OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL CIVICS CELEBRATION PROJECT

Developed by the LWVMA Civic Education Committee

FOCUS ON CELEBRATING STUDENT-LED CIVICS PROJECTS

Updated for the 2023-24 School Year

Student-led Civics Projects became a formalized portion of the curriculum through enactment in 2018 of S2631, An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement. The League of Women Voters of MA advocated for passage of this law through its partnership with the Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition, (MCLC). This law states that schools are to make available **student-led civics projects** in Grade 8 and in at least one additional opportunity in Grades 9-12. Most schools are choosing to make this experience available in a required course so that it is accessible to all students.

MISSION

The League believes in the importance of preparing youth for their role as participants in a democracy. Active civic engagement is essential to help democracy work. To this end the League wishes to celebrate the importance of the work that students are doing on student-led civics projects and amplify youth voices. We would like to bring about broad recognition for all students engaging in this work at the local level. At the regional/state level, we would like to create an opportunity for student interaction with each other and with legislators and experts to help refine their projects and offer special recognition for exemplary student-led civics projects. Our goal is to create excitement among students and teachers about these civic engagement projects and encourage students to see civic skills as life-long skills that will allow them to continue to find ways to improve our communities and our shared future.

CIVICS CELEBRATION PROGRAM DESIGN

The student-led civics project design written into DESE guidance and the legislation call for the projects to culminate with a presentation of student work where they receive feedback. To do this many schools and the state offer a showcase event where students present their projects to members of the community. In developing a partnership with schools, it is important to realize that the point of these showcase events is not to expect "show worthy" projects, but rather to give students the opportunity to receive feedback and appreciation for their work. The point of these projects is to help students learn the process of civic engagement. We should not make the schools feel that the work has to be perfect or that students are performing for the community. This is not a music recital or a game that has to be won. Most projects will be a work in progress because that is the nature of civic engagement.

Note: While this document describes the celebration of student-led civics projects, it is possible that Leagues can support these projects at the beginning and middle stages of the projects also. To see how local leagues can do that, see the **LWVMA School Civics Celebration Project Toolkit and the document Options For Local League Support of Student-led Civics Projects.**)

The Celebration Program Design consists of a local level project and state level showcase events for June 2024 that local League members can participate in.

STEP 1: THE LOCAL LEVEL – Invitations to schools should be initiated in late fall. Celebration events happen in May/June (Interested Schools will select option 1, option 2, or an alternative based on their readiness.

Option 1, Local Community Showcase: To celebrate the importance of the student-led civics projects completed by all students, we propose that local Leagues work collaboratively with school districts to design a community showcase for the student-led civics projects. The local League would **invite** schools to participate, and these events would only happen with school acceptance and collaboration. The purpose of the community showcase would be to appreciate the work that students have done and commend them for their exploration of community issues and ways to address them.

This community event would invite parents, local officials in elected or appointed positions, civic organizations, League members and other community influencers. The specific showcase implementation at each school district would be determined in collaboration with school staff. Students could be awarded certificates of civic engagement and local publicity highlighting student work would also be arranged. The showcase could be for Grade 8 and for high school projects. If the Grade 8 students are not a part of the high school, it could be a separate event for their schools. This could be done in person or virtually.

Option 2, Recognize a Few Projects: The school selects exemplary student projects, and those students for recognition. Recognition could take various forms. One possibility is to interview the students on a local cable access program or series of programs. Another possibility is to invite the students to a League meeting to discuss their projects. This approach may be more appealing to Leagues and schools that don't feel they have the time for a large event.

Note: We have found in our discussions with schools thus far, some of the schools are ready for Option 1, but others only feel ready for Option 2. Schools should select their preferred option, or suggest an alternative, which is option 3.

Option 3, An Alternative Option Designed by the School and the Local League:
Schools may have an idea for a customized option that they prefer and Local Leagues are encouraged to tailor celebrations to the school's preferences. For example, some schools choose to have individual classes present their project during a class period and invite League members in at that time to be an audience, to serve as a judge, or to simply give constructive feedback.

League Role –

- The state League will prepare a support package of resource material to help local Leagues collaborate with their local schools on this project. This material is located in the School Civics Celebration Project Toolkit on the LWVMA website.
- Local Leagues will be asked to reach out to schools containing Grade 8 and Grades 9-12 that they work with, to invite them to participate
- The state League will distribute through local Leagues information about the MCLC Civics Learning Week that will be held in March.
- All local Leagues will be asked to routinely distribute electronically, the MCLC Newsletter to the schools they work with. This will be distributed through the

civicsed@gmail.com Google Group and Leagues who wish to participate in these projects are asked to notify the LWVMA office that they wish to be placed on this group email list. Contact Lily Sweeterman, lsweeterman@lwvma.org

STEP 2: STATE REGIONAL SHOWCASES OF STUDENT WORK – Early June

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will offer three state regional showcase events for student civics projects. Additionally, Generation Citizen will continue to offer their showcase event for schools that work with the Generation Citizen curriculum model. The regional events will be held in western, central, and eastern Massachusetts. LWVMA members are encourage to volunteer to be community advisors at these state showcase events. In this role, we give students feedback on their projects, congratulate them on their work and serve as judges to recommend projects for awards. DESE will create an application process for schools to participate and for community advisors to volunteer.