

Civics Project Guidebook

Guidance to support implementation of Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018,
An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement.

October 2019



Acknowledgements

The Civics Project Guidebook supports and promotes meaningful implementation of [Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018, An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement](#). The Guidebook is designed to support educators as they provide all students across the Commonwealth with opportunities to complete meaningful student-led, non-partisan civics projects. This Guidebook includes tools for districts, schools, and educators aligned to Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018 and the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework.

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Introduction

What specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions are essential for civic readiness? What does it mean to be an informed, thoughtful, and active citizen? What does democratic citizenship look like in action? How do we effectively foster civic agency?

In June 2018, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted a revised [History and Social Science Curriculum Framework](#) which included as one of its core priorities an aim to emphasize and expand civics education across all grades. The 2018 History and Social Science Framework is driven by the vision that *“all Massachusetts students will be educated in the histories of the Commonwealth, the United States, and the world [and] will be prepared to make informed civic choices and assume their responsibility for strengthening equality, justice, and liberty in and beyond the United States”* (pg. 9).

Building upon this vision, the Framework outlines a renewed mission for civic life in a democracy, affirming that **“the primary purpose of a history and social science education is to prepare students to have the knowledge and skills to become thoughtful and active participants in a democratic society and a complex world,”** including the critical development of **“knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will enable them to embrace democracy’s potential, while recognizing its challenges and inherent dilemmas”** (pg. 12).

The 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework includes a full-year civics course in grade 8 and key civics standards embedded throughout all grades, as well as Guiding Principles and core Standards for History and Social Science Practices that emphasize civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

On November 8, 2018, Governor Charlie Baker signed [Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018, An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement](#), which includes provisions related to student-led civics aligned to the History and Social Science Curriculum Framework.

The law includes the following provisions related to student-led civics projects:

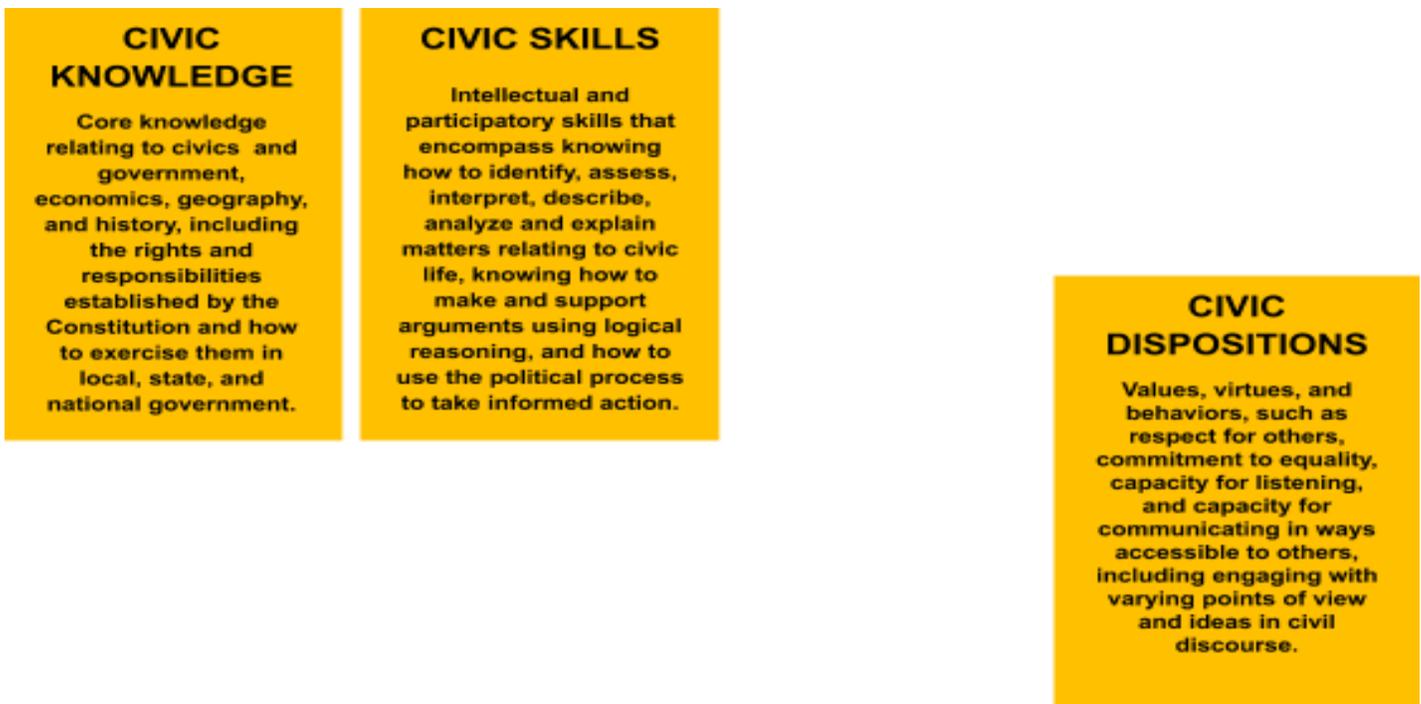
(c) Each public school serving students in the eighth grade and each public high school shall provide not less than 1 student-led, non-partisan civics project for each student; provided, however, that each such project shall be consistent with the history and social science curriculum frameworks adopted by the board pursuant to [section 1E of chapter 69](#) and with structured learning time requirements as required under regulations promulgated by the board of elementary and secondary education. Civics projects may be individual, small group or class wide, and designed to

promote a student’s ability to: (i) analyze complex issues; (ii) consider differing points of view; (iii) reason, make logical arguments and support claims using valid evidence; (iv) engage in civil discourse with those who hold opposing positions; and (v) demonstrate an understanding of the connections between federal, state and local policies, including issues that may impact the student’s school or community. Any student choosing not to participate in a particular group or class-wide project shall be offered the opportunity to develop an individual civics project, with approval by the principal.

In addition, the law authorizes:

Promotion of youth membership on municipal boards, committees and commissions and a non-partisan high school voter challenge to encourage eligible students to register or pre-register to vote and participate in municipal and state elections.

Student-led, civics projects support the development of **civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions** as defined in the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework.



Every student, regardless of race, class, ethnicity, religion, education, gender, or ability has the right to civics education, including effective learning. Civic competencies are essential for a student's life. A non-partisan civics project is based on action civics—a process of applying civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions to mobilize change leading to systems impact.

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TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF CIVICS PROJECTS

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education expects schools to begin implementing the History and Social Science Curriculum Framework and student-led civics projects in 2019-2020. Student-led civics projects should be fully implemented in all schools by 2020-2021.

Civics Projects and the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework

As districts consider implementation of the student-led, non-partisan civics projects, it is important to also consider the high quality curriculum and instruction that supports students' development of civics knowledge, skills, and dispositions. In addition, schools and districts should consider the importance of fostering a school climate and culture that enhances students' application of these skills. While civics projects should align to the 2018 History and Social Science Framework, projects can be interdisciplinary and facilitated across content areas.

Students will complete two student-led civics projects—one in grade 8 and another in grades 9-12. The civics projects support students as they complete the real work of engaged, informed participants of a democracy by identifying issues and advocating for change in their communities. Leading up to grade 8, students develop content knowledge, both civics and literacy skills, and fluency in History and Social Science Practices, as outlined in the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework.

The Framework includes seven Standards for History and Social Science Practice (Practice Standards) that strengthen students' skills for informed citizenship. These skills include developing civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions (PS 1); formulating questions and conducting research (PS 2); organizing information from multiple sources (PS 3), evaluating sources (PS 4-5), and synthesizing information in order to develop arguments and take action (PS 6-7). The Literacy Standards in history and social science set expectations for analytical reading and logical writing and speaking, skills essential to political equality and civic engagement. Standards for news and media literacy aim to help students become discerning readers of digital news and opinion.

OUTCOME GOALS OF STUDENT-LED CIVICS PROJECTS

By completing civics projects, student will be able to...

- BUILD CIVIC CONTENT KNOWLEDGE
- DEVELOP AND PRACTICE CIVIC SKILLS
- DEVELOP CIVIC DISPOSITIONS AND A SENSE OF SELF-EFFICACY
- CONDUCT INQUIRIES AND DETERMINE NEXT STEPS
- DEVELOP AND PRACTICE LITERACY SKILLS, INCLUDING DIGITAL

In Pre-K-2, students are introduced to democratic principles such as equality, fairness and respect, and practice these within their classroom communities. **In grades 3-4**, students begin discussing the functions of government in a society and apply ideas about self-government, rules, rights and civic responsibilities. **In grade 5**, students take a deeper dive into the origins of democracy in Massachusetts and the United States, exploring the founding principles laid out in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. This scope widens to global societies and civilizations **in grades 6-7**, including comparison of deliberative processes used across a range of groups and people.

In grade 8, students return to a focus on U.S. and Massachusetts government and civic life continuing to build **civic knowledge** of foundational documents, how and why government institutions developed, how government evolves through legislation and court decisions, and how individuals exercise their rights and civic responsibilities. Students hone their **civic skills** with class activities that engage them in critical thinking and problem-solving, and provide them multiple opportunities to communicate persuasively and work collaboratively. Students will demonstrate **civic dispositions** such as respect for others, commitment to equality, and the ability to consider various perspectives and engage in civil discourse.

In high school, students deepen their knowledge and application of civics skills and dispositions within a national and global context. They will acquire knowledge and skills within social science and other fields to apply a more critical lens to their political, social and economic context. Students will have another opportunity to complete a student-led civics project with a greater degree of independence, depth, and complexity, requiring them to deeply evaluate and analyze political institutions and policies, and to take informed and intentional action with the goal of long-term change. Project topics, actions, and processes may be interdisciplinary.

STUDENT-LED CIVICS PROJECTS ARE...

A. Student-Led: Students should make informed decisions about the issue, process, and goals for their civics project even as the teacher is setting the broader learning objectives. **Student choice defines this experience.** In doing so, the teacher takes on the role of facilitator, offering guidance, choices, and suggestions, especially at key inflection points of the project. While the processes should follow the six stages of student-led civics projects, there is no prescriptive learning experience. Students reflect on and evaluate their own learning decisions within a larger classroom culture. Establishing that engaging with the process and continual improvement are the goals, not perfect mastery, is crucial to defining success of student-led civics projects.

B. Project-Based: Students achieve their learning objectives not by rote practice but by applying knowledge and skills for an extended period of time to achieve the goal of **solving a real-world problem or answering a complex question.** Students conduct an inquiry and demonstrate their learning by engaging with or presenting to the public, taking their work beyond the classroom. Project-based learning not only offers greater student learning and engagement due to increased relevance to students' lives, but also expands skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, time management, and problem-solving. How is a project-based approach different from 'doing a project'? Rather than completing a prescribed summative task meant to assess rote knowledge on the content of a unit, the unit *is* the project, with rigorous inquiry and critical thinking applied to real-world action.

C. Real-World: The skills students practice are transferrable to their lives outside of the classroom and into their futures as adult civic agents. **By pushing past hypothetical scenarios or theoretical**

action, real-world application teaches students the power of their voices as constituents, even if they ultimately do not achieve 100% of their goals. Ideally, student-led civics projects involve developing a persuasive argument for the kind of real-world impact students want to see, rallying support for this impact, and engaging a relevant decision maker who can act in the direction advocated by the student. At minimum, this real-world project application involves student **interaction with community stakeholders or real-world decision-makers** who have the power to listen to students' concerns and do something about them.

