

PROJECT CITIZEN STUDENTS TACKLE PUBLIC POLICY

A TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Speaker Anne Brenner Armstrong Project Citizen Alaska Coordinator



Purpose

Purpose of this presentation

To share a civic education program that promotes informed, literate, involved citizens

GOAL of Project Citizen

To promote competent and responsible participants in the political life of their communities and nation

Development of Project Citizen

- sponsored by Center for Civic Education
- endorsed by National Council of State Legislators
- aligned with National and State standards in Government and Citizenship; Literacy
- centered on public policy study and public hearings

Project Citizen looks like...



Project Citizen looks like...

- a class of students --> a public action group
- researching one community problem
- examining related policy/ law and data
- building alternative proposals --> one plan
- preparing plan, timeline & budget
- presenting their proposal

Students present need for bike trails in downtown renewal plan.



How does Project Citizen promote student learning?

“Students learn about public policy and the world in which they live from Project Citizen. They learn how to research information for concerns they may have.

I have had student contact various levels of government and many classes have invited our local officials in for interviews about concerns; we have had principals, various people from our mayor’s office, local business owners, DOT, university professors, retired teachers, and the list goes on with our students learning how they can influence their world. They have also visited the homeless shelter, school board meetings and city council meetings, and many other local government agencies.

Most importantly, they learn that they have a voice!”

La Verne Haakanson, Tanana Middle School, Fairbanks



How does Project Citizen promote student learning?

“Project Citizen promotes students researching, writing, and critical thinking.

Students utilize technology and work together as a team. Students think about the governmental process and improve their ability to identify and critique public policy. Students practice their public speaking skills and their communication with peers. Students meet deadlines and work to create a final product.

It is the best performance assessment I have seen. It engages students fully and helps create active citizens. Students feel empowered and gain self- confidence. “



Kelsey Gerke, Gruening Middle School, Eagle River

Foundation of Project Citizen

- **Public Policy** defined: an agreed upon way that our government, at whatever level, fulfills its responsibilities, i.e. protecting the rights of individuals and promoting the welfare of all people.
- **Based on Socioeconomic Theory:** working together to forward justice and change in the neighborhood setting.

Legislators Listening to Project Citizen Presentations 2007



Project Citizen teaches BRANCHES of GOVERNMENT

- Legislative: policy, regulation or law developed
- Executive: policy, regulations, and law is maintained and enforced by executive groups
- Judicial: Court cases examine specific policy

Project Citizen teaches Levels of Government

- Government branches exist at local, state and federal levels.
- When studying a public policy problem, students look at local, state and federal laws and enforcement of this problem.

Project Citizen teaches Advisory Boards -> Decision-making Boards

Advisory Boards

- Critical for local input into regional policy making.
- Example: School Advisory Councils at the school level provide input to the regional policy-making board, usually associated with a district's School Board.

Policy-making Boards

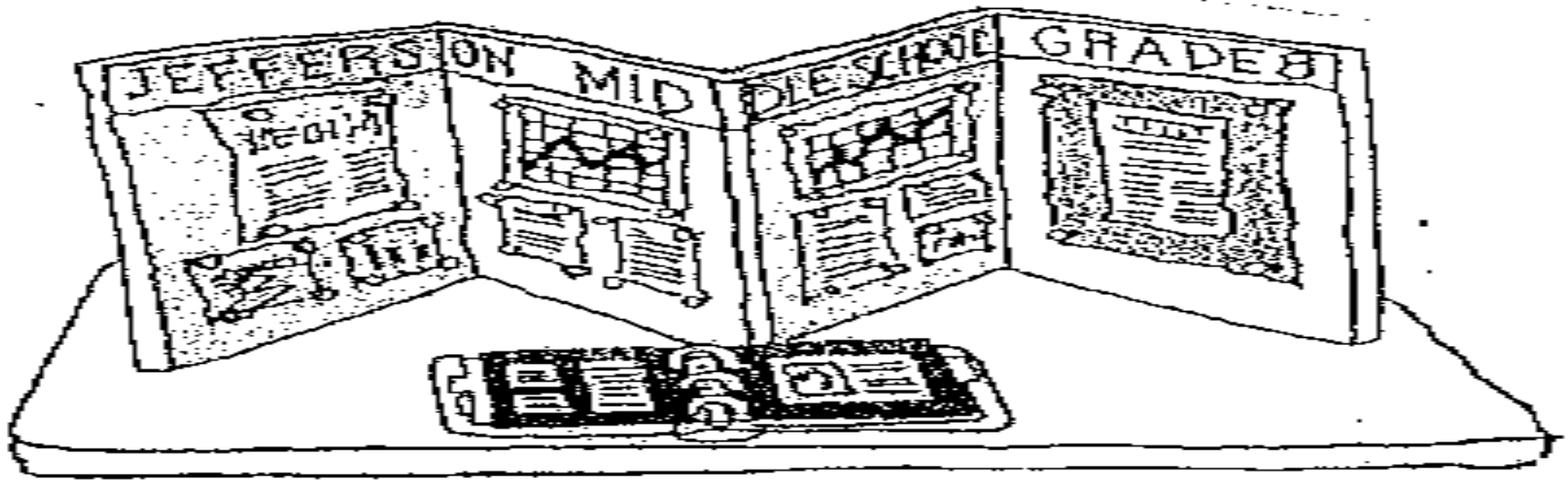
- The policy these boards make must be constitutional and legal, able to be implemented and enforceable.
- Arena for public policy includes health, education, welfare, environment, transportation, safety, recreation

