

# House Appropriations- Education and Environment Division Public Hearing

March 9, 2023

Mr. Chairman Nathe and members of the House Appropriations - Education and Environment Division, my name is Sharon Espeland and I am testifying as a private citizen who is committed to civic education. Thank you for your time and attention today. Currently, I am an assistant principal at Century High School in Bismarck. I also have served as the ND State Coordinator for the We The People program. Prior to assuming both roles, I was a social studies teacher, and I used this program in my government and Advanced Placement Government classes.

I am in favor of this bill and asking for \$200,000 per biennium to expand the We The People program to more schools, offer more professional development options, pay for more out-of-state training opportunities, offer mentoring specific to the program, and provide materials for students and teachers.

## Purpose of We The People:

Students become more knowledgeable and engaged citizens. The intent is to expand civic education throughout the state of North Dakota by providing research based professional development to teachers and providing textbooks and supplemental materials that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. A culminating project could be for students to participate in a simulated congressional hearing either in their classroom, community, or at the state competition.

**The We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution Program** promotes civic competence and responsibility among the nation's upper elementary and secondary students. It is a program that provides a working knowledge of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. The We the People print textbooks' and enhanced ebooks' interactive strategies, relevant content and the simulated congressional hearing make teaching and learning exciting for both students and teachers. The We the People curriculum is an innovative course of instruction on the history and principles of the United States constitutional democratic republic. The program enjoys active support from state bar associations and foundations, and other educational, professional, business, and community organizations across the nation. Since its inception in 1987, more than 30 million students and 75,000 educators have participated in the We the People program. ND has 6-8 competing schools with 160+ students. Many more schools and students participate in non-competitive hearings.

## Key Points:

- The program provides a limited number of sets of instructional materials. The text encourages students to think and support their answers with constitutional application, historic and contemporary examples, Supreme Court cases, logic, and reasoning – it does not tell them what to think.
- The simulated congressional hearing activity involves every student in the class, not just the academic stars. It works with advanced students, students in poverty, urban and rural schools.

- The We The People program meets all of the criteria of 21<sup>st</sup> C. skills, Project Based Learning Components, but most importantly it produces thoughtful and engaged citizens.
- There is strong evidence of the program's success through positive program evaluation since 1987. A research team from Georgetown University has conducted independent studies of We the People that have been confirmed by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, which includes the highest standards for research scholarship. The team found that We the People students scored significantly higher on tests of both civic knowledge and civic dispositions than their peers. These dispositions include (1) respect for the rule of law, (2) political attentiveness, (3) civic duty, (4) community involvement, (5) commitment to government service, and (6) the norms of political efficacy and political tolerance. Additional information and studies can be found at <https://www.civiced.org/research/wtp-research>.

Again, thank you for your time and attention today. My hope is that you will continue your support of The We The People program. It will continue to develop young men and women who are more likely to be civically minded, committed to public service, and engaged in their communities.



# WE THE PEOPLE: THE CITIZEN & THE CONSTITUTION



## STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

6 UNITS – ALIGN WITH NORTH DAKOTA  
STATE STANDARDS

- WHAT ARE THE HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM
- HOW DID THE FRAMERS CREATE THE CONSTITUTION?
- HOW HAS THE CONSTITUTION BEEN CHANGED TO FURTHER THE IDEALS CONTAINED IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE?
- HOW HAVE THE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES EMBODIED IN THE CONSTITUTION SHAPED AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES?
- WHAT RIGHTS DOES THE BILL OF RIGHTS PROTECT?
- WHAT CHALLENGES MIGHT FACE AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?

## STUDIES SHOW THAT "WE THE PEOPLE" STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO:

- BE INCLINED TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS
- RESPECT THE RULE OF LAW  
CRITICALLY CONSUME POLITICAL NEWS
- BECOME MORE TOLERANT OF  
OPPOSING POLITICAL IDEAS
- BE INCLINED TO VOTE IN  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS  
LOCAL ELECTIONS, AND  
SERVE ON A JURY
- BELIEVE THAT  
IT IS THEIR  
RESPONSIBILITY  
TO BE INVOLVED  
IN THEIR  
COMMUNITY



## SIMULATED CONGRESSIONAL HEARING

STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN A SIMULATED CONGRESSIONAL HEARING, WHERE THEY "TESTIFY" BEFORE A PANEL OF JUDGES. STUDENTS ACTING AS MEMBERS OF CONGRESS DEMONSTRATE THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES AND HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO EVALUATE, TAKE, AND DEFEND POSITIONS ON RELEVANT HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES. THIS PROVIDES TEACHERS WITH AN EXCELLENT MEANS OF ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING. THE ENTIRE CLASS, WORKING IN COOPERATIVE TEAMS, PREPARES AND PRESENTS FOUR-MINUTE STATEMENTS BEFORE A PANEL OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES ACTING AS A CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE. STUDENTS THEN ANSWER FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS POSED BY THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS. TEACHERS MAY ENGAGE THEIR STUDENTS IN A NONCOMPETITIVE SIMULATED CONGRESSIONAL HEARING IN THEIR CLASSROOM OR A COMPETITIVE HEARING HOSTED BY HUMANITIES NORTH DAKOTA IN BISMARCK.



