

Executive Summary  
**“Empowering Students Through Literacy”**

In order to affect change on the local, state and national level an informed citizenry is needed. The faculty of Huey Elementary, being members of greater Philadelphia, have concluded that this citizenship is lacking in our immediate community and as educational practitioners we are tasked to change that.

We recognize that in respect to civic life “knowledge is power,” and this knowledge is mediated through literacy skills. The ability to make informed decisions that reverberate through a diverse populace is predicated upon the ability to comprehend, analyze, and communicate literature. The national Common Core standards recognize this as well, and urge teachers to direct social studies teaching to include more literacy based instruction. In short, increasing informed civics engagement is only possible through an adept ability to read and write. In order to equip our students, we have collectively agreed upon the following goal:

**To actively increase the civics education and engagement of Huey Elementary students through project based activities that incorporate Common Core literacy standards.**

**Data Collection and Analysis:**

Our team collected data through an online survey of all 9 English and Social Studies teachers at Huey Elementary School. A focus group of 60 students from grades six through eight was also conducted.

Through extensive analysis of survey responses, we concluded the following from our teachers:

- They feel students have a weak understanding of all levels of government and they feel powerless to have an impact in their communities.
- They believe students do not have the literary skills necessary for interpreting, analyzing, or evaluating texts, which hinders their ability to become engaged and discerning community members.
- All teachers would appreciate more collaboration in lesson planning and strategies.

Through extensive analysis of focus-group responses, we concluded the following from our students:

- They feel disconnected from any form of government.
- They have little or no understanding of how laws are debated or passed.
- They would prefer more interesting projects or activities in addition to the current curriculum.

**Conclusion:**

Students at Huey Elementary would benefit from a project based civics program steeped in research and analysis that incorporated strategies to strengthen their literacy. The project would need full support of staff members, particularly English and Social Studies teachers.

**Proposal:**

A mandatory civics inquiry project where students in grades 6, 7 and 8 will focus on city, state or national government issues respectively. The projects will be supported by community resources and will incorporate elements from our current Social Studies curriculum as well as Common Core literacy standards. The programs will run concurrently enabling all students to benefit from on-site activities such

as guest speakers, educational movies and research strategies.

**Essential Questions:**

6th Grade - How can I become an informed engaged citizen of my community?

7th Grade - How can I become an informed engaged citizen of my state?

8th Grade - How can I become an informed engaged citizen of my country?

**Long-term Goal:** (Student-based)

By the end of the 2014-15 school year, students will have an increased understanding of civics and feel empowered to affect change.

**Short-term Goals:**

1. Students will be familiarized with and regularly using three specific literacy strategies, in order to aid their understanding and analysis of informational texts in social studies
2. Students will learn and practice research skills in coordination with the Philadelphia Library
3. By March, students will be able to research social studies literature using common research techniques as determined by departmental rubric.

**Long-term Goal:** (Teacher-based)

By the end of the 2014-2015, Social Studies teachers will be better equipped to use literacy skills and strategies to inform and enhance civics instruction.

**Short term goals:**

1. By end of September, teachers will have been trained on the use of three specific literacy strategies to use in their social studies instruction
2. Throughout the school year, literacy and social studies teachers of grades 6-8 will collaborate during grade-group meetings regarding the literacy strategies, skills, and progress among students
3. By the end of February, social studies teachers will have established partnerships with various community resources to aid civics instruction and student learning
4. By the end of March, teachers will be able to evaluate student projects in order to assess the students' overall understanding, levels of engagement, and improvement in analytical writing.

Our proposal also includes procedures for monitoring at the teacher and administrative levels, on going as well as concluding evaluation protocols, reflection and revision schedules and plans for an end of the year celebration.

**Community Resources:**

Our plan includes partnerships with various resources located in the West Philadelphia Community. These purposefully chosen resources will enhance our students' learning experiences, grounding them in real-world, problem based learning and action.

**60th Street Business Association**

A nonprofit organization, which seeks to rehabilitate the West Philadelphia community by improving and supporting local businesses. Dedicated to economic development and empowerment, this establishment will provide our students with authentic learning opportunities for community action.

Representative Vanessa Lowery Brown

Our partnership with Rep. Brown of the 190th Legislative District will provide our students with a direct and local connection to state government. In addition, this resource will serve as a way for students to learn first-hand about government procedures and policies, laws, and civil action.

William L. Sayre High School

Our plan incorporates a partnership with our corresponding secondary school in order to give middle school students the opportunity to share experiences in civic service as well as research with high school seniors. As Sayre seniors work to complete their Senior Research and Service-Learning Project, they will serve as mentors for our 8th graders at Huey.