

SEAL-EARNING UNIT

Unit 1: The Civics Capstone Through Youth and Government

Subject	Civics, Government, Research, Public Policy, Public Speaking
Grade Level	11-12 (10 with advisor approval)
Possible Seal Credit	New York Civics Capstone Project, 4 points (Civic Participation), if the Seal Committee accepts it. Rhode Island student-led civics project, if the district accepts it. Connecticut: may serve as the civic engagement project and as portfolio evidence of civics proficiency, where the district uses a portfolio.
Time Allotment	10 to 14 weeks, one 45-minute class or delegation meeting per week plus independent work. Designed to run September through the state conference.
Youth and Government Process Practiced	The whole legislative cycle on a real issue: constituent listening, legislative research, bill writing against the original law, memorandum of support, committee presentation, lobbying, testimony to real officials, and a public presentation.
The Capstone Standard	NYSED's sample capstone assignment (Handbook Appendix T) walks students through nine steps: identify a civic issue, analyze it with data and diverse perspectives, identify causes, generate alternative solutions, evaluate them (including costs and benefits), develop strategies that account for stakeholders, take informed action, reflect, and present. This unit maps each of those nine steps to a Youth and Government task and a piece of evidence.

Learning Objectives:

- ▶ Students will be able to select a civic issue with a real constituency, define it in measurable terms, and gather evidence from at least three types of sources, including people affected by it.
- ▶ Students will be able to locate the current law or policy that governs the issue, explain its history, and identify its gaps.
- ▶ Students will be able to generate and compare at least three solutions, including one that does not require a new law.
- ▶ Students will be able to write a bill in Youth and Government format that amends the real law, with a memorandum of support and a fiscal section.
- ▶ Students will be able to map stakeholders, communicate with at least two real officials or organizations, and record the responses.
- ▶ Students will be able to reflect on the project using the four civic readiness domains and present the project to an audience outside the class.

Materials:

- ▶ Handout: "Capstone Roadmap: Nine Steps, Nine Pieces of Evidence" (Supporting Document 1)

- ▶ Handout: "Issue Selection Form and Seal Committee Pre-Approval" (Supporting Document 2)
- ▶ Handout: "Evidence Log" (Supporting Document 3)
- ▶ Handout: "Stakeholder Map and Officials Contact Log" (Supporting Document 4)
- ▶ Handout: "Solutions Comparison Grid" (Supporting Document 5)
- ▶ Handout: "Reflection Prompts, Civic Readiness Domains" (Supporting Document 6)
- ▶ Handout: "Capstone Rubric" (Supporting Document 7)
- ▶ Youth and Government bill template and memorandum of support template (from Unit 2)
- ▶ Access to state law online (New York: the Laws of New York on the Senate or Assembly site; Connecticut: the General Statutes; Rhode Island: the General Laws), local codes, school policies, and census or state data portals

Pre-Planning:

- ▶ **Seal Committee first.** Before Week 1, the advisor confirms with the school's seal coordinator that this unit will be accepted as the Civics Capstone and gets the committee's own rubric if it has one. Attach it to the student's file.
- ▶ **Individual or team.** Teams of two or three may share research and the bill, but every student keeps an individual Evidence Log, Contact Log and Reflection, and presents.
- ▶ **Roles that help:** Lead Sponsor (presents in committee), Researcher (law and data), Outreach Lead (officials and stakeholders). Rotate the presenting role between the delegation and the conference.
- ▶ **Calendar check.** Mark the delegation bill deadline, the steering conference and the state conference. Steps 1 through 6 must finish before the bill deadline; Steps 7 through 9 continue through and after the conference.

▲ Phase One: Identify and Analyze (Weeks 1-3)

Week 1. Step 1, Identify the issue (45 minutes plus homework).

1. **(10 minutes) The test for a capstone issue:** It must affect real people the student can talk to; it must be governed by a law or policy that can be found and quoted; it must be something a student can act on this year. "Climate change" fails the test. "The town has no rule about idling buses outside the elementary school" passes.
2. **(20 minutes) Listening session plan:** Each student lists five people or groups affected by the issue they are considering and drafts three interview questions. Homework: hold at least three conversations before Week 2 and record them on the Evidence Log.
3. **(15 minutes) Issue Selection Form:** Draft the one-sentence issue statement, the constituency, and the law or policy involved. The advisor signs and forwards to the Seal Committee for pre-approval.

Week 2. Step 2, Analyze with data and diverse perspectives.

1. **(15 minutes) Source types:** Teach the three required source types: people affected (interviews, surveys), data (state or local statistics, school data, budget documents), and informed opinion (news, reports, officials, organizations on more than one side). Each student needs at least two of each.

2. **(25 minutes) Data hunt:** Students locate at least one quantitative source. Advisor models a state data portal search. Students log sources with a one-line note on what each shows.
3. **(5 minutes) Perspective check:** Each student names one person or group who would oppose their likely solution and commits to interviewing or reading them.

