

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Idaho teens gain valuable skills through 4-H Know Your Government conference

AT A GLANCE

Learning about the legislative and judicial branch of government is the primary goal of the conference, but teens report that, “they go home knowing how to be a better citizen.”

The Situation

Less than 30% of eighth and 12th grade students were proficient in civics, according to a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics report. With millions of American students and adults unfamiliar with how their government work, experts believe it leaves American democracy vulnerable.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development has hosted the 4-H Know Your Government conference for teens in grades 8 and 9 for the past 35 years. This year 110 youth participated from all four UI Extension districts across the state (26 from the central district, 28 from the eastern district, 32 from the northern district, 24 from the southern district.)

The success of the program comes from its implementation of positive youth development principles that enable youth to learn through the experiential learning process. Conference delegates learned about the judicial or legislative branch of government. Delegates had preconference learning to prepare to serve in specific roles within mock legislative sessions or mock trials.

Positive youth development is not something adults do for youth, but something that young people do for



4-H delegates speak with Gov. Brad Little at the legislative and judicial breakfast during the 4-H KYG conference. Photo Knutz.

themselves with help from adults. The conference planning committee practices Youth-Adult Partnership model consisting of six UI Extension 4-H faculty/staff, five adult volunteers and up to 22 teens in grades 10 and 11 who previously attended the conference. Youth-Adult Partnerships empower youth by fostering youth voice. During the conference, youth committee members help facilitate the mock trials and legislative hearings as well as lead their peers through the daily schedule.

In addition to the judicial and legislative workshops, a news team of eight youth with the guidance of an adult serve to report on the bills being introduced in the mock sessions and the progress of the mock trials. The team produces a promotional video and documents the

conference experience with photos and video. The culmination of their effort is the annual KYG conference newsletter.

The quality of the conference experience can be attributed to the support the program receives from legislators, lobbyist and judicial officials who volunteer their time to coach the youth during their mock sessions and trials. Supporting the judicial workshops were two police officers, five attorneys and two judges. Five state representatives, one state senator, and one lobbyist coached and advised during the legislative workshop.

Program Outcomes

“Know Your Government (KYG) is a wonderfully unique conference that is effective in teaching the youth of Idaho how to be better citizens. Learning about our government is one of the main goals of this conference, but the important thing that you go home knowing is how to be a better citizen of the USA,” Josiah Knapp, KYG youth. The conference evaluation indicates that:

- 56 of youth were comfortable explaining the judicial process.
- 59 youth were comfortable explaining the legislative process.

There were 101 out of 110 youth that responded to the evaluation with 56 in the judicial workshops, 50 in legislative workshops and 10 on the news crew. Fifteen percent of the youth were attending their second year meaning they have experienced both workshops.

Representative Caroline Nilsson Troy has been assisting with KYG for years and state, “This was one of the most prepared group of youth that she has worked with in years.” Elected officials rated the youth in their mock hearing with an average of 9.6 out of 10 for group participation and decorum.

It is no mystery that 4-H helps youth become more involved in their community. The National 4-H Study reported that 4-H youth are four times more likely to make contributions to their communities, two times more likely to be civically active compared to their peers. From the conference evaluations, participants reported that:

- 76% are more interested in doing a community service project.
- 67% are inspired to volunteer in their community.
- 78% believe they can make a difference in their community.

The Future

UI Extension 4-H Youth Development professionals and planning team members will work to grow the number of youths engaged for the 2023 conference as historical attendance was around 175.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

In addition to registration, the KYG conference was funded through sponsorship and donations which totaled over \$16,000. Major sponsors included Northwest Farm Credit Services, Washington Trust Bank and HUB Insurance.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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