

# So You Have Issues—Now What?: Policy Explorations



This guide links the *So You Have Issues—Now What?* unit to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for ninth and tenth graders. *So You Have Issues—Now What?* is a social studies unit that allows students to study important policy issues that have local, state, and national implications. *So You Have Issues—Now What?* also has interdisciplinary connections to English Language arts. For example, students write in a variety of forms and prepare, organize, and present informative and persuasive messages, as addressed in the English Language Arts and Reading TEKS. The task also uses probability models to describe everyday situations involving chance, as covered in the Mathematics TEKS. The following document includes the applicable TEKS and the details of the *So You Have Issues—Now What?* unit. The asterisks indicate the TEKS that are testable on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The final section of this document presents the applicable Texas College and Career Readiness Standards adopted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) on January 24, 2008.

## Description of Unit

Students will begin by exploring an issue of relevance within the local community, such as school board elections, water conservation, or public funding of campaigns. As a class, they will explore the issue and make a recommendation to the proper governmental body. Then students—as a class or in groups—will choose a national, state, or local policy issue to investigate. Even though the issue they choose to investigate focuses on one level of government, they will examine how it impacts others. They will consider pros and cons, as well as costs of various solutions. The exploration will culminate in a class debate.

After this task, students will participate as informed stakeholders in the policy-making process. Students will also understand that policies are developed at various levels of government and become familiar with the rules for policy implementation.

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## Goals

Students will meet these goals in their explorations:

- Develop the essential skills of logical thinking, creative problem solving, intellectual risk taking, and communicating
- Ask questions and explore theories
- Have opportunities to generate new ideas
- Gain awareness of the ways in which policies can be argued and/or promoted
- Become familiar with the steps behind the scenes which lead to revisions of policies at the local, state or national level

## Phase I. Learning Experiences

1. Introduce the concept of policy and the idea that policies can be created at many levels of government (local, state, and national). Examine different areas where policies are needed (e.g., political campaigns, resource conservation, homeland security, immigration).
2. Identify a policy issue that is currently under consideration. You may wish to have the students choose a local issue that is being debated in your community. Students should be divided into at least two groups that have differing opinions on the issue.
3. Explore the policy. Use these questions to have a class brainstorming session:
  - What are the pros and cons?
  - What are the costs?
  - How do different groups feel about the issue?
  - How does the policy look at the different levels (e.g., local, state, national)? How is the policy similar across levels?
  - What is the difference in laws that are legislated and rules for the laws' implementation?
  - What role do ethics play in making and enacting laws?
4. Hold a class discussion about the varying points of view which members of each group hold about the chosen issue. Each group should examine:
  - How they will research the issue so as to persuade others towards their point of view;
  - Who they will need to consult to provide expert information on the subject;
  - Which publications they will need to consult for support and details;
  - Who will be the target audience of the surveys they will conduct in order to bolster their case;
  - What questions will need to be asked in a focus group format;
  - Who should be invited into a focus group meeting, and
  - Where cost information can be found.

5. Research the issue by conducting interviews, focus groups, and surveys, as well as researching the topic in current publications.
6. Hold a debate about the policy issue, which should include unscripted audience questions.
7. Determine the most appropriate decision-making or administrative body and evaluate the effectiveness of policy implementation at the various levels. Write a letter to the appropriate audience. Students should present their research-based recommendations to the appropriate governing body (e.g., the school district, city council, or other organization).

## Phase II. Independent Research

### A. Research process

1. Selecting a topic. Each student chooses an issue of international, national, state, or local significance (e.g., immigration, environment, gas policy, homeland security, natural disasters, stem cell research, Internet piracy). The issue should be of interest to the student.
2. Asking guiding questions. Once the student has selected a policy issue, he/she should develop questions around the issue while assuming the role of a politician or policy maker: what would you need to know about an issue? He/she should think of three to five guiding questions, such as:
  - Are there problems with the current policy?
  - What are the costs associated with various solutions/changes?
  - How long would the changes take to implement?
  - What is the breakdown among opinions of constituents?
  - How would the various constituents be affected by the proposed changes?
  - What are the benefits that will result from each solution?
  - What are some ways in which the policy might need to be changed in the future?

While these examples are general, the student's questions should be specific to the chosen policy issue. The questions should lead him/her to form individual research-based opinions. The student should develop a hypothesis or some possible answers to the questions.

