

**MHCC Unit #3**  
Public Discourse and Decision Making  
w/ Possible Citizen Involvement  
Rachel DeKuiper, Cannonsburg Elementary School  
Rockford Public Schools

**Grade Level:** 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>

**Abstract:** TLW write a position paper on a chosen public policy issue and justify that position with reasonable arguments. A local action plan may also be developed by students and teachers.

**Primary Standard and Benchmark:**

Standard VI.3LE 1: Persuasive Writing

**Secondary Standard and Benchmark:**

Standard VII.1LE 2: Responsible Personal Conduct

**Estimated time to complete all components of lesson:** 2 class periods of approximately 50 minutes in length. Note: Additional class periods are necessary for students to develop presentations for public audiences in their local communities and perhaps the Michigan House Civics Commission.

**Materials:**

- Position Paper Outline with Phrase Possibilities (download)
- Position Paper Scoring Rubric (download)
- Sample Position Papers, Each with Different Rubric Score (download)
- Position Paper Checklist for Students (download)

**Procedure:**

Day 1: The teacher will model with students how to fill out the position paper outline. Students will then complete their position paper outline using their KWL chart and survey data from Unit #2.

2. The teacher will share sample position papers and corresponding rubric scores with students while explaining the scoring rationale for each paper to the students. (See download #1 for sample position papers.)
3. Students are then instructed to write their position papers using the four-point rubric as a guide. See download #2 for the following pages:
  - Position Paper Outline
  - Position Paper Checklist
  - Position Paper Holistic Scoring Rubric

**Procedure:**

Day 2: In small groups, each group will choose one position paper about their issue to be shared aloud with the whole class. (\*this may be in preparation for schools participating in MHCC hearings held around the state.)

Students can also decide how to share their positions with those who can follow up. (local legislators, school boards, state legislators, etc.) This process will take additional class periods to ensure proper preparation for public audience sharing.

\*Authenticity is the most important component of the Michigan House Civics Commission. Therefore it is important for students to share their researched proposals with a public audience. A local action plan can be developed by students with assistance from the teacher. (See “Developing a local action plan” guide download #3.)

**Assessment:**

Position papers (See download #2 for Position Paper Holistic Scoring Rubric.)

**Reflection: (optional)**

Individual and Team reflection to be discussed or written. (See download #4 for reflective questions guide.)

Sample Position Paper #1  
Adapted from MEAP Prototype  
MHCC Unit #3

**ISSUE: Year-Round Schools**

*I support the idea of having year-round school. I think we should have a year-round schedule. One reason I say this is because after looking at the graph for Plymouth-Canton Schools and seeing how the percentage on the MEAP scores rose, I think our school should have it. Also more students from Plymouth-Canton went to college after attending school year-round. I think it would be for the common good of our community to have year-round schools because everybody would learn more and remember things from year to year better.*

*In the beginning when public schools were formed, students had the summers off to work on the farms and help harvest crops. Because of technology, most students no longer do this. Machines are able to do their old summer jobs better and faster. I believe students spend most of their summer time now playing and having fun, but not learning.*

*I think having year-round school would really give equality of opportunity because everybody would have the same chances of getting a good job. They will have a better chance of going on to college and getting a good education. Year-round schools will give children individual rights so they can be treated like others. A reason year-round schools wouldn't be good is that people going on vacation in the summer would miss school and parents wouldn't be happy. Other than that, I totally support year-round schools.*

**Holistic Rubric Score: 4**

**1<sup>st</sup> paragraph – stated position and referenced data section**

**2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph – referenced research section**

**3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph – referenced core democratic values**

## ISSUE: Year-Round Schools

*I think that your consideration of year-round schools is foolish. Year round school would decrease student vacation time and I don't think that is right. My reasons for believing year-round school is wrong are simple.*

*Students are against year-round school. Students are the people year-round school would most affect, so why don't we do as students wish? They like the current school year schedule. They don't want to lose summer vacation. Families wouldn't have the whole summer to decide when the best time for vacation would be. The whole summer wouldn't be free for vacation and this is not for the common good of students and their families who would have trouble scheduling vacation and family-time together.*