D. Rooted in an Understanding of Systems Impact: A strong student-led civics project **aims for impact at the level of the system**, as opposed to an isolated action that's impact ends after completion. For example, suppose a group of 11th graders identify gun violence as a pressing issue in their community, particularly among youth. After researching potential solutions, they decided to take one or more of the following actions:

- *Isolated Actions with Limited Scope:* Raise money to invite a guest speaker to talk about the impact of gun violence.
- *Goal Driven and Systems Impact:*
 - o Advocate to pass S 1287, An Act regarding the prevention of illegal trafficking and gun violence among youth which was a recently introduced piece of legislation.
 - o Develop programs that have officers reach out to youth to show the effects of gun violence in communities.
 - o Organize a Gun Buyback Program in the city to reduce the risk of people getting hurt by guns in homes.

To strive for systems impact, student actions focus on the processes, policies, institutions, and people most connected to a root cause of an issue. Typically, systems impact is measurable, and sustainable. To help students think past individual-level decision making and operate on the systems-level, have them ask “why” repeatedly to get to root causes of an issue. Then, consider the people, institutions, policies, and processes that impact those root causes.

E. Goal-Driven: Students should develop goals aimed at addressing the root causes of their issues in order to make long-term change. This may be through **influencing public opinion** on an issue and/or **influencing a policy goal**.

- *Influencing public opinion:* These projects can include, but are not limited to, an awareness campaign carefully targeted at a specific audience, where impact can be measured, or projects that focus on rebuilding the civic fabric for discussion and debate among the community and decision-makers, including voters, around political choices.
- *Influencing policy:* These projects tend to fall into one of three categories—
 - (1) Advocating for or newly introducing a policy or piece of legislation,
 - (2) Advocating to change how resources (money or time) are used within a system, or
 - (3) Advocating for an increase in youth voice or representation within government or community decision-making.

Examples of policy-related projects include changing a school curriculum, advocating for a piece of legislation, supporting resource re-allocations for various community needs, or adding a youth voting member to the school committee.

Students may be inspired by local, national, or global issues and should aim to find ways to impact change around an issue. There are benefits and challenges with choosing an issue at each level of scale. For example, localized issues may allow for more immediate and direct contact with decision makers while global issues require engagement with more ambitious goals and wider audiences. At any level, students should have real interaction with community and civic leaders, one of the most empowering parts of a civics project. Ultimately, **students should see themselves as powerful agents of change and recognize the fact that their voice and contributions matter.**

F. Inquiry-Based: Educators do not need to be the masters of the issue students choose to explore. Rather, student-led civics projects provide an authentic opportunity for students to practice research skills, to **ask probing questions about real-world issues, and make judgements about the appropriateness and success of various research methods.** Students have an opportunity to go beyond traditional research using scholarly articles and news sources, and to seek a well-rounded understanding of the project issue from individuals within the community by conducting surveys and interviews with a range of sources of information. Students should **consider multiple points of view**, from next-door neighbors to community leaders and elected officials, and in doing so develop an understanding of the breadth of the issue, including opposing viewpoints.

Student-led civics projects ask students to apply civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions to engage with the process of creating social and political change in their communities (PS 1). This civic action follows six stages, beginning with the examination of local, state, and national issues and followed by the selection of a specific topic of student interest. What makes this different than a research project is the process of developing a theory of action, and then taking action to specifically address the root cause of their issue, either by seeking to influence public opinion or advancing a specific policy (PS 7). In addition to the action stages of the project, a key component is the process of reflecting and showcasing to an authentic audience that occurs after taking civic action.

F. Non-partisan: Student-led civics projects may lead to discussions of relevant and pressing contemporary issues. The 2018 History and Social Science Framework’s emphasis on civics education encourages intentional and informed dialogue about such topics. Educators should facilitate conversations where all voices are heard, respected, and rooted in evidence from legitimate sources. In the case of student –led, non-partisan civics projects, “non-partisan” refers specifically to whether a project takes a side in party politics and party competitions. Student-led civics projects should not be directed at electoral politics, nor should they be developed in support of candidates in particular elections. They can be directed at ballot propositions. They should **include research and information on all sides of an issue** and communications issuing from the project should be targeted at audiences without party affiliations or at audiences with multiple party affiliations. Student projects may involve student-led lobbying--direct communications with legislators in support of specific bills. Schools and teachers may not lobby, except for in the context of “self-defense” lobbying communications, related to legislation that has direct bearing on the mission or existence of their organization (school, district, or school system). Projects may have political viewpoints that reflect the student’s political perspective.

G. Process-Focused: The success of student-led civics projects derives from students learning and engaging in an effective process for civic action rather than accomplishing 100% of their goals. Many students may not accomplish their goals during the civics projects and this is an important lesson for students to learn: change takes time and their work has moved the issue forward even if they have not achieved their goal. Educators should focus on teaching and assessing the process of effective civic action. Every project should **incorporate the six stages of civics projects**, as described in the next section of this Guidance.

H. Action-Based: While both community service and student-led civics projects ask students to perform a service that benefits a community, there are differences in their approach that are important to distinguish. When doing community service, students often perform a service that benefits the community either by engaging in one-time event or ongoing direct volunteerism. A student-led civics project using the six stages requires students to take action toward achieving systems impact and to engage with decision-makers.

BELOW ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW SOME TEACHERS TURNED COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS INTO A STUDENT-LED, NON-PARTISAN CIVICS PROJECT:

Community Services	Civics Projects
<p>FOOD DRIVE SERVICE PROJECT Students organized a school-wide food drive and got other groups in the community to participate. They were able to collect over 2,000 cans to donate to the local homeless shelter, which was more than the shelter had ever received through a single drive.</p>	<p>INSTITUTIONALIZING A DISTRICT-WIDE FOOD PANTRY Students researched in their biology class how chronic hunger affects the body and its effects on young people in particular. Students advocated to the City and School District for resources and then implemented a School-Based Food Pantry by partnering with the Merrimack Food Bank.</p>
<p>FUNDRAISING FOR COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS Students developed a concern for the cost of college and lack of access for many of their peers due to such costs. They held a fundraiser to pay for a fellow</p>	<p>ADVOCATING FOR STATE-LEVEL POLICY After engaging in a unit in math class on the costs of college, financial aid formulas, and loan interest accrual, students decided to tackle the issue of college affordability. They joined organizations around the state in support of the Debt Free Future Act S.744/H.1221 that</p>

student's college fees.

would provide free college tuition to all MA residents attending state colleges.

Six Stages of Civics Projects

A high quality student-led civics project aligned to the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework and Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018 should include these six stages. Depending on the time available, educators may decide to break down each of the six stages into a larger number of steps.



1. EXAMINE SELF AND CIVIC IDENTITY

Stage 1: Examine Self and Civic Identity

Students **start by exploring issues and topics that matter to them, their families, and communities.** They can begin this process by examining challenges they are currently experiencing that they feel go unaddressed or are under-addressed, or alternatively they can build upon valuable work that is already done in the community to solve problems.

2. IDENTIFYING AN ISSUE



Stage 2: Identifying an Issue

After students have spent time exploring and identifying issues that matter to them, **the next step is to identify a focus issue for their student-led civics project.**

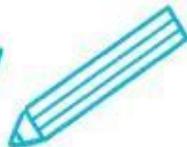


3. RESEARCHING AND INVESTIGATING

Stage 3: Researching and Investigating

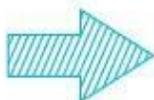
During this stage, students engage in rigorous research. The purpose of this research is to **examine the context, policies, perspectives, and history of the issue, and to learn about possible root causes.**

4. DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN



Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan

Once students have determined the root causes at the core of their project, it is time to **build a theory of action and action plan aimed at achieving systems impact.**



5. TAKING ACTION

Stage 5: Taking Action

Students **begin acting on the tactics they planned.** They move beyond the walls of the classroom and exercise their voice. This is the stage that will be the most unique to each project, depending on the choices students make along the way.

6. REFLECTING AND SHOWCASING



Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing

Students end their project with a final, **summative reflection and work showcase.** Such a showcase is a best practice of project-based learning that supports student pride and ownership. Students should reflect on individual growth and

District Considerations and Guiding Questions

Incorporating student-led civics projects into schools and classrooms will require a shift toward student-centered instruction, creating and sustaining a school-wide democratic culture, and an emphasis on planning to support implementation. Prior to implementing student-led civics projects, it is essential to communicate the new expectations to various stakeholders in your community.

District leaders are encouraged to consider the following:

Building the Foundation for District-wide civics engagement

- *How will the civics projects be integrated with and supported by year-long high quality curriculum and instructional materials that reflect the three pillars (Content, Practice, and Literacy Standards) of the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework?*
- *Are there current practices and partnerships that require students to participate in project based learning? How can you leverage that experience and expertise?*

Informing the Community

- *How familiar are teachers, families, school leaders, and the community with student-led civics projects?*
 - ⇒ Share information regarding the purpose and process of the student-led civics projects with various stakeholders, which may include families, K-12 teachers, district leadership, community organizations, local officials, school committee, and community leaders. Provide connections between the civic education legislation, [Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018](#), and the 2018 [Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework](#).
 - ⇒ Incorporate a description and expectations of the civics projects in applicable course syllabi.
 - ⇒ Facilitate district-wide sessions exploring and support the six stages of Student-Led Civics Projects.
 - ⇒ Develop a district-wide strategy for collecting student project information including: topics, community partnerships, process description, and final outcomes.

Building the Capacity for Dialogue

- *How will all educators be prepared and supported to discuss complex and controversial issues and ideas?*
 - ⇒ Host professional development focused on strategies for facilitating classroom conversations related to complex and controversial issues as these topics may arise as students explore a range of issues.

Conducting Research and Interacting with External Organizations

- *How will the district support teachers in teaching research skills and digital media literacy?*
 - ⇒ Conduct professional development for teachers; leverage librarians and other researchers to enhance and support student research.
- *Where can teachers and school leaders access current policies for engaging with external organizations?*
 - ⇒ Create a district level document capturing any policies and protocols related to partnerships, external communication, school visitors, field trips, student participation in off-site meetings, social media campaigns, conducting interviews, and surveying internal

and/or external stakeholders

- ⇒ Review or develop processes/policies for bringing community experts and external civic leaders into the classroom as guest speakers or as specific partners.
- ⇒ Review or develop processes/policies for student engagement with journalists and social media in different platforms including radio, TV, and newspaper.

What is the difference between Grade 8 and High School student-led civics projects?

Students should begin and continue building civics knowledge and skills in grade K-7.

GRADE 8: In grade 8, students will have the opportunity to apply their civic knowledge of foundational documents, how and why U.S. government institutions developed, how government evolves through legislation and court decisions, and how individuals exercise their rights and civic responsibilities.

- ⇒ Students will **hone their civic skills** with class activities that engage them in critically thinking and problem-solving, and that provide them multiple opportunities to communicate persuasively and work collaboratively.
- ⇒ Students will **apply both civic skills and dispositions** such as respect for others, commitment to equality, logical reasoning, and the ability to consider various perspectives and engage in civil discourse to complete a six-stage civics project.
- ⇒ Students will primarily **focus on the process (six stages) of completing a civics project** and will require significant scaffolding, support, and collaboration during each stage.

HIGH SCHOOL: In high school, students deepen their knowledge and application of civics skills and dispositions within a national and global context as they take additional courses in U.S. and World History, social sciences, and other disciplines.

- ⇒ Students acquire knowledge and skills that enable them to **apply a more critical lens to the political, social and economic context of issues.**
- ⇒ Students complete a student-led civics project **with a greater degree of independence, depth, and complexity.**
- ⇒ The project requires students to analyze and **deeply evaluate** political institutions and policies and root causes of issues.

While civics projects should align to the 2018 History and Social Science Framework, projects can be interdisciplinary and facilitated across content areas.

How do I assess student-led civics projects?

