

Lesson 10: Youth Decision Making

1. Decision Challenge Warm-Up

The goal of this activity is to stimulate thinking about the difficulties of decision making and assessing tradeoffs between immediate rewards and long term benefits. After students complete their plus and minus analysis of the three cases and record their decisions, find out how the class responded.

You might facilitate a conversation about each of the cases or focus conversation on the case where there was the most disagreement. Emphasize more the analysis of plusses and minuses than the actual decisions. It is important for students to recognize that short term rewards can be emotionally powerful and difficult to counteract. Your role here, however, is to discover what students think rather than to influence their decisions.

The second segment of the class offers a choice of two activities that shift the focus of decision making to infrastructure. You may use either one or, if you have extra class time available, you could use both.

2A. Decision-making: Providing Drinking Water in our Local Schools

You might want to introduce this activity by discussing drinking water problems in cities like Flint where the schools are connected to contaminated city systems. In these extreme and rare conditions, providing healthy water to everyone including students at school, the solutions are regional, complicated, time consuming, and very expensive. Fortunately, the great majority of schools provide safe water that students can drink using faucets located throughout the school. But even with this free water provided for everyone, some schools have been exploring alternatives that provide students with water that may be cooler, more convenient, tasty, flavored, but also more expensive. After examining four alternatives, students will recommend a policy for their school.

Pass out Student Handout #2: “Group Activity: Providing Drinking Water in our Local Schools”. Set up the groups and go over the introductory paragraph with

them. Challenge them to generate as many pros and cons they can for each of the four alternatives before they decide which approach they will recommend. (They may come up with a fifth alternative of their own.) After students have had adequate time to complete this task, reconvene the class as a whole, where you will hear each group's recommendation. Try to come to a conclusion as a class. If any students decide they would like to suggest a change for their school, brainstorm possible next-steps such as more research, a presentation at the next student council, PTSA involvement, etc. For anyone interested in examining school drinking water in more depth, look at the resources provided in "Supplemental Materials: Water in Schools".

2B. Decision Making: Youth Infrastructure Consulting Team

Begin this activity by passing out Student Handout #3: Facts about Infrastructure in America. Give students time to quickly read or read it out loud. Don't dwell on it - your goal is to get the general consensus across that there is a serious infrastructure problem in America.

Then pass out Student Handout #4: Decision Making: Youth Infrastructure Consulting Team, and divide the class into small groups of 5-8 students. Briefly review the 4 small group tasks and set a time limit of 2 or 3 minutes for selecting the specific topic to make certain that most of the time will be spent on the task.

Some students and entire groups may not understand what is being asked. You might want to provide an example like the following to maximize understanding.

Example: The student group decided to focus on roads in their community and in the school parking lot. They decided to support a photo contest for the most dangerous pot hole in the community roads and state highway that goes through their community. They are going to place four pictures in the school newspaper and post other pictures on the library wall. Contest entries must include a paragraph about the importance of safe, well maintained roads.