*Students deserve equal opportunities. They need equal time for rest and vacation. How are they supposed to use their brains without rest periods of more than seven weeks? That's what summer is for.*

*Please consider the reasons stated above and say "no" to year-round schools. I want to keep the school year as it is. I am one of many students opposed to year-round schools.*

### **Holistic Rubric Score: 3**

**1<sup>st</sup> paragraph – stated position**

**2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph – referenced research section and core democratic value of common good**

**\*missing reference to prior knowledge**

## ISSUE: Year-Round Schools

*I am against year-round schools. I think that kids should not have their vacations taken away from them. I also think that you should listen to what they say and really put thought into it.*

*More than 50% of the students that have tried year-round schools oppose it. The tourist industry doesn't like it either. They would lose a lot of money and eventually have to do out of business. They would because they would lose money because one would go on vacation that much. They also wouldn't have high school students to work and a good price. The community would be upset too. We would have to pay the teachers and all those that work at schools more because they are working longer. This would raise our taxes and people wouldn't like that.*

*Because of these reasons, I really oppose the issue of year-round schools. They are not a good idea.*

### **Holistic Rubric Score: 2**

**1<sup>st</sup> paragraph – stated position**

**2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph – referenced research section and data section**

**\*missing reference to core democratic values, can't receive a score above 2**

## ISSUE: Year-Round Schools

*I am against year-round schools because I like the old one better. When we get out of school we should have a longer vacation instead of a short vacation. I like school, but I sure don't want to go year-round and only have three, two-week vacations.*

*In Japan they go to school longer. They go to school six days a week. They are used to that though because that's their culture and it's different than ours.*

*We need safety and security at our school. Kids bring dangerous stuff to school. This would happen in the summer too.*

*From what I've heard, I cannot go to school year-round because what if I want to visit my grandma or someone in another state and we have school? Then I can't go visit them until our vacation. I am not trying to be against year-round school. What I think is that kids will be upset if they went to school all summer. It is not fair. I want the summer off so I can visit people. I oppose year-round schools.*

### **Holistic Rubric Score: 1**

**1<sup>st</sup> paragraph – stated position**

**2<sup>nd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> paragraphs – had some interesting points, but they did not support the issue; they lacked focus**

**\*missing reference to core democratic values, research, and data section**

# Position Paper Checklist

	I stated my position clearly.
	I supported my position with information from the Data section.
	I supported my position with information from the Research section.
	I supported my position with reference to at least one core democratic value.
	<b>**Bonus**</b> I explained one reason an alternative position would be less effective public policy.

Points	Description
4	In order to receive a 4-point score, the response must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give a clearly stated position on the issue</li> <li>• Provide one (or more) piece of accurate, valid, and relevant supporting information from the Data Section (survey)</li> <li>• Provide one (or more) piece of accurate, valid, and relevant supporting information from the Research Section (kwl chart)</li> <li>• Provide at least one supporting point that is based on the Core Democratic Values</li> </ul>
3	In order to receive a 3-point score, the response must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give a clearly stated position on the issue</li> <li>• Provide at least one supporting point that is based on the Core Democratic Values</li> <li>• Contain at least one of the remaining elements (Data or Research)</li> </ul>
2	In order to receive a 2-point score, the response must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give a clearly stated position on the issue</li> <li>• Contain at least one of the remaining elements (Data, Research, or Core Democratic Value)</li> </ul>
1	In order to receive a 1-point score, the response must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give a clearly stated position on the issue</li> </ul>
0	In order to receive a 0-point score, the response must show no evidence of any of the elements

Public Issue Question:  
Should...

