

ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL LOCAL GOVERNMENT CURRICULA

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Title: “Take that, you Swine!” An application of current events to the role of local government.

Theme: The application of a current event and the government’s role at each level (local, state, national) to illustrate one of the purposes of government—the promotion of the common good.

GLCE:

C3 Structure and Functions of Government

Explain that governments are structured to serve the people. Describe the major activities of government, including making and enforcing laws, providing services and benefits to individuals and groups, assigning individual and collective responsibilities, generating revenue, and providing national security.

Materials: Handout A

Advanced Preparation: locate via the Internet, an informative article or two on the HiN1 virus. The article(s) should contain basic information as to why it is sometimes referred to as the Swine Flu, its symptoms, the impact that it has had, why it is referred to as a pandemic, etc.) Additionally, if available, prepare ahead of time, a few newspaper articles of the role that local government has played in your community (again, if any) with regard to the spread of the virus.

Methodological procedures:

This unit will take approximately 4 class periods.

Day #1 (Approx. lesson time: 25 minutes.)

Review with students the seven purposes of government from the previous lesson titled, “Local Government’s Piece of the Pie.”

Explain to students that through this next lesson the focus will specifically be on the government’s purpose of **promoting the common good**. This will be illustrated through their research and response to a current event that has the potential to impact each of them in some way. The current event used to illustrate this purpose will be the increasing number of confirmed H1N1 cases (commonly referred to as The Swine Flu) throughout the nation.

Place students in small groups and distribute an information article about the H1N1 virus. (The purpose of this article is to provide students with correct background information on the virus so that students can all work with a common understanding of the virus, its symptoms, how it is spread, precautions, etc. Therefore the article that you find should have basic information about the virus.)

Have students jigsaw the article—that is break the article down into smaller pieces and report to the others in their group specific information about the virus. (Provide questions about the article that students are to answer as they work in small groups. For example, how does the virus spread, what are the characteristics of the virus, can it be prevented, etc.) The purpose of this exercise is to be sure that there are no misconceptions about the basic information about the virus and to be sure that all the members of the group have a clear understanding of the information that they have read. Debrief the jigsaw activity as a whole class when groups have completed the jigsaw tasks.

Assessment activity: after the group debrief has occurred, ask each student to write a 3 or 4 sentence response to the following prompt, **Should the government “step in” and take a firmer approach to the prevention of the further spread of the H1N1 virus?** (Be sure to have students clearly state their position, provide a specific example when explaining their rationale, and thoroughly explain how any action or lack thereof will promote the common good.) This will prepare students for the following day’s activity.

Day #2: Research day. (Approximate lesson time: one hour if using computer lab with students; shorter if teacher pulls articles ahead of time.)

The day should begin with a collection of student responses followed by a brief discussion about whether or not it is the government’s responsibility to promote the common good and whether or not the common good would be promoted by government action as a response to the spread of the H1N1 virus. Have students discuss what they think the government could do to help citizens from falling susceptible to the virus.

Divide the class into small groups of approximately 3-4 students in each group. Ask one third of the groups to research what the response of the federal government has been to the H1N1 pandemic. These groups should focus on the role that the World Health Organization (WHO) has played with regard to the pandemic and what the U.S. government’s response has been and what action has been taken by the federal government. Ask another third of the groups to research what the response of the state government has been to the H1N1 pandemic. These groups should focus the role that statewide agencies have played with regard to the spread of the virus. Finally, the final third of the groups should research the role that local government has played with regard to the spread of the virus. This would include county agencies like health departments or other entities like city governments or townships. Groups should be prepared to share the following day what overall research results revealed.

(Please note: if students need practice with technological research skills, a computer lab situation would be beneficial but is not required since many newspapers or on-line articles could be compiled and used just as effectively.)

Students will then present their findings to the class.

Instruction Note: During this activity examples of the purposes of government that are found by students can be illustrative at the local, state, or national level. It is during the following lesson where the analysis as to how the purposes actually “play out” differently at the various levels of government will be emphasized.

Day #3: (Approx. lesson time: 45 minutes)

This lesson is divided into 2 parts:

- 1) Student work groups from Day #2 will present some of their findings with regard to the role that the government has played at all three levels. A visual should be drawn on the board as groups are sharing to illustrate for students how each level of government is involved with this particular current event.

After presentations have been concluded the following questions can lead class discussion and help students make the connection that the purpose of the promotion of the common good was the unifying impetus for three levels of government. Some questions to ask students might include:

- Do you think any of the three levels of government should be doing more to further prevent the spread of this virus? Why? Less? Why?
 - Are there actions that you found that you think should or could occur at another level of government?
 - Which level of government action do you think impacts citizens the most? Why?
- 2) Now that students have a clear picture of federalism in action through a current event that can impact them, have them focus on the role that the local government plays with regard to a current event such as this one. Divide students into groups of approximately 4-5 students. Provide each group with copies of Handout A—newspaper article, **“County Proclaims Local Emergency in Response to Pandemic H1N1 Flu Virus.”** Upon reading the article, each group should answer the following questions through group discussion:
- What are some of the benefits to the action that this County Board of Supervisors took? What might be some of the drawbacks?
 - What was the rationale that the Board used in making their decision?
 - How is the Board’s action seen as promoting the common good?
 - Do you think that a similar action might be taken by a local entity in the area in which you live (either at the city, township, or county level)? How might similar actions impact you personally?

Day #4: (Approx. lesson time: 20-25 minutes)

This is a period of wrap up through group discussion. Students will participate in a teacher-facilitated group discussion centered on the sharing of opinions and small group discussions that occurred the previous day. The questions that students grappled with the day before can also be used to facilitate the class discussion.

Assessment: Students should prepare a written response to the following prompt: “Had you been a member of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, would you have voted in favor of declaring a local emergency in response to the H1N1 Pandemic in your county?” In your response be sure to include the following:

- A clearly stated position.
- Reasons for your position.
- A thorough explanation as to how your decision would promote the common good.
- An acknowledgement of an alternative viewpoint and reasons why the viewpoint is not valid.

Available downloads:

Handout A—newspaper article, “County Proclaims Local Emergency in Response to Pandemic H1N1 Flu Virus”