[date]

Dear [legistor's name]

I am writing to share some information about how to support the implementation of the required student-led civics projects in Grade 8 and high school. Our students have already begun engaging with the project process this year, and I’d like to provide some details about one way you might expect to hear from them.

According to Chapter 296, [*An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement*](https://malegislature.gov/laws/sessionlaws/acts/2018/chapter296), passed in 2018, all Massachusetts students are required to be provided anon-partisan, student-led civics projectin 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. Through the [six-stage project process](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/civics-project-guidebook/index.html#/lessons/0sggGFWN2sG8OoQXXaL67lPtLUdwkuEx), students complete the real work of engaged, informed participants in a democracy by identifying issues and advocating for change in their communities. In the past, for example, a group of students reached out to their state representative with a bill proposal for expanding excused absences from school to include mental health days. During [Stage 5: Taking Action](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/civics-project-guidebook/index.html#/lessons/ucNl-f-sOvwEfOQcAUODwfAu95xwsNjB), students will engage in outreach to key decision makers in an effort to bring about their desired goals.

For those advocating for state-level change, you may hear from your student constituents as one of their identified key decision makers given your work and role as a legislator. As such, I have included some responses to frequently asked questions to help you consider how best to respond to their inquiries and support students' learning.

I know you are very busy, and, on behalf of our students, want to thank you for the time that you and your staff devote to responding to project-related outreach from students throughout this year. Your support of our students - both with this project and beyond - is invaluable to their learning.

Best,

[name, title, email, school district]

Attachment: Frequently Asked Questions: Civics Project Outreach and Response Guidance

# **Frequently Asked Questions: Civics Project Outreach & Response Guidance**

**Why might students reach out to our office about their projects?**

Through the [six-stage action civics project process](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/civics-project-guidebook/index.html#/lessons/0sggGFWN2sG8OoQXXaL67lPtLUdwkuEx), students complete the real work of engaged, informed participants in a democracy by *identifying issues and advocating for change in their communities*. This includes identifying an issue of importance to them and their community, conducting research on that issue to make an informed action plan, taking action, and reflecting and showcasing their work. During [Stage 5: Taking Action](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/civics-project-guidebook/index.html#/lessons/ucNl-f-sOvwEfOQcAUODwfAu95xwsNjB), students will engage in outreach to decision makers in an effort to gain support for their desired goals. For students advocating for state-level change in the form of new or amended laws, their state legislator and their aides are key decision makers.

**What issues might students reach out about?**

Project issues can vary greatly because students select their focal issue based on what is important to them and their community. For example, while one student might reach out related to school lunches, another might reach out related to access to mental health resources. Part of the project process is helping students learn more about how to take action, and you may receive communication from students about issues that fall outside of the legislator's locus of control. If that happens, please consider supporting their learning by sharing more about your role as their legislator and why the issue or action they are asking you to take is outside of your locus of control.

**How should I expect to hear from students?**

Students will most likely reach out via email; however, they are encouraged to also reach out via telephone. Teachers can organize the project process for students to complete individually, in small groups, or as a whole class; so, you may receive communications signed from individual students, a few students, or an entire class. Given that all students in eighth grade and in high school are required to be provided a project each school year, you may receive multiple emails from students/groups of students, each related to a different project.

**How can I best support students who reach out to me?**

Just as legislators enjoy hearing from their constituents, students enjoy hearing from their legislators. Any support you are able to provide in response to project inquiries would be invaluable to developing students' understanding of how to take informed civic action. For example, support might come in the form of responding to their email, connecting for a video or phone call, or even helping them to understand that given your role and work you're not best positioned to help them take action. If you receive an email or phone call from a student/group of students outside of your district, it is OK to redirect them to their representative or senator.

It is possible that a student's plan for taking action or the legislative timeline for taking action may run past the end of the school year, and that is OK. Even if you aren't able to help them with everything they ask for or the timeline is slower than fits into their project, any information and engagement you are able to offer is invaluable to students learning more about the action civics process.

**Where can I go if I want to learn more about student-led civics projects?**

You can check out DESE's [Civics Project Guidebook](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/civics-project-guidebook/index.html#/), [Civics Project Quick Reference Guide](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.doe.mass.edu%2Fframeworks%2Fhss%2Fcivics-qrg.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK), [History and Social Science homepage](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/), and Chapter 296, [*An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement*](https://malegislature.gov/laws/sessionlaws/acts/2018/chapter296).