My clearly stated position on	
-------------------------------	--

<p>this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>My position is...</i></li> <li>• <i>I think...</i></li> </ul>	
Supporting information from data section (survey results):	
Supporting information from research (KWL):	
Connect to Core Democratic Value:	

Position Paper Phrase Possibilities:

*I believe that...*

*It is my belief that...*

*I think that...*

*I feel that...*

*I support...*

*I do not oppose...*

*Yes, we should...*

*I do not believe that...*

*It is not my belief that...*

*I do not think that...*

*I do not feel that...*

*I do not support...*

*I oppose...*

*No, we should not...*

The following questions are those that you will probably want to ask before you take any action regarding an issue of public policy. Once you have the answers to these important questions you can begin to build a plan of action that you will undertake.

### **Defining the Issue and Identifying Problems**

What is the issue? Are there any problems associated with this issue?

In what ways does this issue or problem affect your community?

What groups or individuals are the most affected by this problem or issue?

Are there already people or groups in your community that are trying to “tackle” this issue or problem? If so, what are they trying to do?

### **Defining Goals**

Do you have any goals with regard to your issue? If so, what are they?

### **Consideration of Options**

Do you have options as you address this issue or problem? If so, what are they?

Can you determine your best option?

Do you have the time, money, materials, and contacts that you might need to exercise your best option? If not, are there ways that you might attain these things?

### **Identifying and Assigning Tasks**

What tasks and or activities must you complete in order to reach your goal (s)? (Be as detailed as possible as this is an important step.)

Who will take care of each of the listed tasks and or activities?

### **Identification of Obstacles**

Are there any major obstacles that might stand in your way? If so, who or what are they?

How will you overcome those identified obstacles?

### **Timeline for Completion of Tasks**

Each task or activity must be assigned to a person or group of people. When is a reasonable amount of time for each task or activity to be completed? Be sure that each task or activity is given a deadline for completion.

### **Identification of Partners**

Are there people in your community who might support your project? (Examples of institutions that might lend support could include: government, businesses, non-profit organizations, the media, etc.) If so, who should be contacted and how? Who will make those contacts? Again, at this step a deadline should also be assigned.

### **Evaluation Plan Design**

How will you decide if your project is successful? Who should be involved in the decision?

### **Establishment of a Budget**

Will you need resources such as money, skills, materials, and/or people to help with the project? Where and how will you get the help you need? List all materials and supplies that you will need along with the amount of money that you might need for each item? How will you meet your needs, including the raising of money to obtain supplies and materials?

<p>Reflection Individual and Team Assignments</p>
---

As part of a class and as an individual, you have taken the time to select, research, discuss, and write about an issue of public policy in your local community or at the state level of government. You may have even established an action plan to thoroughly research your issue and develop steps of action to take to resolve your selected issue. Now, it is time to reflect back upon the entire process. Consider the following questions for reflection:

With regard to your action plan:

- How well did your plan work? Were you able to accomplish your group's goals? Did you and your classmates spend the right amount of time on each task? Was there anything that was left out? Was your planning effective or could it have gone better? How?
- Did your team work together well? Were there any ways that you could have worked better?
- Did you encounter any problems? If so, were you able to solve them? Why or why not?

With regard to the measurement of results:

- Look back upon your original goals. Do you think that overall, you met your goals? Did your project or activity make a difference? If so, how? Do you think that the results achieved will last a long time?
- Do you think that you had to work too hard and for too long a time to achieve your goals? Why or why not? Think about the concept of opportunity cost—what did you give up to achieve some of your specific goals?
- If you had to do it over again, what would you do differently?

Individual Reflection: (Answer this question on your own)

- Have you personally changed as a result of this project? If so, how?
- Did you learn anything while working on this project? What new ideas or knowledge did you obtain by working on this project?
- Will you do anything differently in the future when you work with a team on a project that might be similar to this? What changes would you make?

The BIG picture: (Answer this question with a partner or with your small group)

- How well did you plan? Was your planning effective?
- Did you encounter any problems? If so, how did you solve or overcome them?
- Did your group work well together? Did you learn anything new about working as a team? If so, what did you learn?
- What have you accomplished? Is there more that needs to be done? Is it something that your group or class can reasonably do?
- Do you think that your project made an impact? Were you able to solve a problem or bring more knowledge to a community because of what you did?
- Have you learned anything about your school or local community because of your efforts? If so, what have you learned?