| **PUBLIC POLICY DECISION-MAKING** |
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| **SS.912.CG.2.12** Explain how interest groups, the media and public opinion influence local, state and national decision-making related to public issues. |

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

[**Essential Teacher Content Background Information 2**](#_h00jm9d1a68w)

[**Lesson Summary 4**](#_me2xii9yn4s4)

[**Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace 6**](#_hohn4vjjapi7)

[**Government Content Vocabulary 8**](#_nzy9hwszkwil)

[**Additional Resources, Answer Keys, and Sources 9**](#_15f7rsqjmh08)

| **2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES** |
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| * Updated from SS.912.C.2.10 and SS.912.C.2.11   + Changed from “~~Monitor~~ current public issues in Florida.” and “~~Analyze~~ public policy ~~solutions or courses of action~~ to resolve a national, state, or federal issue.” to “Explain how interest groups, the media and public opinion influence national, state and national decision-making related to public issues.” * Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark   + Changed from “Monitor” and “Analyze” to “Explain” * Addition of Benchmark Clarifications   + Benchmark clarifications are an addition to the 2023-2024 high school civics and government benchmarks. Benchmark clarifications are listed in the lesson summary below. |

## **Essential Teacher Content Background Information**

[*Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use*]

| **This section addresses the following topics:**   1. The Constitutional Basis for Influencing Government 2. Influencing Government 3. Public Policy Decision-Making |
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**1. The Constitutional Basis for Influencing Government**

The First Amendment guarantees freedom of the press. The Bill of Rights, which includes the First Amendment, was added to the U.S. Constitution in order to protect individuals from the national government infringing on their rights.

Several of the rights included in the First Amendment allow media, individuals and interest groups to influence government. The rights that facilitate influencing the government include freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and petitioning the government “for redress of grievances”. In protecting these freedoms, the Bill of Rights extends to the media, individuals and interest groups the right to interact with the government in ways that bring criticism about the government to the people (the watchdog role) and directly to the government (lobbying/lobbyists, special interests). Freedom of the press allows it to serve in a watchdog role as one means to protect individuals from the government infringing on their rights.

First Amendment freedoms also extend to political campaigns where individuals, candidates, special interests and political parties use the media to disseminate political messages.

**2. Influencing Government**

Individuals and organizations seek to influence government by interacting directly with government, and by using the media to bring attention to government actions. The media also acts alone to bring attention to government actions. In bringing attention to the public about government actions, also known as the watchdog role, the public may use its First Amendment rights to influence government. Individuals work together to form interest groups (special interests) which are guaranteed by the First Amendment’s freedom of association. Interest groups form to draw attention to government actions, encourage their members to interact with government and with the press, and raise money as a means to accomplishing their political and policy goals. Interest groups also employ persons or firms to interact with the government in order to educate and persuade the government to take action on their behalf. These persons and firms, called lobbyists, communicate with government officials in individual meetings and testify at hearings, such as before congressional committees[[1]](#footnote-0). The combined impact of these individual, group and media actions are to bring attention to, and influence, government actions.

Freedom of the press extends to election campaigns where press coverage includes providing information about the candidates, issues and political parties. The media also serves as a vehicle for candidates, political parties, interest groups and even ordinary citizens to convey their messages during election campaigns. These campaign-related entities pay media outlets to advertise their message. Campaign advertising gives candidates, interest groups and political parties the opportunity to control their message about themselves and their opponents.

Political Action Committees (PACs) are organizations associated with interest groups, individuals, labor groups and corporations that raise and spend money in order to impact election outcomes. PACs give money directly to candidates, and also spend money on candidates’ behalf such as sponsoring campaign commercials advocating how citizens should vote, or to shape opinions about candidates and political parties.

PACs are not wholly unregulated. Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court have regulated PACs. Regulations began in 1971 with the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) which required full and timely disclosure, set ceilings on media advertising, and set limits on contributions from candidates and their families. One of the most recent Supreme Court rulings related to PACs was *McCutcheon v. FEC* in 2014. In this case, the Court struck down a law that placed total contribution caps an individual could contribute to all candidates, PACs, and parties combined. The Court ruled it limited participation in the democratic process and violated the First Amendment. These regulations have impacted PAC influence.

**3. Public Policy Decision-Making**

While the national government has enumerated powers that impact many areas of public policy, the policies that most directly affect the day-to-day lives of citizens are directed to a large degree by government at the state and local levels. These policies may be in the areas of education, emergency services, infrastructure, parks and recreation, taxes, and more. Various national and state agencies are tasked with identifying issues/problems, developing solutions, and setting policies of implementation. Making those decisions however is not as easy as it sounds, and examining the decision-making process at the local, state, and national levels of government can often provide citizens insight into the perceived gridlock surrounding policy change and government action.

