

The Capitol Forum on America's Future Program Prospectus

The Capitol Forum on America's Future is a civic education initiative designed to engage high school students in civic practice and consideration of current international issues. The program involves students both within their social studies classroom and beyond the classroom at their state capitol. Grounded in the belief that an attention to foreign policy comprises a vital part of responsible citizenship, the Capitol Forum seeks to raise awareness on critical international issues and to help develop a foundation for longterm civic engagement.

How does the Capitol Forum work?

The Capitol Forum program runs on a statewide basis in participating states. The centerpiece of the program in each state takes place in the spring when 80 to 100 high school students from 20 schools come to their state capitol as class representatives for an all-day forum. They deliberate about the role they believe the nation should play in an increasingly complex international environment and join in an open forum to share their views with elected officials and policymakers. The program is launched nationally each year with a summer institute attended by the program's "lead teachers" and the state organizers. The program in each participating state begins with a professional development workshop for teachers in the fall and involves classroom preparation within the context of the participating teachers' regular courses. Following the spring forum at the state capitol, student representatives return to their own classrooms to lead their fellow students in a dialogue on international issues. The program culminates each year in a balloting activity in which all students participate.

Who runs the Capitol Forum?

This is a program that brings together a number of partners in each state, each making a unique contribution in order to bring the program to high school students.

The Capitol Forum is sponsored nationally by the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program. Choices provides content materials, national coordination, and overall structure to the program.

In each participating state, the Capitol Forum is a program of a state-based organization that has an interest in international education and youth civic engagement. State sponsors have included humanities councils, departments of education, international studies centers at universities, and world affairs councils.

The office of the Secretary of State in each participating state plays a key role as the host at the state capitol and the entree to public officials. The Secretary of State also lends the program public authenticity, helping students make connections between their classroom studies and the making of public policy. The Capitol Forum is a natural fit with the Secretaries' nationwide New Millennium Project, an initiative to re-engage youth in public life. Thus, the Secretaries are typically ready to take on the project if the other pieces are in place.

A "lead teacher" (or in most states two) is prepared by Choices during a summer institute to take a leadership role with participating teachers. S/he leads two professional development workshops, prepares participating teachers for their leadership roles at the forum, leads the forum, and participates as a member of the program's organizing team.

Where has the Capitol Forum run?

The Capitol Forum was launched in 1997-98 in Connecticut and has expanded each year since then. Programs are taking place in Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington, and West Virginia in 2005-06 and additional states are making plans to join in 2006-07.

Who is behind the program?

The Capitol Forum is a program of the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies. It is endorsed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), and the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS)..

Additional information about the Capitol Forum program and each state program can be found on the Choices web site at www.choices.edu/capitol_forum.