

## [FUTURE I] Action Civics

### School Segregation & Education Inequality

Grade level: 9 to 12

Activity type: Project

Period: Multiple class sessions

Related subjects: Government, U.S History

### Overview

The Ten Questions framework is designed to help young people engage with political and ethical questions around civic participation in a developmental sequence. The following student action project provides an example of how to execute the Ten Questions in a civics class. This unit draws upon an action project conducted by a group of high school students in Brighton, MA about school segregation and education inequality.



### Essential Questions

- Why is it important that young people have equal opportunities to receive education?
- What does school segregation look like today, how does it occur, and how does it affect students' lives?
- What is the relationship between how education is funded and how school segregation occurs today?
- What actions can students take to address this issue?

### Learning Goals

- Examine how the distribution of school funding produces inequality and segregation in education.
- Discuss how students see the education environment and how they think it can and should be improved.
- Outline strategies to influence local politicians and raise awareness around education inequality.
- Take action.

### Materials

- Generation Citizen modules, [generationcitizen.org](http://generationcitizen.org)
- "Crossing Gap" in *Teaching Tolerance*, [www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-35-spring-2009/crossing-gap](http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-35-spring-2009/crossing-gap)

### Activities

1. Distribute copies of "[Crossing the Gap](#)" (*Teaching Tolerance*) to students. Discuss how students relate to the story themselves.
2. Have students form small groups. Provide them access to the Internet and have students search for funding inequality in their state. For example, students in Brighton looked up an interactive map produced by the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center that showed funding gaps by district across the state. In absence of Internet access, provide copies of the Education Trust's report titled "[Funding Gaps 2015](#)". Have students:
  - Compare their district to other districts.
  - Discuss why disparities might have occurred.
  - Identify related local government bills.
3. As a group, have students select one particular topic in education inequality and formulate potential solutions. Have students develop an action project about education inequality.
4. Distribute the Ten Questions and have students discuss the topic and the action process using them.
5. Have students clarify methods of investigation for their project, like interviews, additional statistical data, newspaper articles, and online research. Give students time to begin work on their project.
6. After coming back to class, students share what they have investigated so far. Focusing on Questions 8, 9, and 10 in the Ten Questions, discuss what actions students can take to translate voice into change. Options might include
  - Write the letter to local politicians.
  - Use social media to contact local government
  - Identify education advocacy groups, city-wide education affairs, or conferences. Present the projects for awareness raising.
7. Bring your proposal to the real world and try them out. After action, have students reflect on the project as a whole class and have them write a reflection journal about their experience.

### Related information

- Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center – Education funding in Massachusetts by district [massbudget.org/tool\\_window.php?loc=education\\_by\\_district.html#tool](http://massbudget.org/tool_window.php?loc=education_by_district.html#tool)
- "Visualizing School Equity" in *Teaching Tolerance*, [www.tolerance.org/lesson/visualizing-school-equity](http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/visualizing-school-equity)

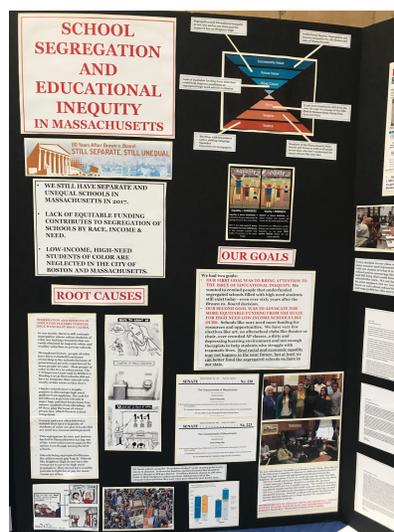
**EXAMPLE.** A group of high school students in Brighton, MA presented an action project on inequality and segregation in education on Generation Citizen’s Civics Day, May 8, 2017. Their project was aligned with the Generation Citizen Framework for Action, but also closely followed the Ten Questions framework.

“OUR FIRST GOAL WAS TO BRING ATTENTION TO THE ISSUE OF EDUCATION INEQUALITY”

“OUR SECOND GOAL WAS TO ADVOCATE FOR MORE EQUITABLE FUNDING FROM THE STATE FOR HIGH NEED LOW INCOME SCHOOL LIKE OURS.”

“In our 12th grade History of Boston Class, we have spent a lot of time discussing issues that exist today in our city. We chose to focus on school segregation and education inequity, because our school, Brighton High School was labeled as a failing school (level 4) by the state at the beginning of the school year. We know that we are not failures, but we do know that the history of institutional racism and class inequity has created a system that is failing us. For many of us Brighton High’s low income, high need students—many who are recent immigrants to this country—**education is our only path to a successful future.** We as low-income students of color are being denied the educational opportunities that our wealthier students have.”

“Schools like ours need more funding for resources and opportunities. We have very few elective like art, no afterschool clubs like theater or choir, over crowded AP classes, a dirty and depressing learning environment and not enough therapists to help student who struggle with traumatic lives. **Racial and economic equality may not happen in the near future but at least we can better fund the segregated schools we have in our state.**”



## 10 Questions

1. Why does it matter to me?
2. How much should I share?
3. How do I make it more than myself?
4. Where do we start?
5. How can we make it easy and engaging for others to join in?
6. How do we get from wisdom from crowds?
7. How do we handle the downside of crowds?
8. Are we pursuing voice or influence or both?
9. How do we get from voice to influence?
10. How can we find allies?

