

Argument of Policy

Summary

Students will discover a policy within their school or district that is important to them and that they'd like to change. They will conduct an investigation of the policy in question and write a letter with their claim, results, and recommendation to the appropriate audience.

Main Core Tie

English Language Arts Grade 8

[Reading: Informational Text Standard 1](#)

Additional Core Ties

English Language Arts Grade 8

[Writing Standard 1 a.](#)

English Language Arts Grade 8

[Writing Standard 1 b.](#)

English Language Arts Grade 8

[Writing Standard 1 c.](#)

English Language Arts Grade 8

[Writing Standard 1 d.](#)

English Language Arts Grade 8

[Writing Standard 1 e.](#)

English Language Arts Grade 8

[Language Standard 2 c.](#)

Time Frame

6 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Large Groups

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication, Character, Social & Civic Responsibility

Materials

You will need a copy of the article about the 9-year-old blogger as well as a copy of the policy with which the class will be looking at. The Peer Review worksheet can be edited where needed.

Background for Teachers

It's important to have a good idea about the different policies within your school or district. Make sure that you have informed all staff members of your school what your classes will be doing.

Student Prior Knowledge

Students need to have a grasp of letter writing in order to be successful in this project. They should also have an idea of a policy that is close to them that they'd like to change.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will know how to conduct an investigation of policy and be able to argue their claim with valid and relevant pieces of evidence. Students should organize their information using formal style and spelling correctly.

Instructional Procedures

Solving school problems

I. Teacher Presentation and group discussion

Ask students to answer the following question while looking at the following article below-Can students make a difference within their school? How?

[9-year-old's blog brings big changes to school lunches](#) (KSL Article)

Group discussion questions:

How did one student make a difference? Cite your example.

What did she do that was so affective? Cite your example.

What are some other things that she could have done that could have brought about a change?

Have you ever been bothered by a policy at school and wanted a change?

II. Identifying and clarifying the problem

Students can look at the policies in you school manual and vote on which policy they feel the strongest about. Explain to students that this shouldn't be about drugs, weapons, or safety policies within the school, but about things that they feel students can handle and shouldn't be banned or should be allowed. At the end of this class, students in each of your classes should have picked something within their school policy manual that they'd like to change.

Teacher preparation: Previously explain to the principal what you are doing within your classroom and ask them if they'd be prepared to explain the reasoning behind a policy more fully when the time comes. At this point, ask the principal for clarification on the policy or policies chosen by your classes. If the principal doesn't send any extra information then, just use the policy from the manual, which we ended up doing. The example that I'll be using is the policy that a group of students chose about electronic devices in school.

The following is a policy taken from [Bountiful Junior High's Student Handbook](#):

CELL PHONE - ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY

Cellular phones , iPods, earphones & other personal listening devices may be used before school, after school, and during lunch. All other electronic gaming devices are not allowed. Inappropriate use of any electronic device will result in confiscation and/or suspension from school. The following policy was adopted by the Community Council and is found on the school's web-page.

CELL PHONE USE

Students may possess and use electronic devices at school subject to the following: Students may use electronic devices before school, during lunch and after school. Use of electronic devices or earphones/earbuds during pass-time between classes is prohibited. They must be powered down, and kept out of sight. Electronic devices may not be left on in vibrating mode. Electronic devices are NEVER used in restrooms or locker rooms.

Electronic devices shall not be used in a way that threatens, humiliates, harasses or intimidates school-related individuals including, students, employees, and visitors, or violates local, state or federal law. Electronic devices may not be used during Utah Performance Assessment System for student testing unless specifically allowed by law, student IEP or testing directions.

CONFISCATION

If a student violates this policy, his/her electronic device may be confiscated. When an employee confiscates an electronic device under this policy, he/she shall take reasonable measures to label and secure the device and turn the device over to a school administrator as soon as the employee's duties permit. Electronic devices will then be secured in the office for a student or

parent to pick up at the end of the school day.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION

1st violation -- Student's device will be confiscated, and he/she will receive 20 discipline points and the device will be returned to the student at the end of the school day.

2nd violation -- Student's device will be confiscated, and he/she will receive 20 discipline points. A parent will be notified and must pick up the device from an administrator.

3rd violation -- Student's device will be confiscated and 20 points will be assigned to the student. The device must be picked up by a parent who will be notified of the infraction. The student will then be prohibited from possession of an electronic device at school or at school related activities for the balance of the school year.

4th violation -- Student will be suspended and a parent/guardian will be notified.

