

COMMUNITY PROBLEM SOLVING

Coaching Techniques

IDENTIFICATION OF THE AREA OF CONCERN

- One way to identify a problem area in the community is to use the Future Problem Solving Program topics. For example, when working on the FPSP topic of rage and bullying, students could generate possible problems and challenges connected with rage and bullying in their own neighborhood or community. They may have research and expertise to tackle the topic and this procedure more clearly ties future problem solving to the real world.
- Project ideas may arise from classroom discussions, local issues, news telecasts, literature (e.g., a Christmas story about a blind child led to Braille menus), etc.
- Look for ideas in local newspapers or magazines; talk with people in community agencies and houses of worship, poll the group for student concerns.
- Interview community members and students at other schools for ideas about areas/concerns they find bothersome. Talk with city officials, board members and leaders of community action groups.
- When it's time to pick an area of concern allow the students to vote. **Suggestion:** Give each student 25 cents/votes to cast/spend however he/she wishes, all on one issue or split among several challenges. The idea that has the most votes/money wins.

DESCRIBING THE AREA OF CONCERN

- Make sure you include background information from your research in your description of the area of concern. Include facts, quotes, definitions and descriptions.
- Include positive aspects of the situation - what is possible and what improvements have already been made.
- Include negative aspects of the situation - limitations and unsuccessful attempts of others to solve the problem.
- Make sure you make your description of the area of concern community-specific.
- Explain why the problem situation the team identified is a significant issue to both the community and the team.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

- Don't dismiss solution ideas you "just know" the kids couldn't actually implement. Give all the possible solution ideas a chance to make it to the evaluation stage.
- Combining solution ideas works well in CmPS. Look for the solution ideas that will work well together to create an effective plan of action

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION

- Once you've picked the area of concern and developed a plan of action, set up a working timeline for implementation. Let the CmPS project deadline guide your work.
- Organize your team into small groups and let each group choose the part of the plan on which they want to work. Give everyone a job, a title, and a deadline. Make sure each CmPSer understands that it is the responsibility of each group to oversee and complete its part of the plan.

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THE COMMUNITY

- Involve other people who have a positive attitude in your project . Avoid those who only want to criticize. Involve officials who are important to the success of your project.
- Change is often met with resistance. Explain this to your students so they are aware that they might meet with resistance.
- Worthwhile change does not usually occur overnight. Prepare your students for this reality.
- At first, the “silent majority” that probably thinks your idea is great will be just that, silent.
- Throughout your project, there might be critics. Prepare your students for this and help them maintain a positive attitude and develop a sense of humor.
- Try to get the local press involved with your project. If you don’t get publicity, then write your ideas as a “letter to the editor.” Include pictures with the letter if they will be more effective.
- Make sure that those in positions of authority concerning your project take a favorable view of the project. Teaching your students about diplomacy will be a positive side effect of your project.

GENERAL MECHANICS

- Have students create a realistic working timeline for the project before students begin implementation. Then *have them* set up a detailed plan of action so students have a concrete checklist for their activities.
- Be prepared for the large amount of time the project will take.
- Students should establish an identity for their group, possibly with an acronym. Perhaps it can symbolize something about your project. One 2002 CmPS team used the acronym L.A.H.T.S. *Lending A Hand to Sudan*. Another team used the acronym WATERS, an acronym for *Water Awareness Team Encouraging Resourceful Solutions*.
- Document everything! Create the report as you go! Take pictures and keep a weekly log of team activities and progress. It will help when it comes time to complete your written report. Students should shoulder most of the responsibility for this “record keeping.”
- Activity does not necessarily mean productivity. There will be “loose” times when you will not seem to be accomplishing anything. Use this time to encourage creative thinking, even generating “far out” ideas that may lead to more practical ideas later on. **Suggestion:** Play the “What If...” game: Students suggest extreme “What Ifs...” (e.g. *What if we can’t make an appointment with the city council?* or *What if our project gets a national sponsor?*).
- There will be times when you just don’t know what to do next. Don’t quit, something will come up. Teams will probably experience disappointment in some area of the project. Prepare your students for this. Remind them of all the positive things that have occurred.

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