Starting in the 2020 school year, all Massachusetts students will complete a **non-partisan, student-led civics project** in Grade 8 and again during high school.These projects are rooted in *action civics*—a process of applying civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions to identify, research, and address community issues.

The [2018 History and Social Science Frameworks](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html) along with Chapter 296,[*An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement*](https://malegislature.gov/laws/sessionlaws/acts/2018/chapter296), renewed the civic mission of a history and social science education in Massachusetts: to prepare students to be thoughtful and active citizens. Student-led civics projects support the the development of **civic knowledge**, **skills**, and **dispositions** that are necessary for informed civic participation**:**

**Civic dispositions** include respect for others, commitment to equality, capacity for listening, and capacity for communicating in ways accessible to others, including engaging with a variety of points of view and ideas in civil discourse.

***What values, virtues, and behaviors do I need to embody in order to be civically engaged?***

Core **civic knowledge** relates to civics and government, economics, geography, and history, including the rights and responsibilities established by the Constitution and how to exercise them in local, state, and national government.

***What do I need to know about government to be civically engaged?***

Intellectual and participatory **civic skills** encompass the ability to identify, assess, interpret, describe, analyze and explain matters relating to civic life, knowing how to make and support arguments using logical reasoning, and the ability to use the political process to take *informed action*.

***What do I need to be able to do in order to be civically engaged?***

**Defining Student-Led Civics Projects**

#### Project Basics:

* ***All students*** *in grade 8 and all high school students* (at any point in grades 9-12) will be provided as least one non-partisan, student led project per the [legislation.](https://malegislature.gov/laws/sessionlaws/acts/2018/chapter296)
* Projects can be individual, small group or whole class; students have the option to complete a project indivudally.
* Issues and actions can vary greatly, but the key characteristics and six stages remain consistent.
* Teachers design time frame for implementation, which may be modular, unit-based, interdisiplinary/cross-content, semester long, etc.

A product of Chapter 296, student-led civics projects are meant to give students a chance to apply all the civic knowledge and skills they gained throughout their K-8 study of history and social science. Students complete the real work of engaged, informed participants in a democracy by *identifying issues and advocating for change in their communities*. For example, students may identify substance abuse as an issue in their community and after extensive research, decide to advocate to create a meaningful drug prevention program in their school.

All projects will embody the key characteristics and six stages described in the [Civics Project Guidebook](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html). This tool helps educators plan for and execute the projects. Visit DESE’s [current frameworks page](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html) to download the Civics Proejct Guidebook, which includes key considerations for districts, resources for teachers, sample competencies for assessing projects, examples of actions and goals, and case studies from the field with embedded professional development protocol.

**Six Stages of Civic Action**

While the issues and actions students decide to   
pursue will be unique to each project, all projects follow **six stages**. What makes this different than   
a research project isthe process of developing a  
 theory of action, and then taking action to   
specifically address the root cause of their issue,   
either by seeking to influence *public opinion* or   
*policy***.** District and school leaders, teachers, local officials, and families should explore the six stages  
in order to better understand the parameters of   
the project. **See pages 36-56 of the Civics Project Guidebook** for goals, guiding questions, and   
resources for each stage.

**Key Characteristics**

High-quality civics projects are defined by  
 the following key characteristics:

* **Student-led**
* **Project-based**
* **Real-world**
* **Rooted in an understanding of systems   
  impact**
* **Goal-driven**
* **Inquiry-based**
* **Non-partisan**
* **Process-focused**

**See pages 12-19 of the Civics Project Guidebook** to learn more about each characteristic.

**Sample Focus Issues and Actions**

Students may choose mental health as their focus issue and decide to advocate for the city to make   
a user-friendly app that allows young people to   
search for mental health services. Students   
focusing on education may decide to advocate   
for a bill that promotes physical education in   
schools. Students with vaping as the focus issue   
may create a peer education program or   
implement a vape “buy back” program in their   
town. **See pages 57-79 of the Civics Project   
Guidebook to see more examples.**