

TO: Future Problem Solving Coach  
FROM: Future Problem Solving Program International  
RE: 2009-10 Team/Individual Community Problem Solving

The Future Problem Solving Program International (FPSPI) provides the tools and strategies students need to face the challenges of today and the future. FPSPI is the perfect vehicle to encourage and develop the thinking skills necessary to adapt to a changing world. FPSPI teaches students to think critically, creatively and futuristically.

The Future Problem Solving Program International's six-step model is aligned with National Curriculum Standards and the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Standards. Community Problem Solving (CmPS) provides opportunities for students to meet and exceed these standards. Through participation in community problem solving, students refine critical and creative thinking skills, focus on a real community or school issue, produce solution ideas, generate criteria to evaluate solution ideas, determine the best action plan, and implement the plan to resolve their problem.

Team/individual Community Problem Solving provides a framework for service learning. This action-oriented, authentic learning encourages students to use knowledge meaningfully across disciplines and become actively engaged in their education. Students recognize, address, and overcome obstacles as they work to make a positive difference in the community. Community Problem Solving allows students to move from ideas to action. A community problem may take many forms. A CmPS project can be a problem that exists within the school setting, the local, state, or national community, or even the global community. CmPS provides the vehicle for a significant learning experience, accepting and confronting real-life problems.

Service learning enjoys the spotlight in education. Many schools, both public and private, mandate service hours as a condition of promotion and of graduation. In addition, many youth groups and community organizations require youth service for advancement, awards, or scholarships. All too frequently the service is accomplished with little or no structured guidance. The Future Problem Solving Program can provide both structure and guidance. The CmPS component provides an opportunity for celebration through its affiliate program competition, recognizing and rewarding exemplary work.

***Community Action*** is the highest level of service learning. Because of the depth of the services provided and the resources involved, a team of students usually works together to complete a *community action* project. However, it is possible for an individual student to effectively carry out a *community action* project. The student goes beyond supplying a curriculum-related service to analyzing the situation, identifying a problem area, generating new ideas, and implementing a difference-making plan of action.

In the process the student(s) develops complex problem solving abilities, advanced communication skills, the ability to connect knowledge across disciplines, and the perseverance to overcome obstacles. In *community action* the interaction between the student and community flows in both directions. This interaction leads to a broader community impact and the highest level of real world learning. It also fosters a reciprocity in which both students and the community become the learner and recipient of the problem solving experience. Involvement in *community action* empowers students with the continuing ability to make a difference and thus become more responsive, effective citizens. The community, in turn, develops a respect and appreciation for the positive change brought about by the students and begins to identify youth as valuable community resources.

***Award Winning Examples:***

A middle school CmPS team accomplished what adults had been unable to do. “*Curves and Swerves*” revealed the magnitude of the problem of Kentucky Highway 146 in Henry County, Kentucky. Two hundred-nine accidents occurred in a nine-mile stretch during the past eight years, including one that severely injured the middle school librarian. After extensive research and presentation of findings, and in cooperation with local officials, Henry County Middle School students convinced the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet to allocate \$770,000 in federal highway funds to eliminate a quarter-mile stretch of deadly curves. While this was an emotional situation for the team, they presented facts and statistics from their research in a very clear and convincing way. As a result of the efforts of middle school students, lives will be saved through changes in a once dangerous road. As one team member described their greatest achievement, “The highway will be made safe by the time we are old enough to drive.”

A senior high school student in Fort Meyers, Florida, developed a project entitled, “Mess with Guns and You’re Done!” Drawing on her own experience, this project emphasized the impact of gun violence in the lives of the children in her community. The project promoted awareness of choosing other options to solve adolescents’ problems.

Look around you. Are there students in your school who might be interested in a community action project for individual problem solving? If so, we encourage you to involve your students in community problem solving through FPS.

It's exciting to see students make a real difference in the community. We hope you take this opportunity to register a team/individual in the CmPS component using the enclosed registration form. We look forward to assisting you as you involve your student(s) in CmPS and help them become learners, leaders, and catalysts for positive change.