



Student Town Meetings

Applications Now Being Accepted!

Overview

The Berkshire Compact for Education, a countywide initiative that helps K-12 students aspire toward postsecondary education, sponsors a series of televised Student Town Meetings for high school students. Students and their teachers select a topic to research and participate in a moderated discussion with a panel of experts. Some of the topics that have been covered in the past are capital punishment, alternative energy, health care reform, pressures on youth and the American dream. The town meetings are recorded at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts TV Studio or onsite at the schools and are shown on public access television throughout the Berkshires. For the 2011-12 school year, we are seeking to identify up to four classes in Berkshire County to participate. Classes that include primarily high school juniors and/or seniors are recommended. After-school or evening programs targeting teens, both in-school and out-of-school, will also be considered provided they meet on at least a weekly basis.

Goals

- Provide a structured process to prepare students to critically analyze and discuss current issues.
- Provide young people with an opportunity to share their views with peers, specialists and community members.
- Actively involve young people in issues of local, regional, state and national importance.

Key Players:

- **The Students** generally choose the topic for discussion. They conduct research about the topic, have class discussions and prepare a list of questions that they would like to address at the town meeting.
- **The Teacher** is responsible for directing the class in their research process and facilitating classroom discussions and preparations. The teacher may assign students to write a short paper about the topic. The teacher works closely with the Berkshire Compact Coordinator in selecting panelists, developing the timetable and preparing a script.
- **The Berkshire Compact Coordinator** (Mary Nash, msnash3@gmail.com) works closely with the teacher to organize the student town meeting. She plans the timetable, sets the date and location for the recording, contacts panelists and the moderator, and takes the lead in preparing the script.
- **Panel Members** provide factual information and insight during the program. The students take the lead in discussing the topic, while the panelists interject periodic comments and insights. The Berkshire Compact will work with the class to identify two or three panelists to participate. In some cases, panelists may serve as guest speakers in the classroom prior to the Town Meeting. Questions that will be addressed are provided to panelists in advance.
- **The Moderator** facilitates the discussion on the day that it is recorded, posing the questions to the students and panelists and tying together themes that are discussed. The Berkshire Compact will select the moderator.

Suggested Topics:

Classes are encouraged to consider the following topics for their student town meetings:

- Any topic related to what students are studying in their classes
- National/world issues such as the economy, the impact of natural disasters, advances in modern medicine
- How has the world changed in the ten years since the World Trade Center attack on 9/11?
- Topics related to the mission of the Berkshire Compact for Education:
 - How can a high school education better prepare students for college and a career?
 - What kinds of jobs will be available in the future? What skills are needed for jobs in the 21st century?
 - What types of education and careers are available in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)? How can more students be encouraged to pursue these fields of study?
 - How has technology changed the way we learn today and what changes can we expect in the future?
- Any other topic of your choice is welcome!

Berkshire Compact Student Town Meeting Application

Schools that have a teacher and class interested in presenting a Student Town Meeting should submit this application by September 30, 2011.* It is highly recommended that teachers discuss the idea with their class and ask for their input in selecting a topic. You will be notified of the status of your application within approximately one to two weeks.

Name of school/organization: _____

Contact name (teacher who will organize class): _____

Contact phone and email: _____

Class/program that will participate: _____

How often does the class meet? _____

Approximate ages of students: _____

Anticipated number of student participants: _____

What time of day is best for recording the town meeting? (approximately 1.5 hours are needed)

Description of proposed topic:

How will your participation in the Town Meeting help you to achieve the goals of your course?

What month would you like to present your town meeting?

November _____

March _____

December _____

April _____

January _____

May _____

February _____

June _____

Authorized signature of Principal or Director of school/organization applying

Fax or email this application by September 30 to Mary Nash, Project Coordinator, Berkshire Compact for Education, msnash3@gmail.com, 637-3956 (fax); 637-3955 (phone).

***Applications will also be accepted on a rolling basis after September 30 if we have not accepted four town meetings prior to then.**