Civics projects will allow students to...

BUILD CIVIC CONTENT KNOWLEDGE, as outlined in the History/Social Science Curriculum Framework. Apply knowledge of local, state, and national representatives and their roles and responsibilities; understand how policies are made at different levels of government and how they are connected; understand how people can use their voice to impact political processes; and understand how policies aimed to promote the public good, protect human rights, and change society have intended and unintended outcomes that may impact their school or community.

DEVELOP AND PRACTICE CIVIC SKILLS: Ask questions about how public issues are addressed and persuasively articulate their point of view; identify, assess, interpret, describe and analyze matters related to civic life; make logical arguments and support claims using valid evidence; feel ready to communicate with elected officials, decision makers, and community leaders; and plan strategically for civic change.

DEVELOP CIVIC DISPOSITIONS AND A SENSE OF SELF-EFFICACY: Develop a sense that their voice matters; engage in civil discourse with those who hold opposing positions; develop a sense of value for their rights and responsibilities as a member of a democratic society; develop confidence in making informed choices when participating in democratic processes; work collaboratively with others to make changes that promote the public good; and explore actions to strengthen equality, justice and liberty in and beyond the United States.

CONDUCT INQUIRES AND DETERMINE NEXT STEPS: Develop the ability to analyze complex issues; develop focused questions; consider a variety of differing points of view; organize information from a variety of sources; evaluate the purpose, point of view, credibility, accuracy and relevance of sources; and take informed action based on findings and conclusions of the inquiry.

DEVELOP AND PRACTICE LITERACY SKILLS, INCLUDING DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY, as outlined in the History/Social Science Curriculum Framework. Become critical consumers of information from newspapers, websites, television and social media; communicate clearly across a variety of media; and conduct research to build and present knowledge.

DEVELOP AND PRACTICE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING SKILLS: Develop awareness of how their unique experiences influence their perceptions about history and current events; take thoughtful action; and participate in dialogue and collaborate with people whose perspectives and position in the world differ from their own.

Assessment of civics projects should address the extent to which students...

- conducted robust research and inquiry into their issues, including finding, evaluating, and utilizing sources to construct their arguments.
- asked compelling questions about the issue and considered different points of view on the issue.
- were critical consumers of information.
- used their knowledge of the connection between the levels of government, policies that impact their community , and their rights and responsibilities to develop a theory of action and action plan.
- communicated their ideas and arguments logically, persuasively, and effectively using valid evidence and relevant claims.
- respected the ideas of others, used logical reasoning, and engaged in civil discourse with those who hold opposing positions.
- participated in dialogue and collaboration with people whose perspectives and position in the world differ from their own.
- were engaged and demonstrated agency throughout the process, and can reflect on their actions to determine areas of success and growth.

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

STAGE	EXAMPLE OF PROFICIENCY AND COMPETENCIES
Stage 1: Examining Self and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students effectively explained how a given issue(s) not only matters to them, but others in the larger community by using a variety of sources when exploring the issue. ● Students synthesized data from conducted interviews and surveys with a range of their peers and community members and used strong supporting questions to get a well-rounded understanding of the impact of the issue. There was clear evidence of consideration and exploration of multiple points of view and engagement in dialogue with people whose positions in the world differed from their own.
Stage 2: Identifying an Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students respected the ideas and experiences of others in the class and engaged in civil discourse when discussing and selecting an issue, especially those who hold opposing positions. ● Students leveraged facts and statistics from their initial findings in stage 1 to support their choice and consulted information from multiple sources to determine the importance and scope of the issue. ● Students actively listened and participated in whole-class discussions surrounding potential complex and critical community issues. ● Students expressed ideas clearly in collaborative discussions building on others' ideas and expressing their own.
Stage 3: Research and Investigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students asked compelling questions to conduct sustained inquiry and deeper understanding into the root causes of a complex issue. Students' questions extend beyond superficial background and consider the broader political, economic, and social context of the topic. ● Students utilized and cited information from different types of sources (e.g. case studies, community interviews, personal narrative, statistics, academic journals, newspapers, publications, books, articles) when conducting research. ● Students critically consumed information from multiple sources to build knowledge and was able to distinguish opinion for fact, as well as the credibility, reliability, and accuracy of each source. ● Students generated new questions about the issues as they conducted deeper inquiries. ● Students applied knowledge of the connections between federal, local, and state policies when examining root causes.
Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students applied knowledge of the connections between federal, local and state policies when identifying the root cause and developing a theory of action and when identifying decision makers ● Students drew evidence from multiple sources to support their rationale regarding their goals and theory of action. Students synthesized their findings from stage three and incorporated this evidence in order to articulate a clear root cause and the corresponding potential tactics for change. ● Students thoughtfully identified which leaders were the decision makers and influencers directly connected to their issue and action plan (i.e. the sponsor for a bill they want to support, or the chair of a budget committee who determines funding related to their cause).
Stage 5: Taking Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students used their constitutionally guaranteed rights to use a variety of tactics in order to target their root causes, falling into three categories: developing our argument and plan,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> rallying support, or influencing decision makers. Students clearly communicated their claims across a variety of media Students Used the appropriate political process and avenues to communicate with elected officials, representatives, and civic leaders Worked collaboratively to present the argument for a call to action logically, persuasively and effectively using valid evidence
Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students identified the extent to which their action plan was effective and could clearly determine and evaluate areas of success and growth. Students effectively explained their reasoning behind each action they took and made clear connections back to previous stages of the project. Students can reflect and provide evidence of how they expressed their voice and advocated for their ideas in group work, class work and beyond the classroom.

The following chart illustrates sample competencies that may appear on rubrics used to assess student-led civics projects. This list is not prescriptive and may include other competencies.

Facilitating Student-led Civics Projects

This section provides guidance and resources specific to facilitating each of the six stages of student-led civics projects.

Stage 1: Examining Self and Community

Students start by brainstorming the issues and topics that matter to them, their peers, their families, and their communities. When examining civic identity, educators should support students' discussion of complex and critical issues. The issues and topics may range from the hyper-local, like food waste in the cafeteria or trash in a local park, to broad and wide-spread, like immigration or homelessness. They can begin this process by examining challenges they are currently experiencing that they feel go unaddressed or are under-addressed, or alternatively, they can take note of valuable work that is already being done in the community to solve problems. Ideally, students are interviewing and surveying a variety of community members to gather a well-rounded understanding of different perspectives. At this stage, every observation is crucial, even if it needs to be further developed or revised; this exploration is all about honoring students' lived experience and asking them to learn from the experiences of others outside the classroom. For this reason, it is crucial that students feel the classroom is a safe space to share and have potentially tough conversations. The goal is to develop as comprehensive a list as possible.



EXAMPLE GOALS

- **Define Student-Led Civics Projects for Students** —*Define Student-Led Civics Projects by exploring example stories and the 6-stage process of civic action.*
- **Develop a class Student-Led, Democratic Classroom Culture**—*Students develop norms that will guide their work together.*
- **Define My Community and My Place In It**—*Students begin by exploring their definition of community, what communities they feel a part of, and their roles and responsibilities as a community member.*
- **Examine Community Assets**—*Students define “asset” and identify the assets their communities offer.*
- **Examine Community Issues and Needs**—*Students collect and synthesize data from the community about the needs and priorities of others.*

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How does our classroom reflect a democracy during this process?
- What are our rights and responsibilities to each other?
- What is a community?
- What communities am I a part of?
- What does it mean to be a member of a community?
- What is my role and responsibility in my community?
- What is an asset?
- What are the assets that my community offers?
- What problems or challenges do I routinely encounter in my school?
- What problems or challenges do people in my community routinely encounter?
- Who are the community partners connected to the issue your students have identified?
- How will the students contact the organization?
- Who do you need to inform when inviting different stakeholders into the building?

Stage 1: Examining Self and Community



**EXAMPLE
LEARNING
OBJECTIVES**

Students will be able to...

- Define what “community” means to them personally
- Identify who and what contributes to their notion of community
- Identify and describe their role in their community
- Define “community asset” and develop a comprehensive list of their community assets
- Analyze data from other members of their community about their concerns and priorities
- Analyze data from media outlets regarding community issues
- Develop and express their own opinions on community issues verbally and in writing

SAMPLE RESOURCES

Guided Exploration of an Example Article about a Student-Led Civics Projects

Students construct their own definitions of project-based learning and student-centered learning and apply those definitions to one or more news articles about a student-led civics project. Here are two thinking protocols student can use to activate thinking around issues and articles.

- [Think/Puzzle/Explore](#)
- [Connect/Extend/Challenge](#)

The Advocacy Hourglass, a Framework for Action - Students explore a framework that can guide their civic action project and map this framework onto local civic projects in the news.

- [The Advocacy Hourglass](#) Exploring a framework for civic action
- [Getting to know the Ten Questions Facing History lesson plan](#)
- [Ten Questions Poster](#)
- [Ten Question Primer](#)

[Classroom Constitution](#) - Students collaborate to establish norms and expectations for the environment they want to co-construct to do this work safely and respectfully.

[Class Constitution Handout](#)

[Opinion Continuum](#)—Students react to and express their opinions on a variety of statements about the role of government and youth civic engagement.

- [Opinion Continuum Activity](#)

Community Asset Mapping—Students complete a map of the various assets and values they believe their communities have to offer. These assets can be utilized when doing their civics project.

- [Community Asset Map Handout](#)
- [My Community Wheel Activity Worksheet](#)

Community Issues Research - Students record notes on their community interviews, their own observations of their lived experience, and ideas gleaned from local media.

- [Community Issues Organizer Handout](#)
- [Community Interviews Handout](#)

<p>EXAMPLE GOALS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build Consensus on a Single Issue—<i>Develop a working definition of consensus and differentiate the concept of consensus from the concept of “majority rules.”</i> • Narrow a Broad Range of Community Issues to a Select Number to Explore More Deeply—<i>Use a reflective process to narrow a wide range of community issues to 4-5 issues.</i> • Investigate a Small Number of Community Issues More Deeply—<i>Collect facts, statistics, and personal testimonies on 4-5 community issues to debate and vote.</i>
<p>GUIDING QUESTIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we learn more about our community issues? • What is ranked-choice voting? • How does ranked choice balance individual preferences with group preferences? • How can we use facts, statistics, and stories to convey the depth and scope of a community issue? • What are persuasive techniques and how do we use them to convince others of the importance of a community issue? • What is the difference between “consensus” and majority rules? • Why might consensus lead to more equitable outcomes and everyone feeling heard?
<p>EXAMPLE LEARNING OBJECTIVES</p>	<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a reflective process to narrow a wide range of community issues in Stage 1 to a few issues • Use facts and statistics on a community issue to argue for the need to take a deeper look at the issue • Develop a working definition of consensus and differentiate the concept of consensus from the concept of “majority rules”

SAMPLE RESOURCES

Community Issue Ranking Activity: Students brainstorm a list of community issues narrowing them down to a small list of priorities.

- [Issue Brainstorm Group Organizer](#)- Consider introducing students to the concept of [Ranked Choice Voting](#) and applying it to this process

Community Issue Research Group Project: Students do research and generate issues

- [Community Issue Research Group Handout](#)
- [Pathos, Ethos, Logos Explainer Handout](#)
- [Refining Your Message](#)

Community Issue Consensus Building:

Students review the concept of consensus building and learn how consensus has features that are distinctive from “majority rules.” They also review the concept of listening partnerships and learn about characteristics of active listening.

- [Consensus Building on an Opinion Continuum](#)
- [Consensus Building Written Reflection Handout](#)
- [Discussion Protocols](#)



Stage 2: Identifying an Issue

After the class has spent time brainstorming and identifying community issues, the next step is for students to identify a *focus issue* for their student-led project. If the project is based on the whole class or small group model, it is important to build consensus on *one* community issue students identified. Consensus is critical for student buy-in to a project and an important concept for students to learn in a civics class. Even if students are pursuing individual projects, building consensus develops collaborative decision-making.



