

# Becoming an Informed Student Activist in Texas

**Learning Objectives:** Students will...

1. Evaluate the importance for being informed and attentive to issues within Texas
2. Understand who is currently serving office within the Texas Government
3. Explain and provide examples of some bills that are currently being proposed in the 86th Texas Legislative Session
4. Discuss and promote the bills that they have identified as being important through meetings with Texas Legislature representatives and/or social media campaigns.

**Grade Level/Course:** Suggested grade level: 12th grade Government/8th Grade US History - throughout the lesson there are suggestions for high school and middle school activities that can be adapted to any curriculum. All the activities can be modified or adjusted to meet the needs of the learner in any classroom.

**Class Periods:** 2-3 periods depending on scheduling.

**Prior learning:** Students will have completed a previous lesson explaining/evaluating what civic responsibility and civic duty are and the difference between the 2. Students will have also studied the US and Texas Constitution and have an understanding of how a bill becomes a law.

**Standards:** (TEKS)

(14) Citizenship. The student understands the difference between personal and civic responsibilities. The student is expected to:

(C) understand the responsibilities, duties, and obligations of citizenship such as being well informed about civic affairs, serving in the military, voting, serving on a jury, observing the laws, paying taxes, and serving the public good;

(15) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of voluntary individual participation in the U.S. constitutional republic. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze the effectiveness of various methods of participation in the political process at local, state, and national levels;

(20) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;

(B) create a product on a contemporary government issue or topic using critical methods of inquiry;

(C) analyze and defend a point of view on a current political issue;

(E) evaluate government data using charts, tables, graphs, and maps

### Essential Questions:

- What does it mean to be an informed student activist?
- Who is currently in office within the Texas Legislature?
- What role does the Governor and Lieutenant Governor serve in the legislative process in Texas?
- How can I examine and promote what bills are being proposed in the Texas Legislature?

### Materials:

- Who's in the current Texas Legislature? - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uzU3C56mF4Xb4ImEwrXmuEm7SV1IbbJR/view?usp=sharing> (I went ahead and uploaded this document to google but I created it as an editable pdf file. If needed I can attach it directly to the lesson for sharing)
- Bills of the 87th Legislature [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1O26o3\\_BpUIrsNhI6wM1feSUWaIEkVNAtzHxeVxIQ3S4/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1O26o3_BpUIrsNhI6wM1feSUWaIEkVNAtzHxeVxIQ3S4/edit?usp=sharing)

### Resources:

- <https://legiscan.com/TX>
- <https://teachthevote.atpe.org/Take-Action/Resources>
- <https://tlc.texas.gov/docs/legref/legislativeprocess.pdf> - The Legislative Process by the Legislative Council
- This site is tracking different Bills - <https://progresstexas.org/blog/bills-we%E2%80%99re-watching-2021-texas-legislative-session>
- Background articles that might be helpful
  - <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2021/01/10/our-legislative-agenda-for-the-87th-texas-legislature/>
  - <https://www.texastribune.org/topics/87th-legislative-session/>
  - <https://www.click2houston.com/news/politics/2020/12/28/10-bills-to-watch-in-2021-texas-legislative-session/>
  - <https://thetexan.news/16-pre-filed-bills-worth-watching-as-the-87th-legislative-session-approaches/>
  - About policy issues for PTA Rally Day in Texas - <https://youtu.be/KBrRhbT6N7w>

Vocabulary: citizen, session, Legislature, bill, proposed, composition, incumbent, active citizenship,

### Teaching Strategy:

Engage: Students will be examining who makes up the Texas Legislature and what bills have been proposed in the 86th Texas legislative session.

- Begin class with a warm-up activity - Students respond to the questions, “What’s the difference between civic duties and civic responsibilities? Can people under age 21 make a real impact on society? For example, can they be instrumental in changing laws or policies on issues they care about? How? What examples from the past or present can you think of to support your opinion?” - give students 5 minutes to provide a written response then participate in a think, pair, share activity with a neighbor. When

students have been given adequate time to discuss these questions with a neighbor then hold a whole class discussion and ask a few groups to share their responses.

- Questions to ask the whole group - Did they have similar conclusions? Did you like your partner's answers more than your own?
- Middle School adaptation - First students respond to the questions, “What are a person's responsibilities in a society? What do you think civic responsibility means? Can people under age 21 make a real impact on society? Can you think of any examples?” students should answer the questions on their own and then participate in a think, pair, share with a partner. And finish with a large group discussion. Afterwards students could create a simple bumper sticker promoting a slogan to encourage student activism.

