



Center for Education in Law and Democracy

PO Box 18490 Denver, CO 80218-0490
303.778.0756 f. 303.7334791
www.lawanddemocracy.org

COLORADO WE THE PEOPLE CONSTITUTIONAL STUDIES PROGRAM

I worked hard in the We the People program because learning about the law and government is, I think, the most interesting topic I have ever studied in school. – WTP student

The Colorado We the People (WTP) program sponsored by the Center for Education in Law and Democracy (CELD) teaches students about the principles of constitutional democracy and how they are embodied in the U.S. Constitution and the U.S. government. Students gain in-depth constitutional knowledge that spans the more than 200 years from the founding of the republic to the present day. At the end of their study, these young constitutional scholars take part in a culminating activity that allows them to demonstrate their knowledge and engage in conversation with community members. Through professional development, teachers deepen their content knowledge, enhance their use of the WTP text, and learn how best to prepare students for the culminating activity.



Why is Colorado We the People an important strategy for civic engagement?

The WTP program promotes students' civic competence by enhancing their understanding of democratic principles and institutions through engaging teaching strategies. Through the program, students learn about the political philosophy that shaped the work of the founders, the historical events that led up to the framing of the Constitution, constitutional values and principles, the Bill of Rights, and 21st-century challenges to the Constitution. The culminating activity, a simulated congressional hearing, engages the entire class, working in cooperative teams, in responding to open-ended questions about the history and relevance of the Constitution today.

Numerous evaluations have shown that, as a result of participating in WTP, students' substantive knowledge increases, as does their commitment to democratic principles. WTP students are more likely than their peers to participate in civic life; their knowledge advantage continues well past their school years.

The WTP hearing was a very different kind of test to take! We got to explain our answers and judges listened to us—people who are real judges! – WTP student

The WTP program has been incredibly beneficial to my classes by raising test scores, promoting excellent research skills, and making learning about the Constitution fun and active. – WTP teacher

As a WTP judge, I have seen students find their voice—students from all walks of life for whom participation in this program opens up new worlds: both new ways of learning . . . and the unexpected discovery of the value of their own participation in civic life, where the potential power of their voices becomes clear to them. – Volunteer WTP judge

Who participates in the WTP program? In 2011, 1700 students from schools representing all socio-economic levels and all regions of the state participated in student hearings; 125 community members served as judges. Approximately 250 students from eight schools came to the state finals, where 20 community members served as judges. CELD estimates that for the past 10 years, more than 3000 middle and high school students have participated in the Colorado WTP program annually. In addition, through a two-day summer professional development program, 30 secondary teachers from around the state work with constitutional scholars, political scientists, and mentor teachers to deepen their content knowledge and learn new implementation strategies.