EXAMPLE GOALS

- **Understand Quality Research**—Examine issues via different types of research (e.g. research studies, case studies, community interviews, personal narrative/experience, etc.), reflecting on the impact and purpose of each type of research.
- **Conduct Research**—Learn about the power of Participatory Action Research and plan/organize their community research plan. Students collect research, reflecting on how each specific research point supports their understanding of their focus issue.
- **Understand and Identify Systems-Level Root Causes**—Begin the research process by understanding the root causes of their focus issue to eventually guide their action plan.
- **Develop a Goal** —Create a civic action goal that addresses one of the root causes they have identified .
- **Develop a Persuasive Argument by Synthesizing Research**—Articulate an argument for the importance of their issue and the goal they have chosen to pursue.

GUIDING QUESTION S

- What is research?
- What types of research do I need to do to better understand my focus issue?
- What type of data will inform my focus area?
- Why do we need evidence?
- How do I do research well?
- Where do I go to research my focus issue?
- What does action research look like?
- How do I research my own community?
- How do I develop a theory of change to guide my project development, implementation and evaluation?
- What questions should I ask when doing research?
- What is a root cause? Why is it important to identify a root cause?
- What are the differences between individual and systemic root causes?
- What are the root causes of my focus issue?
- What are the different types of policy goals that lead to effective civic action?
- What are the different goals we might take action on?
- How can I use the evidence and data from my research to build support for this topic?

EXAMPLE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to...**
- Analyze how different forms of research serve different purposes
 - Explain why evidence is important for creating an action plan
 - Define and Identify root causes and how they impact a community
 - Gather appropriate and relevant evidence to support the overall argument
 - Synthesize with research collected by peers
 - Craft a thesis that addresses both a root cause and goal (theory of change)

Stage 3: Research and Investigation

The next step is engaging in research in order to be informed. The purpose of this research is 1) to develop common language and knowledge on the issue, including the range of perspectives on the issue, and 2) to learn about the possible root causes of the issue. In order to make systemic change, students need to be looking for the deepest causes of their issue or topic. There may be many, so this research should be framed in terms of ultimately choosing one. Like Stage 1, students should also not limit themselves to traditional research online and in libraries; rather, they should survey community members and interview community experts in order to gather the most pertinent, localized information on how this issue or topic manifests in the community, whether that means school, school district, city, state, or

country, and what can be done about it to create lasting, systemic change. Students should also leverage non-traditional community experts to gain perspective about critical issues.



Stage 3: Research and Investigation

SAMPLE

Research

Students will follow through on their commitment, collecting and synthesizing research: interviews, case studies, narratives, surveys, data, research studies, etc.

- [Participatory Action Research Explainer and Team Organizer](#)
- [Action Research Reflections](#)

Understanding and Identifying the Root Causes of Our Community Issue

Students explore individual and systemic root causes by discussing specific (but brief) examples. In groups, students revisit the research they have collected and brainstorm the different possible systemic root causes for their focus issue. Consider using one research article to analyze when doing this all together as practice.

- [Understanding Root Cause Handout](#)

Understanding and Selecting a Goal

Students learn about the four types of policy goals they can devise to address a root cause they have identified. From this, they select one root cause to tackle from their root cause analysis and develop a policy goal that aligns with the four types.

- [Understanding Policy Goals Worksheet](#)

Linking Research to Root Causes

Reflecting on their research, students will be able to link their findings to the root causes and develop a 'story of self' or persuasive argument that demonstrates why their issue is important and its root causes.

- [Writing Assignment: Persuasive Argument for Our Community Issue](#)



Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan

Once students have determined the root cause that will be at the core of their project, it's time to build an action plan. Often, the policy goal is the inverse of the root cause of the issue. An action plan also delineates specific people (decision makers and influencers) that students will contact and tactics for making change happen. Broadly speaking, tactics fall into one of three categories: 1) Developing Our Argument, 2) Rallying Support, and 3) Lobbying Decision Makers. It is important to choose a variety of tactics in order to make it more likely that change will occur.

EXAMPLE GOALS

- **Define who might help us achieve our goal: decision makers and influencers**—*Learn how to identify decision makers and influencers who hold power to help make change and inform their action plan.*
- **Define what types of action steps, tactics, can be used to achieve our goal**—*Consider a wide variety of action tactics in order to evaluate which ones will serve their project best.*
- **Form and Structure Action Teams and Construct an Action Plan**—*Collaboratively build an action plan, create a system to measure and evaluate progress, and reflect on the extent to which the team worked cohesively.*
- **Formulate Asks to Make during Action**—*Develop a persuasive “Ask” and learn how to make their case for a particular policy or initiative.*

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is a decision maker? What is an influencer?
- Who are some possible decision makers and influencers in our community? Who has influence over this issue at the school, district/regional, city/town, state, and federal levels?
- What is a tactic? What are different types of tactics we can use to make a change?
- Why do we think certain tactics will be more effective than others?
- What do we need to be a good team member?
- How can we contribute to our team?
- What are strategies for addressing difference or challenges as a team?
- How can we backwards map towards a long-term goal?
- How do I work effectively in a group to push forward change?
- What makes a request persuasive?

EXAMPLE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to...**
- Identify the various decision-makers and influencers in their community who hold power
 - Evaluate and select what civic action tactics they can use to try to create change
 - Create a strategy for executing their theory of change for civic action

SAMPLE RESOURCES

- Developing a Theory of Change**
- [DIY Theory of Change Guide](#)
- Decision makers vs. influencers**—Students use graphic organizer to distinguish the difference between decision makers and influencers and then apply this understanding to their project goal
- [Extension Worksheet: Apply your Knowledge to Your Goal!](#)
 - [Target Organizer](#)
- Choosing Tactics**—Students work together choose a set of tactics to use in student project
- [List of Tactics](#)
- Developing an Ask**—To effectively attempt to convince influencers and decision makers to work with them or support their ideas, students will need to develop concrete “Asks”
- [Developing an Ask Worksheet](#)



Stage 5: Taking Action

EXAMPLE GOALS	<p>Take Action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Gain Support from Influencers</i> • <i>Convince Decision Makers to Act</i>
GUIDING QUESTION S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I bring together people and organizations in my community to support my issue? • How do I invite influencers and decision makers to have a conversation and take action on the issue?
EXAMPLE LEARNING OBJECTIVE S	<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop material to present persuasive arguments supporting the need for their action goal • Contact and communicate effectively with civic leaders who hold power in their community to influence or take action on their issue • (If group project) Develop collaboration and teamwork skills to drive small group work forward • (If group project) Develop project management skills that help drive small group work forward • Make impact
SAMPLE RESOURCE S	<p>Gaining Support and Taking Action</p> <p>Students will work to reach out to and meet with influencers and decision makers and will create materials (surveys, data summaries, memos, op-eds, proposals) that can help try to convince influencers and decision makers to support their goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tactic Tips: Rallying Support • Tactic Tips: Lobbying Decision Makers <p>-</p> <p>Ensuring Effective Group Work and Action Teams</p> <p>As students work in groups, there are a number of strategies, from group work logs and trackers to reflective assignments, which can help students build their teamwork skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate and Collaborate Rubric • Self-Reflection Rubric

At this stage, students begin acting on the tactics they listed in their Action Plan. They move beyond the walls of the classroom and exercise their voices. This is the stage that will be the most unique to each project, depending on the choices students make along the way. It is important to note that this stage requires a variety of logistical decisions from the teacher. For instance, how will the teacher monitor student communication with the community? Will students be making phone calls on their own personal devices and sending emails directly from their school email accounts? What routines and expectations need to be put in place for everyone's safety and success? How will students build collaboration and team working skills? What knowledge and skills will the teacher assess along the way and what backwards mapping is necessary? What kinds of communication with administration and district leadership need to happen before students begin?

Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing



EXAMPLE GOALS

Reflect on individual growth—*Students reflect on the individual growth of their civic advocacy skills throughout the action civics project. Students should identify both strengths and areas for future growth.*

Analyze collective growth and understanding—*Students will analyze the impact of collaborating with peers and experts in the field throughout the action civics projects.*

Apply advocacy skills beyond the classroom—*Students will determine strategies for applying advocacy skills beyond the classroom to continue their civic engagement with their local community.*

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How did the six stages of an action civics project impact your participation and engagement?
- How do you think information influences a person’s understandings and perspectives? How can did collaborating with peers impact your understanding and civic engagement?
- How did your group’s collaboration change throughout the action civics projects?
- How do advocacy skills support your civic engagement beyond the classroom?
- How will you utilize your civic advocacy skills beyond the classroom?
- How does the presentation of your information impact your audience’s understanding of your topic?
- How can we share our work and receive feedback from the public to better our civic action projects?

EXAMPLE LEARNING OBJECTIVE S

Students will be able to...

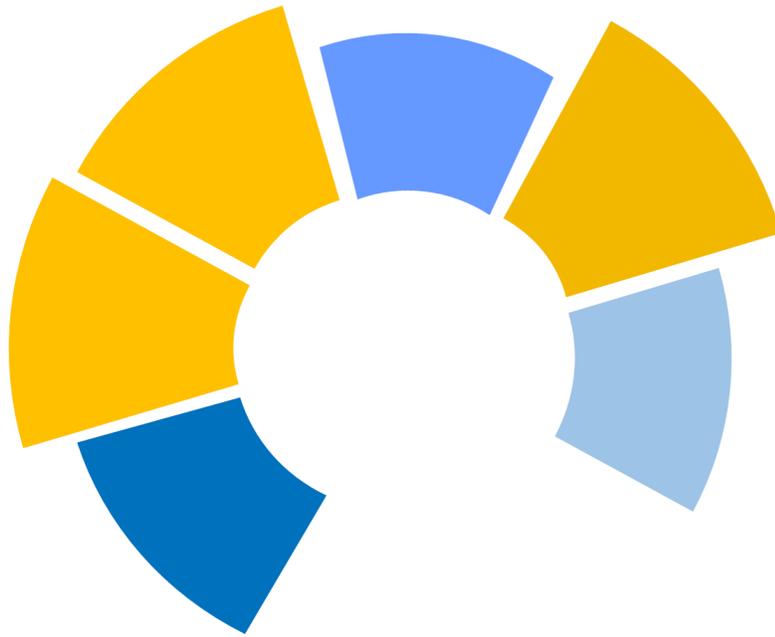
- Reflect on individual growth in civic knowledge, skills, and values
- Reflect on individual growth in developing advocacy skills
- Analyze collective growth and understanding of project topic
- Determine the application of advocacy skills beyond the classroom
- Communicate information in a clear and concise fashion orally
- Represent information visually (through text, images, graphics) that communicate key learnings from the project

SAMPLE RESOURCE S

- [Silent Conversations](#) - Students can have a silent conversation about how they personally grew throughout the project including the skills, knowledge and dispositions they gained.
- [Zones of Comfort, Risk, and Danger for Youth Engagement](#) - Students can reflect on when they left their comfort zone or stayed within it during the implementation of their civic action project.
 - [Zones of Comfort Student Activity Sheet](#)
- [Reflective Discussion Circles](#) - Students can use this protocol throughout the process to reflect on how they are progressing together as a group or class. [Reflective Discussion Activity Sheet](#)
- [Compass Points](#) - Students can reflect on their leadership abilities and tendencies in order to become better teammates in the process
 - [25 Self Reflection Questions to Get Students Thinking About Their Learning](#)
 - [New York Times Article: 10 Reasons to Send Student Work Out into the World](#)

- [Planning a Civics Showcase](#)

While students should be reflecting on individual growth and project success throughout the six stages, a student-led civics project should end with a final, summative reflection and work showcase. Such a showcase is not only the perfect opportunity for assessment, it is also a best practice of project-based learning that supports student pride and ownership in their work. It is crucial for students to showcase and reflect on the action that did (or maybe did not) happen during the project in order to reach larger conclusions about civic engagement and what it means to be a citizen in a democracy. Success should not only be defined exclusively by a policy goal being achieved--change takes time! For example, success may be holding a meeting with a decision maker or rallying widespread community support so that work can continue. By reflecting on what they've learned, what they've accomplished, and how they've grown, students develop the dispositions necessary to become changemakers.



