Leadership Civics Curriculum Component for Junior and Senior High School Social Studies Courses

STEP 1: Research. Find out if your school district already adopted a local government civics curriculum component, or requires students to participate in local government events. You can do this by calling your School Board Secretary and asking them, or you can also file an Open Public Records (“OPRA”) request.

To file an OPRA request, obtain a copy of the OPRA form from your School Board Secretary. Think about what documents you would need to answer any questions relating to your presentation. Note that a request must be made for documents that exist; a clerk is not required to provide information or to create a new document. The clerk has seven days to respond to your request.

Here is a sample of the documents you would ask for in an OPRA request relating to establishing a Participation Civics Curriculum Component:

2. Any policies encouraging high school student civic engagement and/or participation in local government.

STEP 2: Get insider tips to increase chances of adoption.

Free online class & coaching will prepare you to make your proposal.

Take the free “Citizen Legislator” class which teaches you how to successfully gain adoption of a law at thecitizenscampaign.org/citizen_legislator.

Contact Kimberly at The Citizens Campaign for assistance or to request a coach: kimberly@thecitizenscampaign.org or (732) 548-9798 x2.
STEP 3: Organize and Empower!

Recruit others & build support

Invite your friends, family, and colleagues to join you in the effort to improve the community and school curriculum. Organize a meet-up, coffee klatch, or conference call, and The Citizens Campaign team will teach you and your friends how to make a successful presentation to your local governing body.

STEP 4: Make a Proposal

Suggested Presentation Statement

Once you’ve finished your research and organized your neighbors and friends, you are ready to make a presentation. Download the model proposal from The Citizens Campaign’s best practices menu. Pick a date and notify the media you are making a presentation and proposal to the School Board. Send an email to your local school board members and the Board Secretary with a copy of the proposal, any supplementary materials, as well as the date you will be making the presentation. Make sure to copy The Citizens Campaign on this email.

Sample Presentation Statement

Hello, my name is _____________ and I am a citizen of ________ and I reside at __________.

I am a participant in The Citizens Campaign, a non-partisan organization which teaches citizens how to participate with a no-blame approach and offer constructive solutions to help their cities and school districts work better and cost less.

I am here tonight to present a model resolution, which I have chosen and which was developed by The Citizens Campaign’s Law & Policy Task Force in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education. It proposes the incorporation of a high school component to social studies curriculum that teaches students the value of civic engagement in a local environment, the rights and duties of citizenship, and the leadership skills that will empower them to become active citizens in their communities. I have sent all the members of the School Board a copy of the model resolution, as well as a memorandum which describes how the resolution works. I will provide copies for members of the press and public as well.

The State Board of Education requires that high school social studies curriculum teach students to be active and informed citizens. By teaching our youth about local government and how, as citizens, they can make a real impact in their community, we can empower them to become leaders in civic innovation.

The Citizens Campaign provides a curriculum component that accomplishes this goal. In addition to a full body of subject matter, the Citizens Campaign curriculum includes supplementary materials that inform students about the different roles they can play in their local government. Furthermore, adopting this ready-made curriculum allows the school board to comply with State Board of Education requirements without costing valuable time and resources to create one. Therefore, by adopting this curriculum, not only will we be doing a great service to our youth, we will be doing it in a way that is both efficient and cost-effective.
MEMO

Re: Leadership Civics Curriculum Component

By: The Citizens Campaign Law and Policy Task Force

The Citizens Campaign’s social studies curriculum component, developed in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education, which focuses on local government and civic leadership, should be adopted by school districts currently in need of one. In order to have a healthy democracy, citizens must be active and informed. Pursuant to this belief, New Jersey State Board of Education adopted requirements that high school social studies curriculum teach students to be active and informed citizens. The Citizens Campaign has developed a comprehensive curriculum that school districts can feel comfortable adopting, in whole or in part, in order to avoid the burden of developing their own. Adopting the Citizens Campaign’s Leadership Civics Curriculum is, therefore, an excellent way to address a void in our youth’s education.

Democracy in New Jersey works to its best capabilities when its citizenry is active and informed. When citizens are empowered to take part in their local policy-making institutions they can affect the direction of their communities. Today, however, citizens are increasingly less informed about their rights and abilities to affect the decisions of these institutions. When less people are involved in local policy making, it becomes more difficult to develop innovative policies that benefit the community as a whole. Therefore it is important to teach citizens about their local institutions – especially at a young age.

In response to this growing problem, New Jersey has adopted social studies curriculum standards requiring students to acquire the skills needed to be active and informed citizens who will work collaboratively to address today’s challenges. There are, however, school districts that have yet to adopt a specific curriculum component that truly accomplishes this goal. In those instances, it is important for these districts to incorporate a curriculum component, such as the Citizens Campaign’s Leadership Civics course that will effectively comply with the State’s requirements.

The Citizens Campaign has developed an effective and comprehensive curriculum that schools may adopt, in whole or in part, to comply with the State’s social studies requirements. In partnership with University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education, The Citizens Campaign developed curriculum that covers the structure of local government entities, and opportunities for civic leadership.

By adopting the Citizen Campaign’s curriculum, school districts can comply with state requirements and provide effective civic instruction to their students. Developing new curriculum can take a significant amount of time, and may or may not be effective. The Citizen Campaign’s curriculum has already been adopted in other school districts, and is proven to be an effective tool for civic instruction. The Citizen’s Campaign’s curriculum also includes supplemental materials that will enhance a student’s learning experience. School districts lacking a sufficient civics curriculum should consider adopting it in whole or in part.
MODEL RESOLUTION FOR LEADERSHIP CIVICS CURRICULUM COMPONENT

WHEREAS, Board of Education of (name of municipality/region) recognizes, in accordance with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Social Studies, “all students will acquire the skills needed to be active, informed citizens” (NJCCCSS October 2009, sec. 6.3); and

WHEREAS, the value of citizen participation and the ability to apply the knowledge of how government works is most readily accessed at the municipal level; and

WHEREAS, to achieve the goal of involvement in our local government students need a Leadership Civics education consisting of instruction and service learning projects in the following areas:

1. **The “Power Centers” of Local Government & Politics.** Students should receive instruction on the structure, functions and operation of the main power centers of municipal government: the governing body (mayor and council), the school board, and the planning board, as well as the local political parties. Students should also be given opportunities for constructive participation with governmental and political entities.

2. **Legal Rights with Respect to Local “Power Centers.”** Students should receive education about their legal rights for engaging in local decision making. More specifically, students should receive instruction on two key principles: the right to government records and information and the right to be heard (for example, making a constructive proposal to a local board). Students should also be given opportunities to use this knowledge to explore the various avenues for accessing their local government.

3. **Techniques for Positive Civic Leadership.** The following techniques and skills should be emphasized: (1) how to initiate contact and develop helpful and constructive relationships with local governmental and political officials, (2) how to develop a sound, responsible proposal to present to a local governmental and political body, (3) how to make an effective, respectful presentation to a local governmental or political body; and

WHEREAS, this type of “Leadership” civics education will not only motivate and encourage students to take a more active role in local government and politics, but will also empower them with the knowledge and skills to participate in government and politics at all levels.

THEREFORE, be it resolved, that the (name of municipality/regional) Board of Education, in accordance with the New Jersey Department of Education’s call for students to become active and informed citizens, decides to integrate the above described “Leadership” policy into high school civics education offerings, including but not limited to (name of social studies courses).