



An Overview of Solutions Civics®

Education for 21st Century Citizen Leadership

Introduction: New citizen rights enacted at the onset of the 21st century, coupled with contemporaneous technological advances, give citizens the power to participate in their city governments' problem solving and decision making processes. Teaching students where and how they can bring their solutions to bear and how they can share their solutions with other cities across the country, enhances civic engagement and affords a more powerful, and therefore more compelling approach to civics education.

Definition: Solutions Civics® is a 10-hour curriculum component designed for inclusion in American History/Social Studies courses for high school students.

Purpose: Solutions Civics® teaches students “No Blame” problem solving, fostering mutual respect and civility, and giving them the opportunity to move beyond the role of civic spectator to become active and constructive citizen leaders capable of leaving their city and the country better than they found them.

Key Factors of Solutions Civics®:

1. Solutions Civics® is based on the core democratic value of service, which dates back to Athenian times when citizens who reached the age of maturity gathered in the city square and pledged to leave their community better than they found it – an important lesson for soon to be 18-year old graduates.
2. Unlike traditional civics education, Solutions Civics® offers “applied civics” education which teaches citizens leadership “beyond the ballot.”
3. Solutions Civics® teaches students about new 21st century laws and technology programs that give them the ability to participate in the decision-making of their city government and beyond.
4. Solutions Civics® training includes a hands-on local government problem solving project, affording students a concrete opportunity to practice the “No Blame” approach – useful preparation for becoming constructive civic leaders upon graduation.
5. Solutions Civics® is non-ideological. Students’ solutions must be: (a) “success based”, i.e., based on policies that have been proven to work in similar communities; (b) “cost effective”, i.e., budget neutral and preferably expense saving, and (c) beneficial to the community as a whole.
6. Solutions Civics® incorporates a broad array of skills training including: critical thinking, research, writing, public speaking, evaluation of information, civil discourse, media literacy, and substantive knowledge in subjects such as law and economics.
7. Solutions Civics® teaches students:
 - How to use technology to find proven solutions
 - How to employ media literacy in the search for solutions
 - How to obtain information about current government policies
 - How to use a No Blame approach to problem solving
 - How to craft cost effective, evidence-based solutions
 - How to use legal rights to advance solutions at government meetings
 - How to maintain a respectful, ongoing pursuit of progress toward the adoption of solutions

8. Solutions Civics© is compact and can be taught in 10 class hours, inclusive of the hands-on problem solving project, making it simple to incorporate in most high school American History/Social Studies courses.
9. Solutions Civics© comes complete with this “teachers’ toolkit” including among its many resources: a teachers’ training video; a text called “*The 21st Century Citizens Manual*” and 10-five minute video classes.

Overview with Recommended Class Sequencing and Reading Assignments

The Solutions Civics© classes set forth below are designed to fit within American History/Social Studies courses and include a hands-on project that teaches students a proven, no-blame problem-solving approach to local issues they decide are important. This current component is based on a whole course curriculum developed by the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education in partnership with the non-partisan, non-profit, The Citizens Campaign. The component model involves 10 hours of class time and includes a no-blame problem-solving project that is implemented concurrently within the 10 hours of class instruction. Lessons can be supplemented with a robust online curriculum comprised of 10 five minute video classes with downloadable notes available on The Citizens Campaign’s website.

Solutions Civics is now being taught district-wide in Newark, Perth Amboy, and Trenton and is being introduced in several other New Jersey districts and in the Philadelphia school district.

Solutions Civics© - 10-Class Outline including Class Materials

UNIT 1 – INTRODUCTION TO CITIZEN PROBLEM SOLVING

Historical foundation of service in democracy; the new laws and tech applications that empower 21st century citizen problem-solving service; the main arenas for problem solving principles and process.

Class 1- Introduce students to the essential democratic value of citizen service and the civic pledge taken by young citizens of ancient Athens to “leave their city better than they found it...” and teach the new legal and tech powers that elevate citizen problem solving in the 21st century. Discuss issues of interest to students that can be addressed on the local level.

Class 2 – Discuss the principles of no-blame problem solving: evidence-based, cost-effectiveness, benefit to community as a whole; Review 10-Step Project Guide and begin project by drilling down on local issues identified by students. Project will continue throughout the classes.

Class 3 – Students practice finding and developing solutions addressing the problem (includes exercise of legal power to obtain existing policy of the hometown on their issues of choice) and determine cost-effectiveness.

Unit 1 Materials:

Athenian/Civic Pledge; The 21st Century Citizens Manual, chapter 1, Citizen Power in the 21st Century; Chapters 2-4, Principles of No-Blame Problem Solving; chapter 5, The No-Blame Problem Solving Guide; the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) codified at NJSA 47:1A-1 et. seq., OPRA request form; Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) codified at NJSA 10:4 – 6 et. seq.

UNIT 2 – IMPLEMENTING THE PROCESS OF NO BLAME PROBLEM SOLVING

Class 4 – Learn and review the importance of Media Literacy in the search for solutions; Students learn to distinguish and evaluate sources of information in their research.

Class 5 – Preparing a Solution Presentation; Students learn how to use the information they have researched and collected about successful solutions and include such findings in a report and presentation to a local power center.

Class 6 – The Prime Decision-Making Arenas of Local Government; Students learn about the primary decision-making bodies of their local government (the council, school board and planning board) and determine the forum for presentation of their solution; learn local and presentation rules under the Open Public Meetings Act.

Class 7 – The Local Political Party – the “political arena” for problem solving; Students learn the power behind political parties and their legal rights to participate in party decision-making.

Class 8 – Powerful Roles for Citizen Problem Solvers: Non-elected leadership positions that provide opportunities to advance solutions.

Unit 2 Materials:

The 21st Century Citizens Manual chapter 6, Media Literacy in the Search for Solutions; chapter 7, The Four Power Centers; chapter 8, Powerful Roles for Citizen Problem Solvers; Political party district map; List of neighborhood representatives with vote totals; petition form to run for party representative (aka committee person or district leader); Local directory of appointed positions and application form.

UNIT 3 - PRESENTATION AND PURSUIT OF SUCCESSFUL SOLUTIONS

Class 9 - Presentations of solutions at mock government arenas in class or presentation by the class or class representatives of their solution to the chosen government power center.

Class 10 – Student development and discussion of their plans for the pursuit of adoption of their solutions.

Unit 3 Materials:

The 21st Century Citizens Manual chapters 3- 4, The Power of the No-blame Approach & Using the Strategy of No-blame Problem-Solving (presenting a solution for adoption and respectful pursuit to adoption); state and local OPMA rules for citizen input.