3. Designing and submitting a research proposal. The student should include numerous components in the research proposal:
  - The policy to research
  - Three to five guiding questions he/she will investigate, and hypotheses
  - The five most important things to know
  - Strengths and weaknesses of current policies governing the issue
  - Primary and secondary resources he/she will need to find answers to his/her questions
  - The appropriate decision-making body (e.g., district, city, state, national, international)
  - Consideration of multiple perspectives and how the policy would affect different groups

4. Conducting the research. After you have approved student proposals, students begin using the resources they have identified and others they may encounter. Students should contact a policymaker or advocate connected to the issue of choice as part of their research process.
5. Drawing conclusions. Each student should make a list of recommendations or solutions for the policy problem. Then he/she should develop a budget for the recommended solution for the policy issue.

## B. The product

The student shows what he/she has learned through **one** of the following products:

1. A policy memo. The memo should include a cost-benefit analysis and any proposed recommendations or solutions.
2. A public relations campaign. The campaign should feature the student's solution to the policy problem. The student should incorporate appropriate background information and analysis. The campaign can include various components, such as an oral explanation, PowerPoint, brochure, short video for a television commercial, webpage design, article or ad taken out in a newspaper or magazine.
3. Implementation plan. The student should develop a plan for implementing the proposed policy and what it would look like in practice. Each plan should include projections about the effects of the policy solution in ten years.
4. A legislative bill. The student should write the language for a bill that includes the realization of the student's policy recommendations or solutions.

## C. Communication

The student communicates what he/she has learned in **one** of the following ways. These communication options are aligned with product options 1-4:

1. A briefing speech that a staffer would make to a policymaker and team.
2. A conversation between a lobbyist and policymaker.
3. A presentation that a project manager would make to introduce a new policy that the staff needs to implement.
4. A speech that a policymaker would make to the policymaking body. The speech should persuade other legislators to vote for the bill.

In a period of no more than 15 minutes, students present their ideas, engaging other students in the content of their work. Audience members should ask unscripted questions for the student to answer.

## D. A completed project consists of:

1. The research proposal, including guiding questions

2. A research log, note cards, or resource process sheets
3. Transcript from interview
4. The product
5. A Works Cited Page
6. A videotape or audiotape of the presentation, including the unscripted Q&A session

## Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

The unit may address the following TEKS:

### English Language Arts and Reading:

#### English I

- I.1 Understands new vocabulary and uses it when reading and writing\* (Testable on the English I STAAR, Reporting Category 1)
- I.2 Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provides evidence from the text to support their understanding\* (Testable on the English I STAAR, Reporting Category 1, Reporting Category 2)
- I.11 Understands how to glean and uses information in procedural texts and documents\* (Testable on the English I STAAR, Reporting Category 3)
- I.12 Uses comprehension skills to analyze how words, images, graphics, and sounds work together in various forms to impact meaning\* (Testable on the English I STAAR, Reporting Category 2, Reporting Category 3)
- I.13 Uses elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text\* (Testable on the English I STAAR, Reporting Category 4, Reporting Category 5, Reporting Category 6)
- I.16 Writes persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues\* (Testable on the English I STAAR, Reporting Category 5)
- I.17 Understands the function of and uses the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing\* (Testable on the English I STAAR, Reporting Category 6)
- I.18 Writes legibly and use appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions\* (Testable on the English I STAAR, Reporting Category 6)
- I.19 Spells correctly\* (Testable on the English I STAAR, Reporting Category 6)
- I.20 Asks open-ended research questions and develops a plan for answering them
- I.21 Determines, locates, and explores the full range of relevant sources addressing a research question and systematically record the information they gather
- I.23 Organizes and presents their ideas and information according to the purpose of the research and their audience
- I.24 Uses comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings
- I.25 Speaks clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language

**English II**

- II.1 Understands new vocabulary and uses it when reading and writing\* (Testable on the English II STAAR, Reporting Category 1)
- II.2 Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provides evidence from the text to support their understanding\* (Testable on the English II STAAR, Reporting Category 1, Reporting Category 2)
- II.8 Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provides evidence from the text to support their understanding\* (Testable on the English II STAAR, Reporting Category 3)
- II.9 Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about expository text and provides evidence from text to support their understanding\* (Testable on the English II STAAR, Reporting Category 1, Reporting Category 3)
- II.12 Uses comprehension skills to analyze how words, images, graphics, and sounds work together in various forms to impact meaning\* (Testable on the English II STAAR, Reporting Category 2, Reporting Category 3)
- II.13 Uses elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text\* (Testable on the English II STAAR, Reporting Category 4, Reporting Category 5, Reporting Category 6)
- II.14 Writes literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas
- II.16 Writes persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues\* (Testable on the English II STAAR, Reporting Category 4, Reporting Category 5)
- II.18 Writes legibly and uses appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions\* (Testable on the English II STAAR, Reporting Category 6)
- II.20 Asks open-ended research questions and develops a plan for answering them
- II.21 Determines, locates, and explores the full range of relevant sources addressing a research question and systematically record the information they gather
- II.23 Organizes and presents their ideas and information according to the purpose of the research and their audience
- II.24 Uses comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings
- II.25 Speaks clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language