## HOW DO WE SPEND THE MONEY?

HUMANITIES NORTH DAKOTA (HND) SUPPORTS CLASSROOM TEACHERS BY PROVIDING FREE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TAUGHT BY CONSTITUTIONAL SCHOLARS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY ALONGSIDE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. WE ALSO PROVIDE FREE WE THE PEOPLE TEXTBOOKS, POCKET CONSTITUTIONS, AND OTHER RESOURCE MATERIALS. TEACHERS HAVE ACCESS TO ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL YEAR PROVIDED BY OUR WE THE PEOPLE MENTOR TEACHERS. IN ADDITION, HND SPONSORS THE "WE THE PEOPLE" STATE COMPETITION, WHERE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS COMPETE TO SHOWCASE THEIR WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONSTITUTION. THE WINNING STATE TEAM ADVANCES TO NATIONALS IN WASHINGTON, DC, AND WE HELP SUBSIDIZE THEIR TRAVEL.

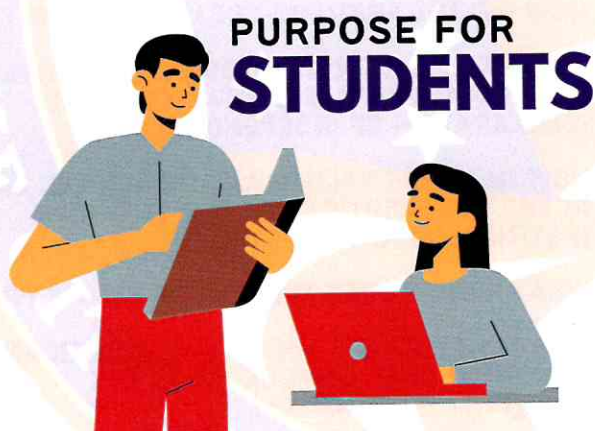
**47** TEACHERS HAVE RECEIVED ONGOING TRAINING AND ARE CURRENTLY TEACHING "WE THE PEOPLE" IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

**100** OUR GOAL IS TO TRAIN 100 TEACHERS ACROSS NORTH DAKOTA AND EQUIP THEM WITH TEXTBOOKS BY THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IN 2026

**270** STUDENTS ATTENDED THE 2023 "WE THE PEOPLE" STATE COMPETITION



- PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING CIVICS AND GOVERNMENT IN OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS
- ENHANCE THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS REQUIRED OF TEACHERS TO PROMOTE STUDENTS' ATTAINMENT OF COMPETENCY IN CIVIC EDUCATION
- INCREASE TEACHER AND STUDENT ACCESS TO THE WE THE PEOPLE CURRICULUM THROUGHOUT THE STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA
- PROVIDE TEXTBOOKS AND SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS THAT PROMOTE CRITICAL THINKING, COLLABORATION, AND COMMUNICATION.



- AN INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY AND THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND VALUES UPON WHICH THEY ARE FOUNDED
- THE SKILLS NECESSARY TO PARTICIPATE AS EFFECTIVE AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS
- THE WILLINGNESS TO USE DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES FOR MAKING DECISIONS AND MANAGING CONFLICT



# North Dakota We the People High School Civics Education

## Potential Growth

**We The People: The Citizen and the Constitution** is a comprehensive instructional program to help students understand the history and principles of our constitutional government. The program focuses on the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights and fosters civic competence and responsibility among high school students.

### Request for expanded funding to achieve these goals:

- Mediate the effects of high teacher turnover rates by training new teachers with highly effective skills to implement in their classrooms. It costs roughly \$3,000 annually to train, equip, and provide ongoing support for each teacher to participate effectively in the We the People program. Our goal is to train an additional 20 teachers each year. This will cost an additional \$60,000 per year.
- Sustain and support teachers currently teaching the We the People curriculum by maintaining our high level of support and offering them expanded training opportunities to attend teacher institutes outside the state so they can bring back their knowledge to our cohort. This will cost an additional \$12,000 per year.
- Expand ongoing support services for teachers through ongoing training throughout the year partnering new teachers with experienced mentor teachers. It will cost \$12,500 to pair our 20 new teachers with five mentor teachers.

Note: In addition to seeking increased state funding, Humanities North Dakota is also actively fundraising to expand the We the People program through corporate, foundation, and individual support.



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