Examples from the field: Student-Led Civics Projects

The following examples of student-led civics projects were facilitated by educators and led by students in Massachusetts in collaboration with Generation Citizen and The Democratic Knowledge Project of Harvard University's Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics.

Focus Issue: Mental Health

Students at a middle school in Lynn created a goal of increasing the number of social workers at all schools across their district in order to improve student mental health throughout their city. Through their research, they found that the ideal clinical ratio of students to social workers in a school is 250:1. The ratio in their middle school was 1400:1. They scheduled a meeting with their superintendent during which they shared their research, argued their case, and made their request: enough money in the school budget to increase the number of social workers at each school in Lynn by a minimum of 1. The superintendent did some quick math, and delivered some unfortunate news: that ask was simply too expensive to put in the budget this year. He provided an excellent explanation of the challenges and tensions of creating a budget, and then made them a promise. He promised that his budget would include a radical increase in funding for student mental health, including a number of social workers (though not quite enough for one per school), and that he would do so every year until they reached the clinical ideal. Hopefully by the time they, currently in the 8th grade, graduated from high school, they would be there. Sure enough, his ambitious budget does include funding for more social workers, and the local paper has made a point of highlighting this fact.

ADDITIONAL SAMPLE ACTIONS AND GOALS:

- Advocate for the City to improve its website and/or make a user-friendly app that allows young people to easily search for and find free mental health services near them.
- Introduce and sustain a student-run school program designed to educate the student body on mental health issues.
- Increased funding in the state budget for suicide prevention line item 4513-1026 to support suicide awareness and prevention training in schools.

Focus Issue: Education

Ninth grade students at a school in Boston have frequently been told that physical education classes were impossible to implement because the school had no gym. After diligent research, they found out that some schools in Boston rent space at local YMCAs and similar facilities. The students took action

and advocated for H.4127: An Act to Promote Quality Physical Education for all schools. They reached out to their State Senator, BPS Health and Wellness Department, as well as conducted email campaigns, surveys, and petitions. Their teacher states, "They learned that civics isn't just something you learn about in school, it is something you participate in in the real world."

ADDITIONAL SAMPLE ACTIONS AND GOALS RELATED to education:

- Increase the funding to extracurricular opportunities in the school district.
- Implement a cultural competency curriculum for administrators and teachers in the school district.
- Create a council that provides student input for the Advisory curriculum.
- Create a committee to plan programming centering on issues of immigration and continue outreach and advocacy to immigrant communities within the school.

Focus Issue: Vaping

Eighth grade students at a school in Lowell were discussing substance abuse as a potential issue to tackle in their civics project, given the vaping ads that targeted them on social media (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat). This issue resonated with the entire class, and so they took on an ambitious goal of proposing new e-cigarette and vaping legislation at the state level. The class spent months on research and outreach to file a bill limiting the sale of flavored vaping products statewide to adult-only stores. Never relenting, the students continued to work on their project into the spring even beyond the formal end of the program-- and their commitment paid off. With the help of a state legislator, legislation based on this project, HD.1484, officially arrived at the MA State House in late April.

ADDITIONAL SAMPLE ACTIONS AND GOALS:

- Create a peer education program: Grade 8 students teach Grade 6 students about dangers of vaping.
- Advocate for targeted messaging / advertising to increase awareness of the health risks of vaping among middle school students.
- Increase education in Health and Wellness classes focused on teen vaping
- Advocate for Bill H.2654: An act to minimize youth vaping and support addiction prevention services.
- Advocate to create a meaningful drug prevention program in the middle and high school grades.
- Introduce anti-tobacco/drug use curriculum across all middle schools.
- Implement a vape "Buy Back" Program in the town.
- Introduce a state bill that bans the selling of flavored tobacco in under-21 stores targeted at children.

Focus Issue: Transportation

Eighth graders at a Somerville school worked to address the unreliable bus system that affects how students get to and from school, extracurricular-activities, and work. After conducting research, the class planned and hosted a community meeting with MBTA employees at their local library to

discuss the issue further. Students advocated for more community input, especially from students, on decisions for new busing policies and bus scheduling. Currently, students are working to collaborate with MBTA employees to advocate for scheduling policies that would account for Somerville schools' dismissal times and promote bus usage across the city.

Additional Sample Actions and Goals related to specific topics:

Bullying:

- Amend school policy to create an anonymous reporting form for instances of bullying.
- Advocate for inclusion of content related to bullying, cyberbullying, prevention, and response in the mandatory middle school curriculum.

Climate Change/Environment:

- Advocate for solar energy sites throughout the city.
- Advocate for building code policy that addresses carbon emissions.
- Pass a city ordinance to eliminate plastic bags.

Homelessness:

- Support homeless shelters in the area by advocating for the coordination of donations from local supermarkets and restaurants throughout the city.
- Advocate for more of district budget to be allocated towards cold weather materials for students in need.
- Advocate for the passage of S.2043: An Act to provide identification to homeless youth and families.
- Increase funding for job training centers in the city.

Exploring the Case Studies

The following examples of student-led civics projects were facilitated by educators and led by students in Massachusetts in collaboration with Generation Citizen and The Democratic Knowledge Project of Harvard University's Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics.

In each case, an educator describes the civics projects and their steps at each stage. These cases provide examples of implementing student-led civics projects within the classroom and are intended to facilitate deeper discussion among educators about the process of integrating student-led civics projects in the classroom. They are not intended to be exemplars or prescriptive.

Guiding Questions for using the Case Studies:

- o How did this teacher facilitate each of the six stages of student-led civics projects?*
- o To what extent are the six stages represented in each project?*

REVIEWING THE CASE STUDIES

When reviewing the cases, educators may consider structuring their conversations using the following steps and protocols:

Step 1: Launch—Divide the group and assign each group one or more case studies to review.

Step 2: Read—While in groups, provide time to read and annotate the case study to identify key concepts or questions to share with the small group.

Step 3: Discuss—Consider the protocols below to facilitate conversations between participants:

3 Levels of Text Protocol

With your small group:

LEVEL 1: Read aloud the phrase or sentence that you have selected.

LEVEL 2: Share your thoughts about the brief selection (*interpretation, connections, past experiences, etc.*).

LEVEL 3: Share what you see as the implications to your classroom instruction.

Four A's Text Protocol

Use post-it notes to individually answer the following questions:

What **Assumptions** does the author of the text hold?

What do you **Agree** with in the text?

What do you want to **Argue** with in the text?

What parts of the text do you want to **Aspire** to?

With your small group, facilitate a discussion with participants sharing thoughts around each "A."

Close the session with a whole group discussion focused on the question: What does it mean for our work with students?

Character Charts Protocol

Individually or in small groups complete a character chart to analyze the roles and responsibilities of different participants during each stage of the civics project.

Case Study Analysis: Roles & Responsibilities Chart

Step 4: Share—Small groups share key takeaways from the discussion to the whole group, including points of alignment and points of growth.

Context: *This is a six-week-long unit that comes at the end of a year-long civics curriculum for Grade 8. By the time students start the unit, they have covered the core topics in the History and Social Science Framework. As the last unit of the curriculum, the civics project guides students to leverage the skills and knowledge learned from the prior units to implement civic action projects. Students explore a range of civic action in which they can engage. They tap into whatever speaks to their hearts and minds, such as their personal hobbies and interests, family, or friend groups. Our inquiry was guided by the [Ten Questions for Changemakers Framework](#), developed by the Democratic Knowledge Project at Harvard University. This unit helps students find their civic voice and hone it to achieve their goal. Students learn the practices of democratic coordination and political institutions, while reinforcing media literacy skills to increase access to networks, opportunities to participate, and other forms of social capital that promote civic agency.*

Prior to the Project

The first step I took was to develop a clear scope and sequence for the unit and the desired outcome. I worked closely with my district coach, Harvard University coordinator, library media specialist, and department head to achieve this goal. We met weekly for about 2 months before the project began. Then, I met with my principal and library media specialist, to go over the unit and identify anticipated outcomes and pitfalls. My principal was the first person to share the project publicly with families through our school newsletter. The weekly newsletter informs parents of the upcoming curriculum, important events, and other relevant information. The next step was to notify families directly of the upcoming project, and it was first made during our spring parent-teacher conferences. After speaking with families about their students' progress through the year, I showed them an overview of the

project and received overwhelmingly positive comments. I informed parents who were not able to attend via email or phone of this upcoming civic action project. The next step was to notify and involve central administration and local politicians about the project. I notified multiple people to prepare them for the upcoming contact they were going to receive from students. I specifically contacted the mayor's liaison on education to involve the mayor's office in the process. The mayor was the most contacted person during this project by my students. They spoke on the phone to numerous students and responded to every email. My district coach and department head presented an overview of the project at a school committee meeting to inform them. The school committee was the second most contacted group of public officials. Lastly, I set up a classroom period for the city's head of participatory budgeting to come in and present to the students. Many students then submitted budget proposals to the city as part of their project.

The use of social media was central to many of the projects. I worked closely with my library media specialist to develop a process for how to use these platforms effectively. Our district is developing a framework for how to best utilize these social media platforms within a classroom structure. For example, social media accounts were required to stay private until they were checked by a teacher, and any new post had to get teacher approval before being made public.

Stage 1 and 2: Examining Self and Civics Identify/ Identifying an Issue

Students needed to move from identification of their own personal passions and commitments to an understanding of the issue that also connects to the commitments and interests of others. The goal for this stage is to help students formulate an issue that not only matters to them but that also is important to a broader community. Students working in groups had to achieve consensus on project definition. I took the lead in setting up project groups, basing them on the student interests previously submitted via the topic selection form. I took peer relationships, as well as students' interests, into consideration for group formation. To build class excitement, I had a ceremony to announce groups. When groups were made, students got together and decided their shared topic, gathered consensus as a group, built on initial research, and worked on refining their message for the public.

Stage 3: Researching and Investigating

Once they were in groups and had refined their topic area, students needed to do a deeper research dive. We are a 1:1 to classroom so the students are able to do online research in class. I prepared them to judge the reliability of their sources, and students set up a reliable source list and bibliography. Finally, many students are able to build on research work they have already done on their issue in the immediately preceding unit of the curriculum in which students write a research editorial.

To help students consider divergent perspectives, I used an issues and controversies database. Students needed this deeper research investigation to prepare for their strategic planning around their action project. Their research covered not only their subject area of interest but also tools and strategies they might use for achieving impact in relation to their issue. For instance, students identified target audiences that they wanted to reach out to and explored the pros and cons of using online tools (see potential risks involved in their participation online).