Week 3. Step 3, Identify root causes.

1. **(20 minutes) Five whys and the law:** For the issue, ask "why" five times, then ask at which "why" the law or policy enters. Students locate the governing law and complete an Original Law Worksheet (Unit 2, Supporting Document 1): citation, what it requires, when it was passed, what it does not cover.
2. **(20 minutes) Root cause memo:** One page: the issue, the evidence, the root causes, the gap in the law. Peer review in pairs for claims that lack a source.
3. **(5 minutes) Evidence Log check** by the advisor.

▲ Phase Two: Solutions and Strategy (Weeks 4-6)

Week 4. Step 4, Generate alternative solutions.

1. **(15 minutes) At least three:** A new or amended law; a change in how an existing law is enforced or funded; a non-legislative solution (a program, a partnership, an information campaign). Students draft all three in a sentence each.
2. **(25 minutes) Precedent search:** For each solution, find one place (another state, county, district or school) that has tried it, and what happened. Log it.
3. **(5 minutes) Pick the solution to carry forward**, and keep the other two for the Comparison Grid.

Week 5. Step 5, Evaluate with costs and benefits.

1. **(30 minutes) Solutions Comparison Grid:** For each of the three solutions: who benefits, who bears a cost, dollar cost (estimate with a source), feasibility within a year, unintended consequences, and who would oppose it. This grid becomes the Fiscal Implications and Justification sections of the bill.
2. **(15 minutes) Decision and defense:** Students write a paragraph defending the chosen solution against the strongest alternative.

Week 6. Step 6, Develop strategies that account for stakeholders.

1. **(20 minutes) Stakeholder Map:** List every affected party in four boxes: supports and powerful, supports and not yet powerful, opposes and powerful, opposes and not yet powerful. Name the officials with authority over the issue: a legislator, a council member, a school board member, an agency office.
2. **(20 minutes) Action plan:** Choose the actions for Phase Three: write the bill; submit it to the delegation and the conference; send the memorandum of support to the real sponsor or official; request a meeting or submit public comment; present to a community audience. Assign dates and owners.
3. **(5 minutes) Advisor sign-off on the action plan.**

▲ Phase Three: Take Informed Action (Weeks 7-11, through the conference)

Week 7. Step 7, Take informed action: write the bill and the memorandum.

Using the Youth and Government bill template, amend the actual law with underlines and strikeouts. Write the memorandum of support from the Comparison Grid. A peer does a Comptroller-style format check using the Seal of State Approval checklist (Storybook County Lesson 1, Writing a Bill). Submit to the delegation by its deadline.

Week 8. Delegation committee. The delegation hears the bill in full Youth and Government committee format (author's opening, technical questions, con and pro debate, summation, ranking). The student records the strongest con argument and the committee's ranking as evidence. Revise the bill.

Week 9. Reach the real decision makers. Each student sends the memorandum of support with a cover letter to at least two of: the state legislator for the district, the committee chair whose committee covers the topic, a local official, an agency, or an organization on the Stakeholder Map. Request a 15-minute meeting or a written response. Log every contact and response on the Officials Contact Log. Where a public comment period or a school board public comment slot exists, prepare and deliver two minutes of testimony.

Week 10. The conference. Present the bill in committee and, if ranked, in chamber. Lobby other delegations. Meet the Governor's Office if the bill reaches it. Collect evidence: the bill book page, the committee ranking, the chamber result, the Governor's action, photographs, the Press Corps coverage.

Week 11. Follow through. Reply to any official who answered. If the bill passed at the conference, send the result to the real sponsor with a note. If an official offered a meeting, take it. Update the Contact Log.

▲ Phase Four: Reflect and Present (Weeks 12-13)

Week 12. Step 8, Reflect. Students write a reflection of 750 to 1,000 words organized by the four civic readiness domains using Supporting Document 6, answering what they know now that they did not, what skills they used, how their view of participation changed, and what they would do next. Peer and advisor review.

Week 13. Step 9, Present. A 10-minute presentation with questions to the school's Seal (Civic Readiness) Committee, which NYSED requires for the capstone, and, where possible, a second audience such as a school board meeting, a YMCA board, a community organization or a public evening for families. The presentation covers the issue, the evidence, the alternatives considered, the action taken, the responses received, and the reflection. The advisor completes the rubric and submits the portfolio to the Seal Committee.

▲ Assessment: Capstone Rubric (100 points; see Supporting Document 7 for the scored version)

- **Issue and Evidence (Civic Knowledge, 20):** Issue is specific and real; governing law located and explained; at least two sources of each type; data used accurately.

