting and interacting with officials who were willing to make personal sacrifices to serve their government, helped students to acknowledge the value of being engaged in political affairs and supporting the government. The survey suggests that **We the People** national finalists are better prepared for active citizenship, are endowed with an impressive array of political knowledge and skills, and possess attitudes conducive to full participation in the political process.

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