Stage 4: Developing a Theory of Change and Action Plan

The first and perhaps most important step was that they needed to make a decision about whether they would aim to influence public opinion or influence a policy change. Students gave forethought to what type of project (public opinion/policy/both) they might want to pursue. A great moment of success for me during this unit was hearing the conversations students were having. There was real

discussion about whether they thought changing public opinion or changing laws was more important, about why they did or did not think that art could play a role in social change, and about why some felt that they could add more value in one over the others. I felt this aspect of the projects was able to ground students in making deep connections between their issue, theory of change, and proposed action(s). Finally, they took time to document their personal choice and related theory of change. This was a great foundation to start the planning and implementation phases of the project. To guide the students in this planning work, and also to be able to assess their project in relation to the quality of their process and planning, we created the planning and implementation sheet. This was a spreadsheet that each group used to assign tasks, link their documents, and record their accomplishments. I encouraged students to plan multiple components to their projects. I also offered youth-friendly templates for letter writing, surveys, phone calls, petitioning, policy proposals, public service announcements, proclamations, etc.

Stage 5: Taking Action

I developed another essential document. This was the individual check-in document that acted as an exit ticket for each class. This was a daily assignment throughout the implementation phase of the unit. The key difference with this document from the group planning sheet was the check-in was individual, meaning only the student filling it out and I would see it. Students used this as a way to tell me if there were any issues with the content of the project or within their group dynamics. The check-in allowed me to troubleshoot some group issues and keep the projects on track. To implement their plans, students made use of various on and offline resources to boost their civic action. Students wrote to the school board; they attended participatory budget meetings. They targeted audiences and tracked their impact on them. They recorded all of these action steps in their planning and implementation spreadsheet and check-in document. The most challenging moments were definitely when students were using programs or social media platforms that I had no background in or real knowledge of. There are always evolving forms of communication and expression that young people are familiar with that I am not.

Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing

To support the process of reflection and documentation, I asked the students to compile all these components into a portfolio with a presentation element. While the completion of the civic action was the most important deliverable of the project, it was important that they report to their classmates on what they had done. For this they needed a portfolio, including a civic action portfolio reflection assignment. Among other things, they refer back to the theory of change that they selected. It is important, though, that this portfolio documents the civic action they have undertaken rather than being a research presentation about an issue area. For this 8th Grade project, my biggest goal was to build self confidence in young people as changemakers. At the beginning of the unit, most students claimed they felt little power to make change on issues that mattered to them most. At the end of the unit, I gave them an informal survey, and the great majority of students felt they had increased their capacity to be civic actors.

Guiding Questions for using the Case Studies:

- How did this teacher facilitate each of the six stages of student-led civics projects?*
- To what extent are the six stages represented in the project?*

Context: *This project is a three month unit (approximately 20-30 lessons) and was completed in an eighth grade class as a component of the civics course. This student-led civics project used the [Generation Citizen Advocacy Hourglass Framework](#) to guide the process."*

Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity

We began the year with a cross-curricular activity where students examine the role of children during the Children's March in Birmingham, as part of an informational text unit. They read a text entitled *We've Got a Job*, as well as additional primary and secondary source material, listened to oral testimonies, and completed a writing piece (ex: standards RI.3 and RI.9). This introductory unit demonstrated that children are changemakers and have the power to positively impact their community, and society.

We then examined a large map of our city and students identified which neighborhoods they live in. We marked school locations, as well as significant features (main parks, movie theater, train station, downtown, etc.). We also looked at an overview of the history of our city, including the waves of various groups that have arrived since the 1840s, as well as current demographics. This was helpful to orient 8th graders in our citywide school.

Next, students work independently, then in pairs and table teams to brainstorm problems and opportunities they saw in our school(s), neighborhoods, and city. These issues were recorded. For homework (given 4-5 nights to complete, including a weekend), students then interviewed 3-4 community members about problems and opportunities they saw in the community. They were asked to mix it up, speaking with adults, family, neighbors, and peers who are not in our class. All of the issues were then recorded on large posters around the room labeled "Observations," "Media," and "Interviews." We typically gather 50-60 issues per class.

Stage 2: Identifying a Community Issue

In timed intervals, students rotated in small teams to the poster boards. Each team had different color markers, and they reviewed and discussed the various issues listed on each board. As a group they put a check mark next to their favorite four on each poster board. After one round, the groups visited each board one more time and put a check mark next to their favorite two (note: they could add check marks to ones they'd already checked). At the end of this process we narrowed down our options by identifying the ten with the most checks out of all three of the poster boards. For the next class I put the top ten topics on an anonymous ballot, and each student was given one as they entered. Students selected their top two and dropped it in our ballot box. Once all were submitted, we compiled the results and identified our top four overall.

From this point we projected the top four in a grid on the smartboard and students rotated up in small groups, with each student placing a post-it in each of their top two. We then created an opinion continuum for each of our top two issues. Each took about 15 minutes. Students were asked to consider each topic independently as a focus issue for its potential as a class civics project, not in comparison with the other issue. Students lined up, from "not very interested in this topic and not excited about it" to "I love this topic and want to work on it." Students then had opportunities to engage one another along the line, advocating for or against each issue. Students were reminded ahead of time to focus on the issues, and that we are all on the same team working to find the best possible issue for our class. Students who are not interested in a specific issue are encouraged to think about ways the issue could become more appealing to them, and to advocate for that. An example of this is "I would be more interested in working on homelessness as our issue if we could focus on children or veterans."

For the purpose of this case study I will focus on a class that chose youth vaping as their focus issue. Many of our 8th graders recognize this as an important current issue and it has become more of a concern in our school this year.

Stage 3: Researching and Investigating

We began our guided research phase with list of 10 reputable sources and reports. A sample includes fda.gov, mass.gov, nih.gov, makesmokinghistory.org, thetruth.org, and lung.org. Students began their research in class with a simple research template. Two to three students focused on each source and looked for facts and statistics that could help us better understand the issue of youth vaping. We also had a large poster board on an easel for students to write a statistic or fact they thought was particularly noteworthy, along with the source. Students then came up with a few possible class goals related to what they perceived as root causes.

We then hosted several guest speakers. First, a D.A.R.E. officer came out to speak with our 7th and 8th graders. We then arranged for a representative from the city's health department to serve as a guest speaker and discuss vaping with the class. She was more of an expert on substance abuse but did provide some information on vaping. We had additional questions and arranged for an expert on youth vaping from a community partner to visit our classroom. Through conducting online research and speaking with several experts, especially our final visitor from a community partner, our students had a lot to consider. They also shared the root causes we identified and related class goals with our final guest speaker, and she helped us identify the best avenues for our project.

Step 4: Developing an Action Plan

The class pursued two different avenues for the project, and both focused on legislation. Our research revealed that while the FDA had classified youth vaping as an epidemic, there was no concerted effort at the state level to provide youth vaping prevention training in schools. Budget seemed to be a significant concern, and our research also determined that the last major tax on traditional tobacco products went into effect in 2013, long before youth vaping exploded. The other concern students had was access to flavored vape products, and marketing to minors. Students discovered that vape packaging and flavors mimic candy and characters children are familiar with, and they are sold in convenience stores and gas stations where older siblings and friends can easily purchase them. Students then looked at a list of potential tactics to consider and they developed a multi-point action plan to address their two primary goals: (1) Increase taxes on vape products and use additional tax revenue to pay for youth prevention / education programs; (2) Restrict the sale of flavored vape products to adult-only establishments (smoke shops) across the state.

Step 5: Taking Action

Students identified a proposed tax bill for tobacco that had been held up in Ways and Means Committee, and they drafted call scripts to encourage legislators to add wording to the bill to cover vape products. They also wanted to require a percentage of this additional tax revenue to be set aside for youth vaping prevention programs, and they wanted to have it moved to the floor for a vote. My students then set up a phone bank and reached out to all 30+ members of the MA House Ways and Means Committee. They also drafted an email script with the same information and followed up each call with an email. My students received responses from five representatives within a week, and they then followed up with another round of calls and emails to those they had not heard from after a few weeks. Students also worked with their representative and House counsel to draft a state bill modeled on local ordinances to restrict the sale of flavored vape products. Through research they had discovered 115 of the 351 cities and towns in our state already restrict the sale of flavored vape products, so they wanted to capitalize on the widespread support and get these products out of gas stations and convenience stores where children see and have access to them, and into adult only smoke shops.

Students also created a petition and collected over 200 adult signatures at our school's open house night. Each student also took a petition page home and collected additional signatures from family and neighbors. A small team of students then met with our school principal, our local "decision maker," to share what they had learned about the dangers of youth vaping and arrange to lead classroom presentations in grades 5-7. With permission granted, my students then created 20 minute presentations and led health classes on the dangers of vaping to over 150 students across six classes. This included a student survey they created to collect more information on youth access to vape products. They also created PSA videos on the dangers of youth vaping, including role playing and interviews, and they uploaded this to our school website. Several students also drafted op-eds and shared them with our local newspaper.

Step 6: Reflection and Showcasing

Overall, my students demonstrated a level of investment that was off the charts. Many have talked about wanting to be involved in politics and community organizations. Rather than just see themselves as voters, several have expressed interest in becoming an elected officials. This is particularly important in our community where some neighborhoods turn out at less than 20% for local elections.

My students developed content knowledge as well as skills that will benefit them in other classes and in the future. They worked together, examined issues critically, learned from experts and one another, made calls and spoke to people in power, and learned how to present their ideas in formal presentations. Most importantly, they gained confidence and understand they have the power to make a difference in our community, and beyond. They won't just sit back and complain or wait for other people to address issues. They are real civic actors at 13 and 14 years old. Several students did find it challenging to move away from the traditional teacher led model, and one solution was to assign specific tasks to those students in order to help them contribute to the class project.

After our Civics Day presentations at the State House, and receiving recognition for their projects, my students continued to work on their goals and reach out to elected officials. The tax bill they advocated for did not pass but they identified a new version of the bill, which was more in line with their primary goal of providing youth prevention programs. They also continued to work with our representative and now have their own bill filed in the House to restrict the sale of flavored vape products across our state. This is currently in committee and is receiving a lot of positive attention, and it is heading to a hearing later this session. Although it has a long way to go, we are cautiously optimistic we will be one of the first 8th grade classes to draft and pass a piece of statewide legislation. Six months after Civics Day we revisit from time to time and they are still going strong. My students recently made another round of advocacy calls to elected officials, and they have been interviewed on television and by a regional newspaper. They have also presented at a school committee meeting and at our district's citywide parent resource fair to inform children and families about the dangers of youth vaping.

Guiding Questions for using the Case Studies:

- How did this teacher facilitate each of the six stages of student-led civics projects?
- To what extent are the six stages represented in the project?

Context: At this school, the high school senior independent project is a semester-long project in an area of the student's choosing. Each student has a supervisory teacher with disciplinary expertise in the area of the student's project.

Prior to the Project

For the last few years I have been developing skills at supporting action civics projects, in particular by incorporating the [Ten Questions for Changemakers Reflection Framework](#) into a number of my civics courses. This and other professional development efforts have helped equip me with skills to facilitate discussion protocols and thinking routines, to guide documentation and reflection exercises, and to oversee multiple projects while allowing students to take the lead. With the civic projects, I have found that I need to be a resource for community connections and creative ideas and have a mindset open to the “messiness” of student-driven inquiry and willingness to go with a flow that will change unexpectedly. The reflection habits developed through the Ten Questions Framework have been helpful to me in developing these skills.

Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity

My students arrive at the start of the semester having already identified the issue of their project. Students submit a proposal in advance of the start of the school year. Our school is developing multiple pathways along which students can complete the high school civics requirement. Doing so through this independent project is one possible pathway. Once the school year starts, my job is to help students deepen their thinking about what matters to them and about the issue that they have chosen. I have students complete an Identity Wheel/Chart that includes skills/talents/perspectives along with aspects of identity and sense of self.

