Letters to the Editor: a Civic Action Project
Students Advocating for Change in Local Issues

Lesson overview: The purpose of this lesson is to engage students with local issues. They will research local initiatives and policies across the nation that have been successful. Using these research points as a data base, they will then look at their own city and community and devise an initiative to help improve their community. They will use primary sources documents and ultimately write a letter to their local city council member, school board representative, etc advocating for change.

Standard: Research, formulate positions, and engage in appropriate civic participation to address local, state, and national issues or policies (CDE, standard 4)

Age group: High School (9-12th grade Civics class)

Lesson duration: 3 or more 90 minutes blocks

Sample Headlines: Student letters published in the Longmont Times-Call

Gabbie Andrezzii: Value of art in schools is underestimated

Rebecca Dunn and Tori Schlinder: Longmont should provide body cameras for police

Cody Trenholm: Let's work together on saving the planet
Day 1: What are local communities doing across the nation to improve their city?

1. Warm-up “All politics is local” Tip O’Neil, 1935. Respond thoughtfully to the quote. What does the statement mean? Do you agree or disagree? How would you apply it to today?

2. Working in groups of 3-4, have students analyze various local initiatives across the country that been successful. Each group will read a series of articles about their particular initiative. The groups will be given resources from a variety of perspectives so they will also look for bias in the publications. As they work they will fill out the following sheet.

Here is a list of typical local issues:

- Emergency Response
- Affordable Housing
- Race & Justice
- Fracking
- Fluoride
- Vaccination
- School Start Times
- Testing
- RTD
- Parks & Recreation
- Bike Lanes
- Red light cameras
- Marijuana
- Speed Traps
- Curfew Laws
- Sanitation & Recycling
- Zoning
- Open Space
- Gun Laws
- Minimum Wage
- Homeless
- Plastic Bags
- Water Quality
- Water Conservation
- Snow Removal
- Fire Prevention
- Business Support
- Libraries
- Shopping
- Roads
- Mosquito Control
- Public Health

https://docs.google.com/document/d/113ASGrqOMOLM6ZXXVFrRrKNOglB_CobEUXEFFfvikaE/edit
A case analysis

Group member names:

Initiative/Issue you are researching:

As you read over the articles fill in the following chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document title</th>
<th>Write a detailed summary of the document</th>
<th>What bias did you observe in your document?</th>
<th>What was the most interesting fact that you found in your document?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on what you learned today, was the initiative successful? defined your choice.
Examples of initiatives you could use:

- Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Blue Zone initiative (https://www.bluezones.com/2014/03/cedar-falls-project-beginnings/, https://www.bluezones.com/2014/03/cedar-falls-project-outcomes/)


- West Virginia initiatives to fight obesity (http://wvutoday.wvu.edu/n/2010/10/21/health-research-center-partners-to-fight-obesity, https://www.healthiergeneration.org/about_childhood_obesity/in_your_state/west_virginia/)

- Other ideas are available here:
  - Route Fifty - http://www.routefifty.com/
  - ICMA http://icma.org/en/icma/home

- Here is a list of typical local issues:
  - Emergency Response • Affordable Housing • Race & Justice • Fracking • Fluoride • Vaccination • School Start Times • Testing • RTD • Parks & Recreation • Bike Lanes • Red light cameras • Marijuana • Speed Traps • Curfew Laws • Sanitation & Recycling • Zoning • Open Space • Gun Laws • Minimum Wage • Homeless • Plastic Bags • Water Quality • Water Conservation • Snow Removal • Fire Prevention • Business Support • Libraries • Shopping • Roads • Mosquito Control • Public Health
Day 2 What are the issues in my community?

1. Warm-up; What did you observe about the initiatives that you studied yesterday? What caught your eye as you studied them?

2. Students brainstorm about local issues in their community. Working in their same groups, students will look through local newspaper reports, council minutes, election materials, Route Fifty, election materials and other primary sources to identify issues.

3. As they read through the primary source documents, have them fill out the chart. When they are doing working as a group, select one person to share out their information. As they are sharing, have a student write a list of issues on the board to help create a visual list of their identified local issues.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BCayNCj8jFwXY-sVsqtTNXJ_RoG71ZDoe3-coXcqte4/edit

4. Here is a list of typical local issues:

- Emergency Response
- Affordable Housing
- Race & Justice
- Fracking
- Fluoride
- Vaccination
- School Start Times
- Testing
- RTD
- Parks & Recreation
- Bike Lanes
- Red light cameras
- Marijuana
- Speed Traps
- Curfew Laws
- Sanitation & Recycling
- Zoning
- Open Space
- Gun Laws
- Minimum Wage
- Homeless
- Plastic Bags
- Water Quality
- Water Conservation
- Snow Removal
- Fire Prevention
- Business Support
- Libraries
- Shopping
- Roads
- Mosquito Control
- Public Health
What issues are facing your city?