Students explain their class project to Sen. Berta Gardner

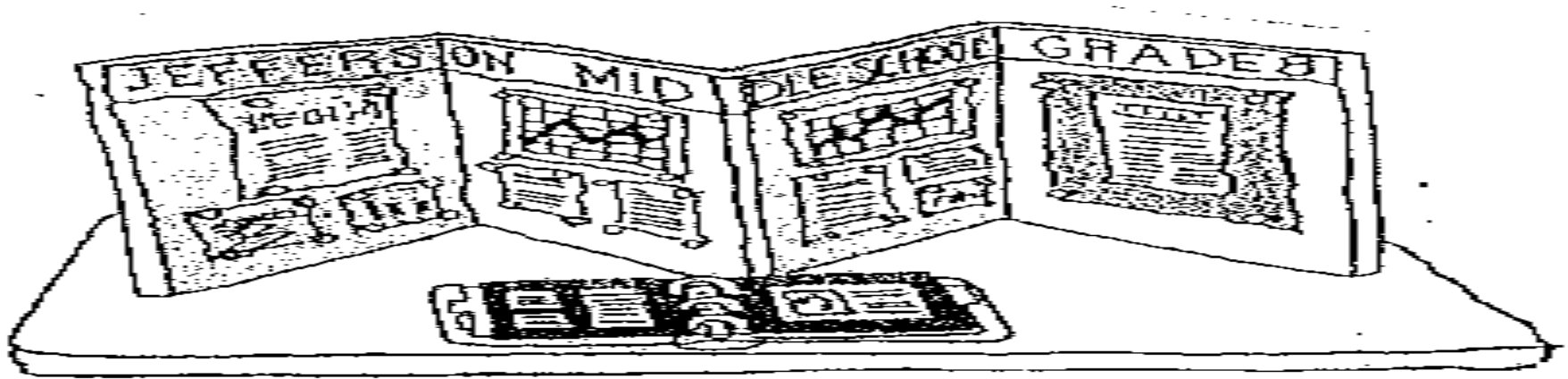


Project Citizen process

PROBLEM	SUMMARY of the problem Pertinent Law at all levels Relevant graphs and documentation
ALTERNATIVE POLICIES	Existing Policy 2-3 Alternative Policies noting Advantages & Disadvantages, Proponents and Opponents for each Alternative and evaluation of each
PROPOSAL	Summary explaining class policy and supporting data, advantages/disadvantages, proponents/opponents, Constitutionality, branch of govt/agency responsible for implementation, Laws and regulations that relate
ACTION PLAN	Process and advantages, steps to inform the public and gain community support, cost/budget, timeline, community /govt role, and consideration for those opposing the plan



- class decision-making
- critical reading, citing, summarizing and evaluating information
- locating the law related to the problem
- designing/ implementing/graphing a survey