**English III**

- III.1 Understands new vocabulary and uses it when reading and writing\* (Testable on the English III STAAR, Reporting Category 1)
- III.8 Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provides evidence from the text to support their understanding\* (Testable on the English III STAAR, Reporting Category 3)
- III.12 Uses comprehension skills to analyze how words, images, graphics, and sounds work together in various forms to impact meaning\* (Testable on the English III STAAR, Reporting Category 2, Reporting Category 3)

- III.13 Uses elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text\* (Testable on the English III STAAR, Reporting Category 4, Reporting Category 5, Reporting Category 6)
- III.14 Writes literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas
- III.16 Writes persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues\* (Testable on the English III STAAR, Reporting Category 4, Reporting Category 5)
- III.18 Writes legibly and uses appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions\* (Testable on the English III STAAR, Reporting Category 6)
- III.20 Asks open-ended research questions and develops a plan for answering them
- III.21 Determines, locates, and explores the full range of relevant sources addressing a research question and systematically record the information they gather
- III.25 Speaks clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language

#### **English IV**

- IV.1 Understands new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing
- IV.2 Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provides evidence from the text to support their understanding
- IV.8 Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provides evidence from the text to support their understanding
- IV.9 Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about expository text and provides evidence from text to support their understanding
- IV.11 Understands how to glean and uses information in procedural texts and documents
- IV.12 Uses comprehension skills to analyze how words, images, graphics, and sounds work together in various forms to impact meaning
- IV.13 Uses elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text
- IV.15 Writes expository and procedural or work-related texts to communicate ideas and information to specific audiences for specific purposes
- IV.18 Writes legibly and uses appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions
- IV.20 Asks open-ended research questions and develops a plan for answering them
- IV.21 Determines, locates, and explores the full range of relevant sources addressing a research question and systematically record the information they gather
- IV.23 Organizes and presents their ideas and information according to the purpose of the research and their audience
- IV.25 Speaks clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language

**Social Studies:*****United States History***

- US.19 Understands the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society\* (Testable on the U.S. History STAAR, Reporting Category 3)
- US.24 Applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources, including electronic technology\* (Testable on the U.S. History STAAR, Reporting Category 3)
- US.25 Communicates in written, oral, and visual forms\* (Testable on the U.S. History STAAR, Reporting Category 2)
- US.26 Uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings\* (Testable on the U.S. History STAAR, Reporting Category 2)

***United States Government***

- G.2 Understands how constitutional government, as developed in the United States, has been influenced by people, ideas, and historical documents
- G.3 Understands the roles played by individuals, political parties, interest groups, and the media in the U.S. political system, past and present
- G.6 Understands the roles played by local, state, and national governments in both the public and private sectors of the U.S. free enterprise system
- G.9 Understands the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution
- G.17 Understands the importance of the expression of different points of view in a democratic society
- G.18 Understands the relationship between government policies and the culture of the United States
- G.21 Applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources, including electronic technology
- G.22 Communicates in written, oral, and visual forms
- G.23 Uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings

***Economics***

- E.16 Understands the goals of economic growth, stability, full employment, freedom, security, equity, and efficiency as they apply to U.S. economic policy
- E.17 Understands the economic impact of fiscal policy decisions at the local, state, and national levels
- E.23 Applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources, including electronic technology
- E.24 Communicates in written, oral, and visual forms

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- E.25 Uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings

### Mathematics:

#### *Mathematical Models with Applications*

- M.1 Uses mathematical processes to acquire and demonstrate mathematical understanding
- M.8 Applies mathematical processes to determine the number of elements in a finite sample space and compute the probability of an event
- M.9 Applies mathematical processes and mathematical models to analyze data as it applies to social sciences
- M.10 Applies mathematical processes to design a study and use graphical, numerical, and analytical techniques to communicate the results of the study

Additional mathematics, social studies, and science TEKS could apply, depending on the policy issue the student chooses to study. For instance, a student may choose to study the use of stem cells, thereby covering more Science TEKS.