Most authority for setting the public policies that affect citizens’ everyday lives is reserved to state and local government agencies. This is a result of the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as well as the practice of federalism. When examining the public policy issues, all elected officials must utilize the U.S. Constitution, and state constitution if they are state or local officials, to first determine if they have the power to act on a policy issue. Some areas of public policy relate to the enumerated powers of the national Congress while other issues may fall under the reserved powers of the state.

If an elected official and/or body has determined it has the constitutional power to address a public policy issue, it still has numerous things to consider in the decision-making process. When analyzing possible solutions, officials must look at everything from available budget to laws already in place, past precedents, and Supreme Court rulings. States must also consider Article VI, Clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution, commonly known as the Supremacy Clause. The Supremacy Clause establishes that the national (federal) constitution, and national law generally, take precedence over state laws and constitutions.

Finally, in addition to all of these factors, there are citizen’s opinions, the desires of special interest groups, and the voice of the media all attempting to influence the decision. And while it may be easy to argue that a government official should only concern themselves with the constitutional and legal elements of the decision, and enact the policy solution that is in the best interest of the nation, these are officials who need to be re-elected to continue to do their job. So, they cannot ignore the influence of public opinion, the media, and interest groups.

## **Lesson Summary**

| **BENCHMARK** |
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| **SS.912.CG.2.12** Explain how interest groups, the media and public opinion influence local, state and national decision-making related to public issues. |
| **BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS** |
| * Students will objectively discuss current public issues in Florida and use both the U.S. and Florida Constitutions to justify pro and con positions. * Students will examine the relationship and responsibilities of both the state and national governments regarding these public issues. * Students will analyze public policy solutions related to local, state and national issues. |
| **FLORIDA CIVIC LITERACY EXAM COMPETENCY CONNECTION** |
| **Competency 2:** Understanding of the United States Constitution and its application |
| **OVERVIEW** |
| In this lesson, students will analyze current public policy issues and solutions and examine the factors that influence the decision-making relating to these issues. |
| **ESSENTIAL QUESTION** |
| What factors and influences are considered during local, state, and national decision-making related to public issues? |
| **GOVERNMENT CONTENT VOCABULARY** |
| * constitutionality, interest group/special interest group, lobbying, lobbyist, media, politician, public opinion, public policy, Supremacy Clause |
| **INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES** |
| Reading complex text Project-based learning Perspective-taking |
| **MATERIALS** |
| * How Do Elected Officials Make Decisions? slide * Elected Officials and Public Policy: An Introduction reading * Think Like a Politician Brainstorming Activity * United States Constitution (external link) * Florida Constitution (external link) * U.S. Senate: Laws and Regulations (external link) * The Florida Legislature (external link) * Student digital device |
| **B.E.S.T. STANDARDS** |
| The grade in which this lesson is taught will determine the specific B.E.S.T. standards correlation. Thematically, this lesson aligns to:   * ELA.R.2.4: Argument * ELA.R.3.3: Comparative Reading |