- telephone skills
- interviewing: organizing questions-> summarizing
- writing business letters and thank you letters
- group decision-making: alternatives -> action plan
- recording minutes of class meetings
- group presentation skills

Problem: Low Graduation Rate



Examples of Project Citizen Studies in Alaska

Project	Mentors / /Consultants
Healthy school lunches, # days school / week, sports availability, safe place to wait	School Board Members School District Administration School Advisory Boards
Food poisoning, clean restaurants	Alaska Regional Food Inspector
Tattoos/ body jewelry	AK Cosmetology Board, School Nurse, PHN
Fire Department coverage	City Fire Department
Bullying	School Counselor, Private counselor, School Board School Administration, Wellness Court

Examples of Project Citizen Studies in Alaska (cont.)

A Suburb's Access to Town	City Bus Service Borough Assembly
Need for Street Signs	Village Council, Village Corporation
Damaged hiking trails & ATV trails	Division of Natural Resources Division of Forestry
Bike trails	Dept. of Transportation
Skateboard Park	Borough Parks and Recreation Dept.
Recycling Plastic Bags	State Environmental Health, Private Businesses/Stores, Borough Refuse Center

Examples of Project Citizen Studies in Alaska (cont.)

Outdoor Air Quality in Winter	Borough Air Quality Office State Environmental Health
Indoor Air Quality in Schools	School District Maintenance, Private Carpet Business
Cell phone use in school	AK Cell Phone providers, School Board, School Administration
Help for Needy Families	AK Social Services, Bean's Cafe, Counselor
Pan-handling at intersections and stores	Borough Assembly, City Council
School-related Stress and Depression	School Counselor, Private Counselor, School Nurse, Health provider

Policy Changes linked to Project Citizen

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| • Slogan : 20 or below, plug it in | Tanana Middle |
| • Panhandling policy: Anchorage | Rogers Park Elem. |
| • Lights on running trails | Gruening Middle |
| • Bike trail safety | Gruening Middle
Tanana Middle |
| • School Lunches | multiple schools |
| • Bus line added | Goldenvue Middle |
| • Minimizing plastic bags | Randy Smith Middle
& multiple schools |
| • Walkway over highway near school | Clark Middle |

FORMER SEN. PASKVAN DISCUSSING ISSUE



Students' Transformational Change: CONFIDENCE

- realizing the resources in their community and state
- understanding how government aids community
- understanding how to give input on a concern
- realizing how to break down research tasks
- realizing they CAN DO research
- feeling success with partners and teams
- feeling pride and respect for their work

Families' Transformational Change: Authentic Input

- 1. opportunities to contribute and discuss the class research with their student
- 1. feel this is meaningful and life-impacting
- 1. input valued by students and teachers
- 1. provide consultants, rides and snacks.

Teachers' Transformational Change FACILITATOR ROLE

- from direct teaching to facilitating learning
- from decision-maker to organizer, quality check, and program evaluator
- from contained classroom to community outreach



A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

“PROJECT CITIZEN is a driving force of my teaching practice. It helps me reach my goal of instilling civic ideals in my students. It is the highlight of my year and something that keeps me committed to my profession. It is the thing that connects students most closely to me and is what they talk about when they come back from high school to visit. “

KELSEY GERKE, GRUENING MIDDLE, EAGLE RIVER



A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

“I am able to connect to the world in which my students live via Project Citizen. They are able to see the world and decide on changes they may want to make. They work together as a team, and students learn how research, interview, email, and troubleshoot on where they need to go once they have decided on their topic.

It is amazing for my classroom! “



LA VERNE HAAKANSON, Tanana Middle Fairbanks

Project Citizen Schools

• CURRENT-----|

- Gruening Middle
- Tanana Middle
- Unalakleet Middle
- Mears Middle
- Eielson Middle
- Randy Smith Middle

PAST-----|

- Gruening Middle
- Tanana Middle
- Goldenview
- Begich
- Romig
- Rogers Park Elem.
- North Pole Middle
- Central Middle

Building Project Citizen

- Aligned with ESSA and standards
 - Professional Development needed for Teachers
- Regional and State Showcase
 - Are incentives for students and schools.
 - Connect students with community
 - Connect legislators and policy-makers with students and families

Alaskan Students working together as they tackle public policy.