## Texas College and Career Readiness Standards

This unit may address the following Texas College and Career Readiness Standards:

### English Language Arts:

- I.A.1 Determines effective approaches, forms, and rhetorical techniques that demonstrate understanding of the writer's purpose and audience
- I.A.2 Generates ideas and gathers information relevant to the topic and purpose, keeping careful records of outside sources
- I.A.3 Evaluates relevance, quality, sufficiency, and depth of preliminary ideas and information, organize material generated, and formulate thesis
- I.A.4 Recognizes the importance of revision as the key to effective writing
- I.A.5 Edits writing for proper voice, tense, and syntax, assuring that it conforms to standard English, when appropriate
- II.A.1 Uses effective reading strategies to determine a written work's purpose and intended audience
- II.A.2 Uses text features and graphics to form an overview of informational texts and to determine where to locate information
- II.A.3 Identifies explicit and implicit textual information including main ideas and author's purpose
- II.A.4 Draws and supports complex inferences from text to summarize, draw conclusions, and distinguish facts from simple assertions and opinions
- II.A.5 Analyzes the presentation of information and the strength and quality of evidence used by the author and judge the coherence and logic of the presentation and the credibility of an argument
- II.A.7 Evaluates the use of both literal and figurative language to inform and shape the percepts of

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- readers
- II.A.8 Compares and analyzes how generic features are used across texts
- II.A.11 Identifies, analyzes, and evaluates similarities and differences in how multiple texts present information, argue a position, or relate a theme
- II.B.1 Identifies new words and concepts acquired through study of their relationships to other words and concepts
- II.B.2 Applies knowledge of roots and affixes to infer the meanings of new words
- II.D.1 Describes insights gained about oneself, others, or the world from reading specific texts
- III.A.1 Understands how style and content of spoken language varies in different contexts and influences the listener's understanding
- III.A.2 Adjusts presentation (delivery, vocabulary, length) to particular audiences and purposes
- III.B.1 Participates actively and effectively in one-on-one oral communication situations
- III.B.2 Participates actively and effectively in group discussions
- III.B.3 Plans and delivers focused and coherent presentations that convey clear and distinct perspectives and demonstrate solid reasoning
- IV.A.1 Analyzes and evaluates the effectiveness of a public presentation
- IV.A.2 Interprets a speaker's message; identifies the position taken and the evidence in support of that position
- IV.A.3 Uses a variety of strategies to enhance listening comprehension
- IV.B.1 Listens critically and responds appropriately to presentations
- IV.B.2 Listens actively and effectively in one-on-one communication situations
- IV.B.3 Listens actively and effectively in group discussions
- V.A.1 Formulates research questions
- V.A.2 Explores a research topic
- V.A.3 Refines research topic and devises a timeline for completing work
- V.B.1 Gathers relevant sources
- V.B.2 Evaluates the validity and reliability of sources
- V.B.3 Synthesizes and organizes information effectively
- V.B.4 Uses source material ethically
- V.C.1 Designs and presents an effective product

### Mathematics:

- IV.D.2 Applies probabilistic measures to practical situations to make an informed decision
- V.B.1 Computes and interprets the probability of an event and its complement
- V.B.2 Computes and interprets the probability of conditional and compound events
- VI.A.1 Plans a study
- VI.B.1 Determines types of data
- VI.B.2 Selects and applies appropriate visual representations of data
- VI.B.4 Describes patterns and departure from patterns in a set of data

- VIII.A.1 Analyzes given information  
VIII.B.2 Uses various types of reasoning

### Social Studies:

- I.A.2 Analyzes the interaction between human communities and the environment  
I.A.3 Analyzes how physical and cultural processes have shaped human communities over time  
I.A.5 Analyzes how various cultural regions have changed over time  
I.A.6 Analyzes the relationship between geography and the development of human communities  
I.B.2 Identifies and evaluates sources and patterns of change and continuity across time and place  
I.B.3 Analyzes causes and effects of major political, economic, and social changes in U.S. and world history  
I.C.1 Evaluates different governmental systems and functions  
I.C.2 Evaluates changes in the functions and structures of government across time  
I.C.3 Explains and analyzes the importance of civic engagement  
I.D.1 Identifies and evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of different economic systems  
I.E.1 Identifies different social groups and examines how they form and how and why they sustain themselves  
I.E.2 Defines the concept of socialization and analyzes the role socialization plays in human development and behavior  
I.E.3 Analyzes how social institutions function and meet the needs of society  
I.E.4 Identifies and evaluates the sources and consequences of social conflict  
I.F.1 Uses a variety of research and analytical tools to explore questions or issues thoroughly and fairly  
I.F.2 Analyzes ethical issues in historical, cultural, and social contexts  
II.B.1 Explains and evaluates the concepts of race, ethnicity, and nationalism  
II.B.2 Explains and evaluates the concept of gender  
II.B.3 Analyzes diverse religious concepts, structures, and institutions around the world  
II.B.4 Evaluates how major philosophical and intellectual concepts influence human behavior or identity  
II.B.5 Explains the concepts of socioeconomic status and stratification  
II.B.6 Analyzes how individual and group identities are established and change over time  
III.A.1 Distinguishes spatial patterns of human communities that exist between or within contemporary political boundaries  
III.A.2 Connects regional or local developments to global ones  
III.A.3 Analyzes how and why diverse communities interact and become dependent on each other  
III.B.1 Applies social science methodologies to compare societies and cultures  
IV.A.1 Identifies and analyzes the main idea(s) and point(s) of view in sources  
IV.A.2 Situates an informational source in its appropriate contexts  
IV.A.3 Evaluates sources from multiple perspectives