Name:
Part 1: Independently, look through the newspapers, and primary sources documents and find 4 articles that you find interesting. The articles you find should relate to a local issue, problem, or policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Title</th>
<th>Date/Source</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 2: As a group, have each member share their two most interesting articles or documents. From there, select one article that the group finds the most compelling. Answer each question, in detail for the selected article.

1. Article title:

2. Date and source

3. What problems were described in the article?

4. What policy is discussed? If no policy is discussed can you think of a potential policy?

5. What level of government would/is involved?

6. What interests you about this problem or policy?

*Select one or two group members to share.
Day 3 Create your own recommendation/Initiative

1. Warm-up; respond thoughtfully to the following quote- What did Thomas Jefferson mean? how can you relate his quote to your analysis of local government?

   “The qualifications for self-government are not innate. They are the result of habit and long training.” Thomas Jefferson

2. Vocabulary

   **Civic Virtue**: dedication of citizens to the common welfare, even at the cost of their individual interests.

   **Common Good**: benefit or interest of a politically organized society as whole.

   **Federalism**: the division of power between the local, state and federal government.

3. Looking at the list your class worked on yesterday, what issue are you most interested in? Today, students will identify the issue they want to work on. They will fill out the following proposal sheet and spend the remainder of class researching their topic and becoming more informed.
Your Initiative

Name:
What issue do you want to work on? why?

What are the facts about your issue? (Create a list a page of research notes on your particular topic/)

What is your proposed solution? Why do you think this will work?
Day 4: Final Project

1. Warm-up

“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Martin Luther King Jr.
Do you agree with Martin Luther King Jr? What historical examples prove his point?

2. Using your initiative write up from yesterday, create a proposal to your local leaders about your ideas. Remember this needs to be professional and in final copy form.

   1. Final Project:
      ● Letter to the editor of your local newspaper*
      ● Letter to your Mayor
      ● Letter to your county council
      ● Proposal for your school board
      ● Proposal for your city council

Student examples of letters to the editor


http://www.timescall.com/opinion/letterstotheeditor/ci_29190645/sadaf-ghiasy-colorado-should-increase-transportation-funding

http://www.timescall.com/opinion/letterstotheeditor/ci_29144945/gabbie-andreozzi-value-art-schools-is-underestimated

4. Rubric
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1c5kTkUDbRmGH35BRsm47FkC3BWQmaVfCaZjkqMkdSNk/edit?usp=sharing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advanced (10)</th>
<th>Proficient (8)</th>
<th>Partially Proficient (7)</th>
<th>In Progress (6)</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My final letter demonstrates an advanced level of content understanding. All bodies of evidence are complete, accurate, reflective and are of high quality. They go beyond fact listing to synthesis and analysis. The research is fully thought out, complete and includes and in-depth analysis of the issue. Required engagement in community.</td>
<td>My final letter demonstrates a proficient level of content understanding. All bodies of evidence are complete, and accurate. They go beyond fact listing to synthesis and analysis. The research is fully thought out, and complete. Analysis provides an accurate description of the issue. Relevant and specific evidence.</td>
<td>My final letter demonstrates a partially proficient level of content understanding. Some evidence may be incomplete, inaccurate. Bodies of evidence do not go beyond a restatement of facts. The research is complete but analysis provides a vague description of the issue.</td>
<td>My final letter demonstrates a low level of content understanding. Some evidence may be incomplete, inaccurate. Bodies of evidence do not go beyond a restatement of facts. The research is complete but analysis provides a vague description of the issue.</td>
<td>My final letter demonstrates a lack of understanding of content material. Some standards are missing bodies of evidence. Many pieces of evidence are incomplete, and/or inaccurate. Evidence that is available does not go beyond a restatement of facts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Day 5: So What: What did we learn?

1. Warm-up

“Each time a man stand up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples, he builds a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Robert Kennedy, 1961

2. Thoughtful reflection

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oijPVFHfoUu--Wq1tw-NOxs1nhkAEB32aa-udLVyHdn4/edit
Local Government Initiative Reflection

1. What did you learn about your particular issue? (Relevant, recent facts, communication, laws, policies, etc)

2. How did you try to impact this problem/issue/policy?

3. What knowledge or skills did you gain through this experience (include real-world skills and knowledge as well as knowledge about local government)? Be specific and give examples

4. Do you see yourself working on this issue after the project continues? What recommendation would you make to the next person who chose to work on this issue?