Egregious violation -- (Including, inappropriate texting and or photos taken) will result in possible suspension, referral to District Case Management, expulsion and referral to law enforcement authorities.

SECURITY OF DEVICES

Students shall be personally and solely responsible for the security of electronic devices brought to school. The school shall not assume responsibility for theft, damage, misuse or unauthorized calls made with an electronic device, including iPads, Kindles, iPods, or other electronic readers or devices. If devices are loaned to or borrowed and misused by non-owners, device owners are jointly responsible for the misuse or policy violation(s).

CAMERA OR AUDIO RECORDING DEVICE FUNCTIONS

Students using camera or audio recording functions of electronic devices may pose threats to the personal privacy of individuals, used to exploit personal information, and or compromise the integrity of educational programs. Accordingly, the use of the audio recording or camera functions of electronic devices is strictly prohibited on school premises at all times.

EXCEPTIONS

The use is specifically required to implement a student's current and valid IEP.

The use is at the discretion of a teacher for educational purposes.

The use is determined by the principal to be necessary for other special circumstances, health related reasons, or emergency.

Make copies of the policy and hand it out to students. Ask them to highlight the areas that they have questions about and prepare to share those questions with the class. The list below is some ideas of what students came up with.

How many electronic devices are confiscated on average a day? Month? Year?

How many electronic devices are in the various levels of violation on average?

Would students use their electronic devices appropriately if they were able to use them in between classes (the part of the policy that the students wanted amended)?

Why is it such a big deal for students not to have electronic devices in the hall or on vibrate?

Does down time or independent working time count as educational purposes?

III. Planning an Investigation

The first and second questions can be answered with an interview to the secretary who they find out keeps a record of confiscated electronic devices. To answer the third and fourth question the students can create a questionnaire for students throughout the school to take.

(Note to teacher: it would be wise to forewarn teachers throughout your school of what's going on in case they are asked to be interviewed or students within their classes).

For the last question the students can create interview questions for teachers.

Divide students into smaller groups. Two students can develop specific questions that they will ask the secretary. The other groups can put together the questionnaire for students and questions to interview teachers with.

Students in all grades need to be able to understand the questionnaire. Below is a sample questionnaire. Students decided to put at the top that this questionnaire would remain anonymous and that they should be as honest as possible.

How often has your electronic device (cell phone, ipod) been confiscated this year? If it was confiscated, where was it taken? Place a tally below the area it was taken.

In the halls in between classes In class In the library or restroom

I use my electronic device in between classes in the hall
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

I see people using their electronic device in between classes in the hall
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

What are you doing when you use your electronic devices at school? Circle the top two.

- Texting friends
- Texting family
- Listening to school appropriate music
- Listening to non-school appropriate music
- Calling friends Calling family

Have you ever texted any of the following while at school? Be honest. Circle all that apply and circle how often you do.

Test or assignment answers
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

Swear words
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

Sexual innuendo
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

Sexual pictures
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

Violent words or bullying
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

Anything else that you might consider school inappropriate, if so explain: _____
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

I know people that do the following while at school? Be honest. Circle all that apply and circle how often you've noticed.

Test or assignment answers
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

Swear words
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

Sexual innuendo
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

Sexual pictures
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

Violent words or bullying
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

Anything else that you might consider school inappropriate, if so explain: _____
 Always Usually Occasionally Never

The teacher interview questions focused more on how often electronic devices were taken, where

they were taken, what students were doing with them, etc.

IV. Conducting the Investigation

Students conducted the investigation in several ways. It greatly helped that contact had been made previously. For the questionnaire they spoke with forty-two of the forty-six teachers at the school. Thirty-nine teachers allowed them to quickly pass around the questionnaire in their classroom and forty allowed themselves to be interviewed by the students. Students also passed around the questionnaire during lunches in order to try and get any missing students. The head secretary as well as the assistant secretary was also interviewed.

The teacher results came out that electronic devices were taken mostly during class, but the second highest came from the required hall duty that teachers take up. The majority of electronic devices confiscated were cell phones and students were texting, the second highest they were calling someone, and lastly students were listening to their ipods. None of the teachers looked at the history of what students were texting and didn't listen to the current song that the student had been listening to. Teachers either took the phone to the office or returned it to the student at the end of class.

