

SECONDARY LESSON PLAN

The Power of Us: School Board Organizing for Inclusive Education

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVELS: 6 - 12

SUBJECT: Social Studies/Civics and/or English-Language Arts

LENGTH OF TIME: This lesson was designed for a standard class period of 50 minutes. Adaptations and extensions for a block period are included at the bottom of this lesson.

GOAL: Students will understand the role of local school boards and develop foundational organizing skills to advocate for inclusive school policies.

OBJECTIVES:

- + Identify the key responsibilities of a school board and how its decisions directly impact school policies.
- + Analyze the historical and structural roots of local censorship or bias-based issues using a Root Cause Tree.
- + Construct a values-based anti-censorship message to effectively advocate for inclusive education.
- + Synthesize individual activist tools (power mapping, root cause analysis, and messaging) into a unified organizing strategy to build collective power.

EDUCATORS' NOTES:

- + **The Core Concept:** Local school boards have a direct impact on the daily lives of LGBTQ+ students and families, driving crucial policies on diversity, equity, and inclusion. As these boards increasingly become targets for coordinated censorship campaigns and anti-LGBTQ+ extremism, it is vital that young people understand how local power operates. This lesson demystifies school board structures and equips youth with foundational organizing tools, empowering them to build collective power, oppose censorship, and actively advocate for inclusive, anti-racist educational spaces.
- + **Cross-Curricular Adaptability:** While this lesson focuses on Social Studies in particular, see the bottom of the lesson for differentiation suggestions and cross-curricular connections.

MATERIALS

Lesson Visuals & Instructions

- + [Student Organizing PowerPoint](#)
- + [Organizing Equation Handout](#)

Welcoming Schools Resources

- + [School Advocacy](#)
- + [School Boards Matter Guide](#)
- + [Confronting Censorship Guide](#)

External Partner Resources

- + [Advocates for Youth](#)
- + [Youth Activist Toolkit](#)

THE LESSON

1) THE HOOK: KEY VOCABULARY ASSOCIATION (10 MIN)

Display Slide 2 and ask students to rapid-fire the very first words that come to mind when they see the word “Organizing.” Document their answers on the slide or on the board. Before moving to Slide 3, acknowledge that while many associate the word with cleaning or schedules, in activism, “organizing is the process of building power as a group and using this power to create positive change.”

Then, display the Margaret Mead quotation “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” on Slide 4. Ask students to think about an example that illustrates the quotation from history, media, and/or their own experience. If time permits, give students an opportunity to pair with another student before sharing with the class.

✚ Slides Resource: [Slides 2-4](#)

2) DIRECT INSTRUCTION: TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE (5 MIN)

Let students know that today they will learn how to organize to hold specific decision-makers accountable—but first, they need to know exactly who holds the power. Play three quick rounds of “Two Truths and a Lie” to uncover how school boards work. Read the statements aloud or display them on the board, and have students hold up 1, 2, or 3 fingers to guess the lie.

✚ Slides Resource: [Slides 5-10](#)

3) GUIDED PRACTICE: ACTIVIST TOOLS JIGSAW (25 MIN)

Divide the class into four expert groups (for classes larger than 20, make more than one expert group as needed), and let them know that they will be working with their peers to build their expertise in one aspect of organizing. They will use the tools provided to brainstorm and the “Key Question” for each expert group to guide conversation.

Provide each expert group a copy of their slide and resources, and check in with each group to provide support. (See the slide notes on [slides 15-18](#) to determine the appropriate pages of each guide to be given to each group). Remind students how much time they have remaining every few minutes so they have time to identify what’s most important to share.

✚ **Group 1:** Board Mapping (The “Who”) → [School Boards Matter Guide](#)

✚ **Group 2:** Power Analysis (The “Influence”) → [Youth Activist Toolkit](#)

✚ **Group 3:** Root Cause Tree (The “Why”) → [Youth Activist Toolkit](#)

✚ **Group 4:** Values-Based Messaging (the “What”) → [Confronting Censorship Guide](#)

4) COLLABORATIVE CLOSURE (10 MIN)

Explain to students that they will pull the expertise each group has built today together in an Organizing Equation, as shown on [Slide 19](#): **Knowing Who (Board) + Building Power (Influence) + Knowing Why (Roots) + Sharing Our What (Message/Values) = ORGANIZING.**

Provide students with the [Organizing Equation handout](#), and ask them to jot down key ideas from each group's shareout. With the remaining 1-3 minutes of class, ask students to respond to the question on [Slide 20](#) at the bottom or back of their [Organizing Equation handout](#):

“At the start of class, we learned that 'organizing' means building power as a group to create positive change. Looking at our equation, why is just doing ONE of these steps not enough to win the inclusive schools we all deserve?”

5) EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY

Encourage students to apply what they've learned by attending their school board's next meeting. Whether they plan to speak or simply listen, their presence reminds elected officials that the board's constituents include students and that the policies they enact have real impacts on students' lives. Students can learn more about additional advocacy actions and resources on [Welcoming Schools' Advocacy page](#).

HOW TO ADAPT FOR A BLOCK PERIOD (90 MIN)

✚ **Coalition Building & Power Mapping:** Introduce the Power Map tool on pages 20-21 of the Youth Activist Toolkit (pages 16-17 as printed) to help them strategize their coalition building. Have groups draw the Power Map grid on poster paper and brainstorm a list of potential key players in the community, such as local bookstores, labor unions, racial justice advocates, or faith leaders. For each key player, students will rate their level of support for the demands on the horizontal axis (ranging from "Die Hard Ally" to "Die Hard Opponent") and their level of decision-making power on the vertical axis (ranging from "Decisive Decision-Making Power or Influence" to "Not on Radar").

If time permits, have students use their completed maps to role-play hosting their first ally meeting. They must practice providing space to share concerns, identifying the goal they want to accomplish, and dividing up outreach tasks to target specific persuadable players they plotted on their map.

✚ **Mock School Board “Public Comment” Simulation:** After the jigsaw, have students use the School Board Testimony Guide to draft a speech that includes an introduction, the censorship issue, why it matters, and the specific action they want the board to take. Select a few students to act as the "School Board" and the "Clerk" who manages the timer.

Teach students the norms of a real meeting: speakers will be timed and could be cut off, and the board generally does not engage in a conversation or react to public speakers. Having students practice delivering their values-based messages to a silent, neutral "board" helps remove the intimidation factor for future real-world advocacy.

HOW TO ADAPT THE LESSON FOR OTHER SUBJECTS & DIVERSE LEARNERS:

✚ **Jigsaw Differentiation for Diverse Learners:** To support diverse learners and different grade levels, scaffold each group as described below:

✚ **Group 1: Board Mapping (The “Who”)** | The educator may complete some of the information (school board names and/or terms) so that students may focus on researching each member on their own and/or using pre-selected sources to gather relevant information to help them identify school board allies.

- + Group 2: Power Analysis (The “Influence”)** | The educator may provide students the name(s) of a primary or secondary target so that students can focus on identifying groups/people who can influence each.
- + Group 3: Root Cause Tree (The “Why”)** | The educator may provide students with an example of a leaf, trunk, and/or root to scaffold students’ thinking.
- + Group 4: Values-Based Messaging (the “What”)** | The educator may provide sentence starters for each box in the graphic organizer:

+ WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT IS YOUR CONNECTION?

“Hello, my name is [Name], and I am a [Grade Level, e.g., 8th grade / high school junior] student at [School Name] who cares about [e.g., inclusion, fairness, representation]”

+ WHAT CENSORSHIP IS HAPPENING?

“I am deeply concerned about the proposal to [e.g., restrict GSAs / limit discussions about race and gender / ban specific books] in our schools...”

+ WHY IT MATTERS

“Inclusive books and programs are essential because they teach us... and/or makes feel...”

+ WHAT ACTION DO YOU WANT TO SEE

“We need the board to stand up for all students and vote [YES / NO] on [Policy Name/Issue] because if you fail to act, what is at stake is...”

For the shareout portion of the jigsaw, the educator can guide the process as a whole class rather than in individual groups.

- + Math/Data Literacy:** Students can explore the statistical realities of local elections and the financial impact of book bans.

- + Activity:** Have students calculate the impact of low voter turnout, exploring [the finding that most school board elections are decided by just 5-10% of the voter base](#). Then, have them analyze school budgets: compare [the average library expenditure of about \\$11 per student per year](#) to the [tens of thousands of dollars in legal and administrative expenses that districts can face when managing censorship requests](#).

- + Art & Graphic Design:** Creating art for a campaign is a powerful way to communicate a message, inspire cultural change, and appeal to viewers on a sensory level.

- + Activity:** Have students collaboratively design a piece of activist art – such as illustrations for social media, infographics, banners, zines, or even fashion and face paint – that reflects their values-based message about inclusive schools. To practice the true organizing process, explain to students that they must prioritize the voices of the people directly impacted by the artwork. Students will pitch their art concepts to the class to gather input, ask for feedback, and get approval, ensuring their design accurately represents the community without misrepresenting anyone.