Stage 2: Identifying an Issue

I have the students turn the issue they are already passionate into an “equitable” commitment by making sure they engage with others in a learning community. An “equitable” commitment is one in which a student learns how to make whatever they’re pursuing about more than just themselves. We really work on situating the students’ issue in a broader context. In order to motivate students who feel disempowered or cynical about change, I encourage candid and supportive conversations about the realities of change, the slow pace of the political process and the disappointment of defeat. These conversations are important to building understanding and resilience.

Stage 3: Research and Investigation

After students have achieved an equitable understanding of their issue, we turn to research. The point of this research is to help the students develop a well-grounded theory of change. We learn about the different theories of change that connect to efforts to change public opinion and efforts to change laws. Students work independently to research: (a) *their issue* (root causes, multiple perspectives, impacts, etc.) and (b) past and current *actions and strategies* taken by other individuals, groups and organizations in response to the same issue. The goal is to help them evaluate other people’s theory of change so that they have criteria for developing their own well-grounded theory of change.

We collaborate with the school librarian to support the development of research skills connected to how to identify high quality websites and to distinguish among kinds of publications. We also, though, draw on the learning community that we are building. Students give brief “brown bag lunch talks” at the semester mid-way point, to share their thinking with fellow students and teachers and to receive feedback. Also central to this work is a focus on peer collaboration and feedback through the use of [Thinking Routines](#) and [Discussion Protocols](#). These activities help underscore that good research is also about mining the wisdom of crowds.

Students are encouraged to think about the following questions: What do I need to understand about this issue in order to speak about it to others and take public action? What is the work that has already been done? What can we learn from those who came before and are currently engaged? What sources and modes of analysis are best suited for my research on the root causes of the issue I am working on?

Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan

Students work individually and collectively to create a plan of action in response to their chosen issue. They write their own *Theory of Change* essays and document and reflect on their project thus far. I encourage students to reflect on both *process* and *content* on a weekly basis. For the process, for example, students reflect on their level of motivation, work ethic, interest in these tasks, what challenges they encountered, and how they cope with them. For the content, students reflect on newly emerging questions, how they move their thinking forward, and how they connect it to what they already know.

To help students clarify which tactics will best help them pursue their objective, I organize a workshop series to enrich the students’ choice of means and methods in their project. One of the challenges of these units is to help students achieve a solid theory of change in which they can articulate the connections between their objectives and the tactics that they choose. This kind of strategic thinking is new to them. I believe this is where the value of the early work in the module on identity, values, and community really pays off. Identity exploration and community building activities both help students to feel grounded in who they are individually and together. Candid and supportive conversation about the realities of change, the slow pace of the political process and the disappointment of defeat all help to build understanding and resilience. Equally important are critical thinking skills and an honest exploration about the narrative vs. the reality of democracy and equity in the United States. Looking at examples of changemakers helps position students as a part of a legacy of change and struggle.

Stage 5: Taking Action

In this step, time management within an independent learning framework can be challenging for students. For many students this is the first time they are working independently. Benchmarks along the way and a scaffolded responsibility help keep students focused. Students can lose interest in a topic, or get overwhelmed by the depth of a problem. I generally work to make sure that the students always weave reflection into what they are doing, including in the implementation stage. Students are encouraged to think about “What can I learn about my strengths and challenges as a civic actor while

implementing my plan?” and “What skills and attributes will keep me going when I face obstacles and disappointment implementing my plan?”

The authentic and the public aspects of the work are critical. These aspects raise the bar and students overwhelmingly rise to the occasion. One of the best things about seeing the civic projects in action in the implementation phase is seeing my students interact with people of all ages and backgrounds. The projects give them real opportunities to learn from and with others.

Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing

The final product for the civic action project is, of course, the completion of the action. In addition, though, I ask the students to document and reflect throughout. Both individually and in the students’ learning groups, each student creates a portfolio that tells the story of their work over the course of the semester, and presents their work to other students and community members. I developed a Graduate Project Rubric and Presentation Rubric for this portion of the student assessment.

The ongoing documentation and reflection components are essential criteria for success. I believe strongly that student success should be based on their ability to articulate and demonstrate their own learning ; their understanding of the mechanisms of government and strategies for participating in ways that are effective, equitable and self-protection; and an assessment of their theory of change--whether or not they reached their end goal. I want students to do what they set out to do, and to reflect on the learning that happens both when things go beautifully and also when things don’t go as planned.

Guiding Questions for using the Case Studies:

- How did this teacher facilitate each of the six stages of student-led civics projects?
- To what extent are the six stages represented in the project?

Context: This is a four-month civics project built into a curriculum alongside a study of World War II and the Civil Rights Movement, drawing connections to what it means to be an upstander, both in history and today. Approximately a quarter of the student body are English Language Learners, most of whom are recent immigrants and/or refugees. This student-led civics project used the [Generation Citizen Advocacy Hourglass Framework](#) to guide the process.

Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity

To start our civics project, as a class we discussed the importance of creating change in our community, drawing on what we were learning in history class. With an interview template of open ended questions (ex: “What issues do you think are important in our community?”), my students headed out into the community to interview family members, teachers, and friends. We gathered and analyzed the interview data, drawing out a master list of community issues. To this we added topics my students had written about for an op-ed project I had them complete earlier in the year. After listing all the issues on the board, there were more than thirty topics in all, ranging from homelessness to school discipline to opioid abuse.

Stage 2: Identifying an Issue

To narrow down and ultimately select our topic, we conducted rounds of voting to see which topics sparked the most interest. First, I had students vote on the three topics they thought we most relevant, important, or urgent. This helped us narrow to the top ten topics, all still very broad. We narrowed

further by holding discussions and debates that required students to advocate for community challenges they were deeply passionate about. We started with small group discussions and then moved to full group share-out conversations. From there, we voted again, narrowing to three topics (down from thirty).

To make a final decision, we created a *human interest spectrum*. One side of the room was labeled “Really Excited” and the other side “Not So Excited.” Students stood along the invisible line to show their personal interest in the topic, allowing us all to visualize the class interest. Students who were excited could then advocate and attempt to persuade classmates and classmates who were less excited could offer ideas for how they could become excited in the topic. Different students would offer suggestions, like “Instead of focusing on adults, why don’t we focus on student hunger?” or “I might be interested if we were able to specifically create change on helping students in our school.” Students were encouraged to move along this invisible line throughout the activity to reflect their evolving feelings toward the topic in reaction to their peers’ arguments.

It was during this last set of discussions and debates that our topic started to formalize to hunger. During the spectrum activity, a number of students shared stories of friends they knew in school who did not have enough to eat or who relied on the school lunch program. Other students, many of whom had spent time in refugee camps, shared personal stories of not always having enough to eat growing up. Listening to these stories, it very quickly became apparent that this was a topic the entire class was passionate about, deeply connected to, and wanted to take action on. To narrow our focus even more, the class built on the stories they had heard from classmates and shared themselves, and they decided to specifically focus on student food insecurity at the high school level.

Stage 3: Researching and Investigating

My class broke up into groups. One group tackled compiling a list of food pantries in our city, first using Google and then contacting community organizations that provided us with complete lists of pantries. This group then created a set of questions to ask these pantries, and together we created a call script before they called each pantry to ask them for key information about how they ran their programs and who they served. For my students, this also meant practicing making pretend calls many times beforehand to make sure they felt prepared to get on the phone. Another team researched and contacted the other school-based food pantries in the state to understand how they addressed food insecurity. A third team began compiling research on the science behind food insecurity and the effects of food insecurity on academic success. Finally, we then gathered each group’s cumulative information, and the teams presented to each other to share their findings and draw connections between each group’s work.

Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan

With a better understanding of the effects of food insecurity and a more comprehensive landscape of who was addressing food insecurity in the community, my students realized that there was a gap in who was being served. After their discussions they realized that there were fewer convenient ways for high school students to get access to food if they needed it, and that unlike middle and elementary school students, many high school students might be living on their own or be primary breadwinners. My students decided to advocate for the creation of a school -based food pantry that students could have easy access to and which could directly support their peers.

Stage 5: Taking Action

Together they would be working to put together a research report and proposal for the school

leadership, but each team had a role and specific set of responsibilities. Google Classroom and Google Documents were essential tools that ensured all teams had access to each other's work and could learn and draw on what each other were working on simultaneously and in real time. I also worked to intentionally build teamwork skills with my students, discussing strategies for different issues that arose internally and encouraging students to take ownership and leadership roles. We had full group, small group, and sometimes individual discussions about what roles each student was taking and how they could problem solve together and not necessarily rely on me to come in and "solve" challenges.

One team compiled a report on the food pantries they had already interviewed. One team compiled a cost analysis of establishing a school-based food pantry, including researching shelving and boxes to store food. Another team set about examining our school, exploring spaces and rooms that could be a potential site for our food pantry, talking to staff, measuring rooms and writing up a report on what spaces were most feasible based on size, accessibility, and location within the school. Yet another team followed up with the other school-based food pantries in Massachusetts, gathering more detailed information about how they operated, what challenges they faced, and what challenges we should consider. They synthesized their findings in a memo to add to our report. Drawing on research that their peers had done, another team came up with a proposal regarding who would run the pantry and how it would remain stocked throughout the year. A final team reached out to the regional food bank to set up a meeting. They then sat down with the director of the food bank and proposed a collaboration; excitingly, the food bank was incredibly enthusiastic and committed to helping. After all of this, my students compiled their separate memos and reports into one joint proposal that came out to 23 pages, single spaced! They then set about scheduling a meeting with the school leadership team to formally make their proposal. A group of three students sat down with all the class' action teams, prepared a presentation based on their shared data, and then presented it all in multiple different meetings with school leadership. They conducted multiple formal conversations to collaborate and ultimately select a space. After a few weeks, their plan was approved!

Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing

As a class we had the opportunity that spring to reflect on the immense amount of work we had done and the work still to come. We did this during class time, both individually in written reflections and also in small and full group discussions. I also created a reflection template specifically for students to assess how their skills (teamwork, editing, public speaking, etc.) had developed over the course of the semester. What was most exciting for me was watching how confident my students had become. At the start of the semester, they had been nervous to make phone calls to food pantries, but now they were confidently sitting down to meetings with school leaders and the director of the regional food bank, assertively advocating for their pantry. But for us, the work stretched far past the semester's end. While my course officially ended that spring, my returning students (now seniors) all excitedly returned to school the next fall to continue work on actually opening the food pantry. That meant more meetings with the regional food bank and more conversations with the school leadership. And then in October we officially opened the school's food pantry, the fourth school-based food pantry in the state.

Guiding Questions for using the Case Studies:

- How did this teacher facilitate each of the six stages of student-led civics projects?
- To what extent are the six stages represented in the project?

Context: This project was incorporated into a civic action unit in a high school social studies classroom. This is a six-week unit in a semester-long elective course that focused on Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement.

Prior to the Project

To prepare for the civic action unit, I used the [Ten Questions for Young Changemakers](#) Reflection Framework to analyze the decisions that Civil Rights movement activists made at key points in their own change-making work. For the civic action project itself, groups of students designed and executed their own human rights-related action projects, choosing an issue of interest to them to pursue. When examining primary sources from the Reconstruction Era and Jim Crow units, students discussed whether the person was trying to leverage a form of power to influence change, or if they sought to express themselves.