- ▶ **Root Causes and Alternatives (Civic Skills and Actions, 15):** Root cause memo reasons from evidence; three real alternatives with precedents.
- ▶ **Evaluation and Strategy (Civic Skills and Actions, 15):** Comparison Grid complete with sourced cost estimates; Stakeholder Map names real people and offices.
- ▶ **The Bill and Memorandum (Civic Knowledge plus Civic Skills and Actions, 15):** Amends the actual law correctly; format complete; memorandum argues from the evidence.
- ▶ **Informed Action (Civic Experiences, 20):** Bill heard in delegation committee; at least two real officials or organizations contacted with responses logged; testimony or public comment delivered where available; conference participation documented.
- ▶ **Reflection (Civic Mindsets, 10):** All four domains addressed with specific examples; honest about what did not work.
- ▶ **Presentation (Civic Skills and Actions, 5):** Clear, within time, handled questions, audience outside the class.

Rhode Island criteria are built in: student led (Issue Selection Form), reasons from evidence (Evidence Log and Root Cause Memo), connects federal, state and local policy (Original Law Worksheet and Stakeholder Map).

▲ Differentiation:

- ▶ **Support:** Provide a short list of pre-vetted issues with the governing law already identified. Allow a two-person team to split the research and outreach. Replace the 750-word reflection with a recorded interview using the same prompts.
- ▶ **Challenge:** Require a survey instrument with at least 50 responses, a meeting (not just a letter) with an official, and a second audience for the presentation.

▲ Supporting Documents

1. Capstone Roadmap: Nine Steps, Nine Pieces of Evidence

1. Identify a civic issue. Evidence: Issue Selection Form, signed.
2. Analyze with data and diverse perspectives. Evidence: Evidence Log with two sources of each type.
3. Identify root causes. Evidence: Root Cause Memo and Original Law Worksheet.
4. Generate alternative solutions. Evidence: three solutions with precedents.
5. Evaluate solutions. Evidence: Solutions Comparison Grid.
6. Develop strategies for stakeholders. Evidence: Stakeholder Map and Action Plan.
7. Take informed action. Evidence: the bill, the memorandum, the delegation committee record, the Officials Contact Log with responses, testimony text, conference record.
8. Reflect. Evidence: reflection organized by the four domains.
9. Present. Evidence: presentation file, audience and date, rubric.

2. Issue Selection Form and Seal Committee Pre-Approval

Student: _____ Grade: _____ Advisor: _____ Delegation: _____



Issue, in one sentence: _____

Who is affected (the constituency I can talk to): _____

The law or policy that governs this issue (citation if known):

Why this issue, in two sentences: _____

Three people or groups I will interview first: _____

Team members, if any, and my role: _____

Advisor signature and date: _____ Seal Committee pre-approval, signature and date: _____ Points this project is eligible for: _____

3. Evidence Log

For each source: date, type (person affected, data, informed opinion), source name and citation, what it shows in one sentence, how I will use it. Minimum two per type.

Interviews: name, role, date, three key statements, permission to quote (yes or no).

4. Stakeholder Map and Officials Contact Log

Map: Four boxes. Supports and powerful. Supports and not yet powerful. Opposes and powerful. Opposes and not yet powerful. List names, titles and the reason each cares.

Officials with authority: State legislator(s) for the district. Committee with jurisdiction. Local official (council, board, agency). Organization(s) working on the issue.

Contact Log: Date, who, how (letter, email, meeting, public comment), what I sent or said, response received (quote or summary), follow-up owed. Minimum two contacts with responses; a non-response after two attempts counts if documented.

5. Solutions Comparison Grid

Columns: Solution A (law change), Solution B (enforcement or funding change), Solution C (non-legislative). Rows: What it does. Who benefits. Who bears a cost. Estimated cost and source. Feasible within one year. Unintended consequences. Likely opponents and their best argument. Precedent and result. My rating and reason.

6. Reflection Prompts, Civic Readiness Domains

Civic Knowledge: What do I know now about how this law or policy works that I did not know in September? Which source changed my understanding most?

Civic Skills and Actions: Which skills did I actually use (research, interviewing, writing law, speaking, negotiating, media)? Which was hardest, and what did I do about it?

Civic Mindsets: Where did I meet someone who disagreed with me, and what happened? Has my view of what one person can change shifted? How?

Civic Experiences: What did I do that I had never done before (contact an official, testify, present a bill, lobby)? What would I do next on this issue if the project continued?

7. Capstone Rubric (scored version)

Each row scored 4 (exceeds), 3 (meets), 2 (approaching), 1 (beginning), multiplied by the row weight. Rows: Issue and Evidence (x5), Root Causes and Alternatives (x3.75), Evaluation and Strategy (x3.75), Bill and Memorandum (x3.75), Informed Action (x5), Reflection (x2.5), Presentation (x1.25). Total 100. Meets this unit's capstone standard at



70 or above with no row below 2; the Seal Committee applies its own criteria. Advisor
signature: _____ Seal Committee signature: _____