- IV.A.4 Understands the differences between a primary and secondary source and uses each appropriately to conduct research and construct arguments
- IV.A.5 Reads narrative texts critically
- IV.A.6 Reads research data critically
- IV.B.1 Uses established research methodologies
- IV.B.2 Explains how historians and other social scientists develop new and competing views of past phenomena
- IV.B.3 Gathers, organizes, and displays the results of data and research
- IV.B.4 Identifies and collects sources
- IV.C.1 Understands/interprets presentations critically
- IV.D.1 Constructs a thesis that is supported by evidence
- IV.D.2 Recognizes and evaluates counter-arguments
- V.A.1 Uses appropriate oral communication techniques, depending on the context or nature of the interaction
- V.A.2 Uses conventions of standard written English
- V.B.1 Attributes ideas and information to source materials and authors

### Cross-Disciplinary Standards:

- I.A.1 Engages in scholarly inquiry and dialogue
- I.A.2 Accepts constructive criticism and revise personal views when valid evidence warrants
- I.B.1 Considers arguments and conclusions of self and others
- I.B.2 Constructs well-reasoned arguments to explain phenomena, validate conjectures, or support positions
- I.B.3 Gathers evidence to support arguments, findings, or lines of reasoning
- I.B.4 Supports or modifies claims based on the results of an inquiry
- I.C.1 Analyzes a situation to identify a problem to be solved
- I.C.2 Develops and applies multiple strategies to solving a problem
- I.C.3 Collects evidence and data systematically and directly relate to solving a problem
- I.D.1 Self-monitors learning needs and seeks assistance when needed
- I.D.2 Uses study habits necessary to manage academic pursuits and requirements
- I.D.3 Strives for accuracy and precision
- I.D.4 Perseveres to complete and master tasks
- I.E.1 Works independently
- I.E.2 Works collaboratively
- I.F.1 Attributes ideas and information to source materials and people
- I.F.2 Evaluates sources for quality of content, validity, credibility, and relevance
- I.F.3 Includes the ideas of others and the complexities of the debate, issue, or problem
- I.F.4 Understands and adheres to ethical codes of conduct
- II.A.1 Uses effective prereading strategies

- II.A.2 Uses a variety of strategies to understand the meanings of new words
- II.A.3 Identifies the intended purpose and audience of the text
- II.A.4 Identifies the key information and supporting details
- II.A.5 Analyzes textual information critically
- II.A.6 Annotates, summarizes, paraphrases, and outlines texts when appropriate
- II.A.7 Adapts reading strategies according to structure of texts
- II.A.8 Connects reading to historical and current events and personal interest
- II.B.1 Writes clearly and coherently, using standard writing conventions
- II.B.2 Writes in a variety of forms for various audiences and purposes
- II.B.3 Composes and revises drafts
- II.C.1 Understands which topics or questions are to be investigated
- II.C.2 Explores a research topic
- II.C.3 Refines research topic based on preliminary research and devise a timeline for completing work
- II.C.4 Evaluates the validity and reliability of sources
- II.C.5 Synthesizes and organizes information effectively
- II.C.6 Designs and presents an effective product
- II.C.7 Integrates source material
- II.C.8 Presents a final product
- II.D.1 Identifies patterns or departures from patterns among data
- II.D.2 Uses statistical and probabilistic skills necessary for planning an investigation and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data
- II.D.3 Presents analyzed data and communicate findings in a variety of formats
- II.E.1 Uses technology to gather information
- II.E.2 Uses technology to organize, manage, and analyze information
- II.E.3 Uses technology to communicate and display findings in a clear and coherent manner
- II.E.4 Uses technology appropriately