The questionnaire came back with some interesting results. Most students hadn't had their electronic devices confiscated, the second highest group had their cell phones taken up to two violations, third group one violation, and then third and fourth violations there was only a handful. Most students texted in between classes, at lunch, and before and after school. They also admitted to swearing in calls and texts, but nothing else. The section on what others did with their electronic devices students decided was more accurate because they were pointing the finger at someone else. The most was swearing, second bullying (whether pretending or not), third sexual innuendo, and a couple even said they'd seen sexual pictures. No one saw or said they'd sent answers to tests or assignments. Students created a detailed table with the results. The students were upset because they wanted to make the case that the students at their school could responsibly use their electronic devices in school in between classes. It seemed, though, that students were using them anyway in between classes and didn't seem to necessarily care about the rule. Lots of teachers admitted to not going out and doing their hall duty because they had students needing help, which meant supervision was not happening and students were not getting their device confiscated. The secretary explained that she had tons of first offenses come in and even more second offenses, after that the numbers dropped significantly.

V. Introducing Argument of Policy

Now that the investigation is complete students need to write a letter to the principal with their data to make their case about the electronic devices being used in the halls in between classes. They will need to explain their method of their research and attach a copy of the questionnaire as well as the table of results. Break down the sections of the letter, so that they have a firm understanding of how to write such a letter. Help students with the introduction and then the first few sentences for each paragraph to help them get going on their own. Allow for whole group and small group work where needed.

Argument of Policy components (Hillocks pg 74-75)

Introduction--Describe the nature of the problem to be investigated and explain the major and related questions.

Research Design and Methods--Explain how you went about investigating the problem and related questions.

Classes/Teachers and how selected

Questionnaire and tallies

Interview results

Results/Findings--Explain what you found relative to each area above as a result of the

methods you used.

Interpretation of Results/Findings--Explain what the results mean and why these interpretations are valid.

Conclusions and Recommendations--Explain what might reasonably be done in light of the research findings.

Writing the Introduction--Students will need support to work through such a complicated process. Have a group discussion talking about why they decided on this particular study and what the study includes. They need to explain the area they are looking at specifically. Students should also quote the actual rule in the intro. At this point, help students use more scientific vocabulary in their letter. Take the opportunity to help them learn new words.

Writing about Research Design and Methods--Students need to explain why they chose their forms of research such as questionnaire and interviews. They should tell their readers how data was obtained before presenting the results. They should break down the questions and the results that came with them in detail.

Presenting, Explain, and Interpreting Findings--Walk the students through the information that was found. It's important for students to know that they shouldn't lie about findings even if they don't support their claims. They should be specific about how many students conducted what research and their specific findings. They should talk about what the interpretation means from these findings and include the table with their results.

Writing about Results and Interpreting Results--The students will talk about the percentage of students selecting each frequency. They need to break down each question and explain them in detail from the questionnaire if one is used. They should talk about the results that were strange to them. This is where they can explain results that didn't match up with their claim and why they felt that way. They should report accurately, talk about the discrepancies in the responses, and make a convincing case about the results.

Writing Conclusions and Recommendations--The final section is to develop conclusion or interpretations of the result and recommendations. If a result backs up the policy than it's important to validate that. Students need to develop a warrant, a rule that helps explain why they think students are using their electronic devices in the hall despite it being against the rules. Students need to explain why they don't agree with the solution of confiscating electronic devices since it doesn't seem like that's even really happening. Students may be more willing to pocket them during class if they can be allowed to use them in the halls without the fear of them being taken. Students should talk about motives and solutions in this section.

VI. Letter

After students have put together their letters allow for peer editing and revision before sending them on to the proper readers. A worksheet is attached to this lesson entitled PEER REVIEW, which can be altered and changed where necessary.

Letters can be given to the principal or Superintendant where necessary. Depending on resources, it would be best if letters were typed and appropriate letter format taught for formality.

Strategies for Diverse Learners

Grouping is always critical. Make sure that when students are diverse and have special needs diversify the group. Place some of the gifted students with those that are in need of assistance. Always make sure to follow IEP procedures if there are any writing or reading accommodations.

Extensions

The next step would be to find another argument of policy and work through the process on a more individual basis. If the teacher lacks the time for a second project such as this then, students can work out an action plan of a different argument of policy only.

Assessment Plan

Students should be graded on their Peer Review worksheet will include necessary changes that need to be made to their letter and checking to see if those changes were made by comparing them to the rubric. From the Peer Review and your own observations, you will get an idea about the participation involved from each student. The attached rubric can be used as well to grade the letter written by each student on arguments of policy.

Bibliography

"9-year-old's blog brings big changes to school lunches." Salt Lake City: KSL, 2012. Cutler, Jacob and staff. Student Handbook. Bountiful: Davis School District, 2009. Hillocks, George Jr. Teaching Argument Writing. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2011.

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