### Lesson Cycle:

- Students will examine who makes up the Texas Legislature using the handout provided. Depending on the age/ability level of your students there are multiple options to have students collect this data.
  - Research on their own or in groups of 2 - The teacher could post the following websites for students to access to research the data.
    - [https://ballotpedia.org/Texas\\_State\\_Legislature](https://ballotpedia.org/Texas_State_Legislature)
    - <https://legdir.capitol.texas.gov/about.aspx>
  - Jigsaw method - the class could be broken up into 3 groups with each group being responsible for a section of the chart. Give students 15 minutes to complete their section and then come back together as a whole class and have groups present the information they collected as well as post it on a projected google document that the other students can use to record the information on their own chart.
  - Whole class activity - teacher leads the students through the chart. Students are responsible for using the web links to find the information together and then share as a whole class while the teacher records it on a projected chart.
  - When complete as a class evaluate the information that was collected on the chart. Could show students where the Senators and House members sit while in chamber, [https://senate.texas.gov/\\_assets/pdf/86FloorChart.pdf](https://senate.texas.gov/_assets/pdf/86FloorChart.pdf) & <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/houseReports/seatingChart.pdf>
  - Hold a discussion with students about what they are finding as they research the Texas Legislature. Allow students to preview the questions and have a discussion with an elbow partner first and then after 10 minutes hold a class wide discussion. Guided question suggestions:
    - Did you know previously who is Governor of Texas? What do you know about him?
    - How would they define the ethnic makeup of the Texas House? Texas Senate?
    - Do you think that will have an impact that will have on what bills get passed?
    - How many members are women?
    - Why is the Lieutenant Governor an important role in the Texas Legislature?
    - Is there anything else you want to learn about the Texas Legislature?
- Students examine 3 bills that have been proposed this legislative session. One will be done as a class to model the activity and students are to work alone or in pairs to research 2 more Depending on the ability level of your students you could have them research 3 on their own. Use the following website to

access all the bills proposed in the current Legislative session -

<https://capitol.texas.gov/Search/TextSearch.aspx> or <https://capitol.texas.gov/Search/BillSearch.aspx>

Another great site is <https://legiscan.com/TX>

- Before students start their research you will need to work with students to identify what issues they want to focus on. So first - Ask students to respond to the following question, “What issues are you currently concerned about in Texas?” (education, gun control, custody issues, etc.) Ask students to identify 3. - students respond in think, pair, share first and then after 5 minutes have a class discussion to see if there are any commonalities between the students. Have the class vote on 1 topic that you will look at as a class to preview how to complete the activity on their own.
  - Middle School idea - post a large piece of chart paper on the wall and write “Issues that concern me” at the top. Give each student their own sticky note and give them five minutes to write 3 issues on the sticky note and place them on the chart paper. Hold a discussion about the issues the students provided. And have the students vote on which issues they want to research as a class.
- Lead the class in researching 1 bill from the Texas legislative site. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the State Legislature website. I have provided 2 links. The first is easier to use because you can search for key terms.
- Students will research 2 of their own topics from the list of issues they identified in the last activity and search the state’s legislative website to research what bills have been proposed based on that issue.
- Extension activity - students choose 1 one of the bills and research at the Federal level to see if similar bills have been proposed.
  - Another idea would be for student identify an issue that is relevant to them and create an original bill
- Students engage in active civil participation by:
  - Contacting their representatives through social media to find out where they stand on the bills and issues that are important to the student. Research what committees their representatives are on and what bills they will be looking and reviewing this legislative session.
    - House committees listing - <https://capitol.texas.gov/Committees/Committees.aspx?Chamber=H>
    - Senate committees listing - <https://capitol.texas.gov/Committees/CommitteesMbrs.aspx?Chamber=S>
  - Attending Rally Day and students will plan on speaking with their representatives about the bills and issues that they have researched through this assignment.
    - Be an informed citizen! Make a poster supporting your ideas to take with you to Rally day. Come prepared with questions to ask the representatives. Make a list of the representatives you want to meet and talk to. Be sure to be up to date on the bills you are interested in discussing or any other current issues you want to discuss, check to see if the bill is in committee or has it been voted on.
  - Use a social media campaign to promote the Bills that you want to get passed. Make sure you are thoughtful in your posts. Cite sources that you reference and check that all of your facts are

correct and up to date. Use your social media platforms, ie Snapchat, twitter, facebook to promote the Bill you want to get passed.

- Use this site to set notifications so you get alerts and information on all the bills you are interested in <https://capitol.texas.gov/MnuMyTLO.aspx> This will help you stay informed for the social media campaign.
- Middle School Engagement Activity - Students create posters representing magazine covers that reflect the issue or Bill that they want to promote.
  - Each Magazine cover will need:
    - a current magazine name as a title - Time, Newsweek, etc
    - A large heading and image to represent the issue or Bill. Image could be symbolic of the issue or bill.
    - Articles listed on the magazine cover will represent main ideas or topics connected to the issue or Bill
    - Should resemble the cover of a magazine
    - Use of color is encouraged and the product is neat and legible