## **Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace**

| **DAY** | **ACTIVITY SEQUENCE** |
| --- | --- |
| DAY 1 | ***Planning Note:*** *This lesson assumes you have already taught SS.912.CG.2.8 so that students already know the role interest groups, the media, and individuals play in determining public policy. This lesson focuses more on the current application* *from the perspective of an elected official.*   1. Begin class by projecting the “How Do Elected Officials Make Decisions?” slide. 2. Have students brainstorm, on separate paper or in a notebook, what they know about how elected officials at various levels of government make decisions. What do they take into account in making public policy? Who influences them? 3. Allow students several moments to work, circulating the room to monitor for engagement while they brainstorm. 4. Solicit responses specific to the following to engage and scaffold background knowledge:    * At all three levels of government, which branches are primarily responsible for decision-making related to public issues? (executive, legislative)    * What do they have to consider/take into account when making these decisions (state and national constitutions, past precedents, judicial decisions, budgets, the confines of their powers, etc.)    * Who influences them while making these decisions? (citizen opinions, media, interest groups) 5. Explain to students that in this lesson, they will learn more about what goes into the decision-making process at the local, state, and/or national levels of government when elected officials (politicians) try to address problems/issues. 6. Pass out the “Elected Officials and Public Policy: An Introduction” reading. 7. Complete the reading as a class, modeling text-marking strategies as you go. Periodically pause to check for comprehension. 8. Split students into pairs and ensure they have access to a digital device. 9. Distribute a “Think Like a Politician Brainstorming Activity” handout to each pair. 10. Explain to students that with their partner, they will work through the decision-making process an elected official might use to address a national or state public issue, examining all of the factors that are considered. 11. Instruct students to brainstorm a list of national and/or state problems/issues that they find important. Their list should be recorded in box 1 of their “Think Like a Politician Brainstorming Activity” handout.   ***Teacher Note***: If students struggle to brainstorm issues, you could have them examine national and state news publications online for ideas. You may also just assign pairs a predetermined national/state problem if preferred.   1. Once a set amount of brainstorming time has passed, instruct pairs that they must now choose ONE problem/issue from their list for the remainder of the activity. Provide students a few moments to do so, having them record their choice in box 2. Also have them determine if this is more of a national or state problem. 2. Once all pairs have selected one issue/problem, instruct them to work on boxes 3 and 4. They will investigate the national and state constitutions to determine who has the power to address this issue and record that in box 3. They will then use their digital device to begin researching what major rules/policies/laws already exist surrounding their chosen issue.   ***Teacher Note***: You will want to provide them with a list of recommended websites to use for research (“[U.S. Constitution](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript)”; “[Florida Constitution](https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Constitution)”; “[U.S. Senate: Laws and Regulations](https://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_index_subjects/Laws_and_Regulations_vrd.htm)”; “[The Florida Legislature](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Welcome/index.cfm?CFID=156970768&CFTOKEN=65926224)”)   1. While students work, circulate the room to monitor for engagement and understanding, checking in with each group at least once to understand the issue they have chosen and help ensure they are researching in the right areas. 2. Next, bring the class back together and instruct the pairs to brainstorm a list of possible solutions to their chosen issue.   ***Teacher Note***: If students struggle to brainstorm solutions, you could have them return to national and state news publications online for ideas. You may also just assign pairs a predetermined national/state solution if preferred.   1. Once a set amount of brainstorming time has passed, instruct pairs that they must now choose ONE solution from their list for the remainder of the activity. Provide students a few moments to do so, having them record their choice in box 6. 2. Provide students the remainder of the time to work through boxes 7-10 which require they analyze additional factors and influences surrounding their policy decision. 3. While students work, circulate the room to monitor for engagement and understanding. 4. To end class, have students write a one to two sentence summary in which they explain what influences local, state, and national decision-making related to public issues.   ***Teacher Note***: Depending on the dynamics of your class, and how much you are requiring students to write, completing the “Think Like a Politician Brainstorming Activity” portion of the lesson may take two class days and not one. |

## Government **Content Vocabulary**

| **Word/Term** | **Definition** |
| --- | --- |
| **constitutionality** | the quality of aligning to or being allowed by a constitution |
| **interest group/special interest group** | a group of people who are concerned with a particular issue and who try to influence legislators to act in their favor, also known as a special interest group |
| **lobbying** | participating in activities in order to influence government officials |
| **lobbyist** | a person who participates in activities in order to influence government officials |
| **media** | the plural form of the word “medium,” refers to various means of communication. For example, television, radio, newspapers and the Internet (web) are different types of media. The term can also be used to describe news organizations as a whole group. |
| **politician** | a person involved in politics; often referred to as an elected official |
| **public opinion** | the collection of attitudes of a group of people in a population |
| **public policy** | a system of laws, regulations, practices, and priorities concerning a given topic set and funded by elected leaders and/or government agency |
| **Supremacy Clause** | Article VI, Clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution; establishes that the national (federal) constitution, and national law generally, take precedence over state laws and constitutions |

## Additional Resources, Answer Keys, and Sources

| **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** |
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| [Florida Department of Education: Florida Civic Literacy Exam Homepage](https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/fcle.stml)  Florida Department of Education’s Civic Literacy Reading List   * N/A |

| **ANSWER KEYS** |
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| Written Response: Sample Scoring Rubric |

| **SOURCES** |
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| Lesson materials adapted from and inspired by handouts/worksheets used as part of the Civic Action Project from the Constitutional Rights Foundation: <https://www.crfcap.org/>  State of Florida Laws from The Florida Senate: <https://www.flsenate.gov/laws>  Florida Constitution: <https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Constitution>  United States Constitution: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>  The Florida Legislature: <http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Welcome/index.cfm?CFID=156970768&CFTOKEN=65926224>  The U.S. Senate: Laws and Regulations: <https://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_index_subjects/Laws_and_Regulations_vrd.htm> |

1. The term “lobbyist” emerged from the old English practice of persons trying to persuade the government waiting in the Parliament lobby to interact with Members of Parliament as they entered or left the building. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)