In guiding students through civic action projects, I have learned that I need to envision myself as a coach rather than as a holder of knowledge. My disciplinary expertise matters less and what matters is that I am able to coach students through the six steps of the civic action project. That said, since a strong civics project does require disciplinary expertise in the issue area of the project, I find that I needed to be willing to do research simultaneously to my students in order to help them address their chosen issues as effectively as possible. Second, to prepare for this unit, I reviewed my school's policy about the use of social media by students for a school project, and about posting videos or pictures of themselves online. Many students chose to use social media as an element of their project. It was also one of the tools we discussed that they could use to widen their audience and impact. For example, one group of students researched, wrote, and created a podcast about mass incarceration in the US. I asked the members of that group to post their podcast somewhere online so that it would be available and listened to by more people. To support my students, I coordinated with my school's administration and its technology team. Third, I found it important to give extra attention during this unit to fostering positive peer relations and a safe classroom climate. Since we had been studying race and civil rights all semester and now students were picking human rights issues, we were often working with controversial issues or coming face to face with the different degree of exposure different students had to issues of race. At the start of the unit, I wrote a class constitution to establish norms for working together. My class had already held multiple discussions about race since we had studied Reconstruction and Jim Crow; we had explored issues of offensive language and perspective. I wanted to reinforce these learnings before my students dove into civic action projects on issues areas at least some of which were bound to be connected to controversies. Lastly, we practiced mindful listening at various times throughout the semester. This kind of norm setting for democratic practice plays an important role in the success of the project.

Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity

In order to support my students in thinking about their own values and commitments, we build on the earlier curriculum in the semester to deepen and extend our work with the Ten Questions for Young Changemakers Framework. We use the Ten Questions Framework to analyze the decision-making of various young activists who participated in the Civil Rights Movement. Building on the course's content knowledge, we used the Ten Questions Framework to discuss what motivated the activists and how they approached achieving their goals. This familiarized the students with the Ten Questions analytical framework such that they would be ready to use the questions for their own civic action projects.

I use examples of young activists in the Civil Rights Movement to demonstrate that young people have always pushed society to change and improve. My goal in picking out young people throughout history who have made a difference is to motivate students who feel disempowered or cynical about change. We discussed how in the Children's March, it was the kids who felt most empowered to demand change precisely because they were young and did not have the same responsibilities as adults.

Stage 2: Identifying an Issue

Next, I had students complete mini-research assignments to investigate a human rights violation of interest to them. I generally work with our school librarian to scaffold research. This was meant to further ignite their passion for helping with a specific issue. It was also a support for students who did not feel that an issue mattered to them.

After sharing with peers about their research, students then told me or emailed me what overarching issue (LGBTQ rights, environmentalism, racism, poverty, refugees, etc.) they wanted to work on for their final project. I then made groups based on interest for the final project. The first time students got into groups, I had them do a few icebreaker questions with each other (simply going around in a circle to answer the questions) and then I asked students to honestly and authentically share what they needed from one another to collaborate well and had them create and sign the collaboration agreement document.

Stage 3: Researching and Investigating

Once students were in their groups, I reviewed the civics project overview. I asked students to research their broad issue. In addition, I asked them to investigate how organizations, governments, and individuals are already working on the problem. By having them think about other peoples' theories of change, I am building up their vocabulary and analytical framework for thinking about their own theory of change, which they do in the next step. After sharing what they had learned in their groups, students followed a protocol to brainstorm about possible refined topics they could choose for their projects. They were grouped based on a broad issue that needed to be made more specific so they could then think of ways to address that narrower problem. Thereafter, students further researched their refined issue to understand the causes of the issue and generate ideas for how they might intervene.

Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan

Once students have selected their target issue and target context, I ask them to focus in on the question of whether they will pursue a changing public opinion or influencing policy. Typically, I tried to encourage my students as a group to pursue both with different members of the group taking different roles. My goal was to help them see the relation between changing public opinion and changing policy. While different students may have strengths in one or the other, I wanted them to see how those strengths and approaches could work together. After this work, students complete a formal proposal to be turned into me. I focused on if they had refined their topics enough, whether they had articulated a strong theory of change, and what potential issues they had overlooked or not anticipated adequately. Students revised their proposals afterwards. Finally, once they had finalized their proposals, I gave students the option of dividing up different roles for their work together before proceeding. Giving effective feedback on the project proposals was the most important moment in the project in terms of supporting students in achieving that success. Students often did not foresee scheduling issues or anticipate how much work would be necessary to accomplish certain goals. I was therefore an important support for logistics.

Stage 5: Taking Action

A major part of my role was also in helping students manage their action plans and mitigate their actions where needed to increase the effectiveness of their plans. In this step, breaking students' work into different mini-assignments is a key strategy for managing a large number of students' projects. Students did encounter several challenges. One of them was to get their target audience engaged with their work.

Stage 6: Reflection and Showcasing

I asked students to present their projects and to reflect on the successes and challenges of the project and what it's meant to them. Students reflected authentically on their theory of change, action plan, and about their own roles in the fostering change. They were asked to articulate how their own beliefs influenced the work when reflecting during the final presentation. In the future, however, I'd like to improve a few elements. First, I would elaborate the assessment for how they ground their project in a theory of change. I would make the alignment of influencing public opinion clearer, so that students can design more sophisticated theories of change. Second, I would provide more examples of young people making change in the contemporary era.

Guiding Questions for using the Case Studies:

- How did this teacher facilitate each of the six stages of student-led civics projects?
- To what extent are the six stages represented in the project?

Context: This project was completed as a culminating unit in an eighth grade course. This is a large urban public high school with approximately 1,800 students. Civics instruction at the school includes an 8th grade Civic / U.S. Government class that is offered as a history course, and an AP U.S. Government course in high school. This student-led civics project used the [Generation Citizen Advocacy Hourglass Framework](#) to guide the process.

Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity

Although I didn't start my student-led civics projects until much later in the school year, focusing on media literacy from the beginning provided an important foundation for examining community. Since being an informed citizen is one of the hallmarks of a successful civics class, I facilitated this skill through a recurring, twice weekly assignment called "Keeping up with the News" in which students were required to read an article on a political topic or event from a reputable news source and summarize it or react to it. One area of focus in my unit is to teach students to recognize bias in media sources. We read two articles on protests in St. Louis following the 2017 acquittal of police Officer Jason Stockley in the fatal shooting of a black motorist named Anthony Lamar Smith. One of the articles was from a conservative media source and the other was from a liberal source. Students noticed clear differences in how each article described the shooting and the protesters. Our debrief of the articles led to larger conversations about racism, racial profiling, and the criminal justice system. Many of my students had seen the horrific video of the fatal shooting of Philando Castile that previous summer, and it was clear they were deeply affected by it. These were difficult conversations for me to facilitate; I acutely felt my students' fear and frustration that incidents of law enforcement violence keep happening, which was further amplified by the fact that police officers are often acquitted in these cases. Yet as a civics teacher, my job is to point students in the direction of academic analysis and coming to a deeper understanding of the facts of an issue. In this case, I had my students do further reading on the integral relationship between prosecutors and law enforcement, and the high burden of proof for prosecutors to win criminal convictions.

Stage 2: Identifying an Issue

When it came time to begin our student-led civics projects, I reviewed case studies and news articles of civic advocacy projects with my students. We broke down each project into the steps it took to accomplish the policy goal. I also asked students to journal about issues in their community that affect them and the people they care about. Students wrote about issues ranging from homelessness, drug abuse, unreliable transportation, student mental health, and neighborhood cleanliness. As my students talked through these issues in classroom discussions, I took on the role of a facilitator, prompting my students to connect their observations to root causes. Since our class was using the whole class model of student-led civics projects, students needed to come to a consensus on which one of the many issues

we had discussed would become the basis of our project. We achieved this through a number of strategies. In order to narrow down to our top two topics, we used anonymous (heads down) voting. Then, we did a Four Corners discussion to allow students to express their level of enthusiasm for a topic. Finally, we built consensus by creating a spectrum from 1-10 where students indicated their level of interest and attempted to persuade each other to get on board. This class needed time to have deep conversations, and some of those conversations led to passionate disagreements. This is part of the process. I found some great protocols on listening partnerships that would help students both actively listen to peers they disagreed with and process their emotions. I actively coached students to reiterate the views of peers they disagreed with, ask open-ended questions about other perspectives, and communicate their conditions for working on an issue that wasn't their first choice. Ultimately, the class ended up with a topic that not everyone was passionate about but every student agreed to work on: police accountability.

Stage 3: Researching

Something I noticed during student conversations about police accountability was a significant knowledge gap of how violent encounters between police officers and citizens are investigated and adjudicated. Students clearly indicated that they wanted their project to focus on accountability and punishment for law enforcement who engaged in police brutality, but they knew very little about the process. Most had no idea there was even a process for citizen complaints of excessive force against police officers. They were unaware of the extent or quality of the training officers receive on racial bias. I assigned students some independent research about the topic, but I also curated several newspapers articles that I found to ensure a variety of perspectives would be considered. My goal was for my students to have a balanced view of the investigation process--its strengths and its flaws--and the efforts law enforcement are currently taking to train officers on racial bias and community interactions. We discussed these articles in small groups and in Socratic Seminars.

Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan

At this point in the project, I was really pleased that my students were exploring such a complex topic, but I was concerned that the project may create some serious friction within the class. At a school as diverse as mine, it was just as likely that a student sitting in my class was the child of a police officer as it was that they knew someone who had experienced a racially biased law enforcement encounter. Students could not agree that racial bias in law enforcement was a serious issue, but a few of my students had concerns about the action steps that our project might take. I really wanted to give my students as much latitude as possible in developing an action plan, but I felt strongly that I provide some direction so that all of my students felt heard and validated. I decided to create clear parameters around the project: we would invite members of law enforcement to have a two-way conversation on bias in policing, and our class would focus on a local action they could take on the issue within our city. Despite these parameters, we were still struggling as a class to develop a specific goal. I had to do a little more digging myself, which resulted in finding articles on citizen oversight boards of police conduct. I found out that many cities have them, and that the extent of their power varies widely. I also discovered that our city does have the process called the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel. However, it only consists of three members who are appointed by the mayor and who have previous connections to some aspect of law enforcement. I presented this information to students in a jigsaw activity and posted a focus question on the board: "If you were a city councillor elected to review this Ombudsman Oversight process, what changes would you make and why?" After this conversation, we were finally able to come up with a project goal: advocate for an increase of the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel from three members to seven members and inclusion of members who had no previous connections to law enforcement. Based on our goal, my students and I determined the

project required five different Action Groups, including a community contact group, a presentation group, a social media group, an editorial group, and a survey / interview group. We developed a list of each Action Group's tasks and objectives, and then students ranked their choices of which group they would most like to be in.

Stage 5: Taking Action

The presentation group developed a 12-slide presentation which included the survey data, quotations from peer interviews, and statistics and research that the community contact group had gathered from our community contacts and our guest speaker from the Boston Police Department. The government contact and community contact groups had a number of major successes. They emailed and called the administrator with the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel, officials within the Mayor's office, the community affairs department of our city's police department, and journalists at the city newspaper. The most responsive group by far were the journalists. The students were able to have some interesting conversations with them about the flaws in the internal investigation process of police complaints. The reporters actually knew very little about Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel, so it was great to see students teach the reporters about the police oversight process. Unfortunately, students did not receive a response from the administrator of the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel. They did, however, hear from the community relations department of our city's police department and scheduled a classroom visit. We hosted a lieutenant from the police department who provided an overview to students about challenges they faced in the job, various youth-oriented outreach programs and community partnerships created by the department, and the philosophy behind community-based policing.

Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing

We showcased our work at a Civics Day at the Massachusetts State House. The student delegates spent about four hours after school preparing their class board for the presentation. I offered them some visual models of presentation boards and gave students full responsibility for creating their own. At the end of the event they were thrilled to learn that their project won an award for best overall project! When I reflected on how divisive this topic initially was in our class, I was extremely proud that my students had gotten to the point where they could speak about a topic as emotionally fraught as police brutality with authority and had a tangible, locally based recommendation for making law enforcement more accountable to the community.

Guiding Questions for using the Case Studies:

- How did this teacher facilitate each of the six stages of student-led civics projects?*
- To what extent are the six stages represented in the project?*