How to Engage Others in the Community

What is Community Problem Solving? Community Problem Solving (CmPS) is a team or individual activity in which students identify real problems and implement real solutions in a community – local, state, national, or even global. Students use the skills of the problem solving process as they work on their project; however, since real life is not always as organized as an academic exercise, the process may not proceed neatly from step to step. CmPS can be pursued as an extracurricular activity or as part of the regular school curriculum and can be one or two years in length.

The Mississippi Future Problem Solving Program, Inc. is small in comparison to other affiliates, but our community involvement is enormous. Students from across the state find the Community Problem Solving component of the Future Problem Solving Program to be very rewarding. This component puts students in direct contact with their communities.

These are some samples of Community projects where our students have found success.

TIM (Technology to Improve Motor Skills)- A group of sixth grade students received the Beyonder Award for their work with the special needs population and rehabilitation doctors. They designed and built a prototype of a manipulative that can be used in classrooms and rehab centers to help improve the motor skills of students and adults in our disabled community. These students are in the 11th grade now, and the impact of this project still lives in them.

PAINS (Packs Are INjuring Students) - A group of seventh grade students worked directly with students and teachers in our school district and after intensive research they were able to make a presentation that helped reduce the weight of backpacks by over 50%! This project was super important to these kids because two of the team members had back fractures directly related to the weight of their backpacks.
TWISTER (Tornado Warning Integrated System To Exhort Residents)— Students who are now freshmen in college worked on TWISTER when they were sixth graders. They learned this year just how much their efforts as 6th graders paid off. These kids worked with the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency to determine the need for weather warning devices in our county. They wrote the research portion of a grant that MEMA submitted. During the project timeframe, they were able to get weather radios at a discounted price and then worked with the volunteer fire departments to distribute them to residents in rural areas. Six years later, the grant they helped with was approved and now every school campus and most volunteer fire departments in our county will be equipped with weather warning sirens . . . thanks in part to the Community Problem Solving Program.

Global Issues Problem Solving (GIPS) can also put students and coaches in direct contact with their communities. One of the key elements of this component is research. Although research materials can be purchased from FPSPI for reading prior to beginning a topic, it is always a good idea to take the topic to the community. Encourage your students to talk to their parents, local experts, and to check the local news for information about the topic in your community.

Another great way to engage the community is through sponsorships and donors. As a state with a very high rate of poverty, our students depend on community sponsors for help with team registration fees, state competition expenses, and international conference registration fees. Support from our community banks, restaurants, and small-businesses is crucial to the success of our program.

DonorsChoose.org is another great resource for reaching out to the community on a larger level. We were able to secure a Bill Gates / Barksdale Foundation grant which was used to pay for coach training expenses and to register five new teams in low-income schools. This grant will also allow these students the opportunity to attend and participate in our state’s Affiliate Bowl in our new Novice Division.

Students gain so much from community involvement and the Future Problem Solving Program. Here are some quotes from a few of our students and new coaches.

- I like that we work together and can work in the community to make changes, or at least we try. Some people say that we’re just kids, but if enough of us work together, we can make a change~~ Faisal M.
- My experience-- I love it [FPS]. I love the concept and the skills it makes the students use. I think it makes students go into a deeper level of thinking than they are used too, which is a wonderful experience for them. I have seen them take critical thinking skills they developed during this process and use these skills in other activities in my class. ~~Coach Kelsey L.
- I really enjoy this. It was not what I was expecting. ~~Quinton W.
- It is a different way to use problem-solving skills. ~~Christian J.
- Future problem-solving really makes you think. ~~Kennedi M.
In addition to teaching students about community engagement, Community Problem Solving also teaches many other skills such as oral presentation techniques, technology integration, reading, writing, research skills, and teamwork! **Consider engaging your students in CmPS!**

"A healthy social life is found only when in the mirror of each soul the whole community finds its reflection and when in the whole community the virtue of each one is living."

~Rudolph Steiner~

Parents and Students!

Watch for the video announcing the upcoming International Conference topic on March 1, 2015 at [www.fp.spi.org](http://www.fp.spi.org)!