

4-H Capitol Experience

Preparing Youth for Active Citizenship

March 18-21, 2012

Audience

This program is open to Michigan high school teens interested in citizenship programs and state and local government. Total attendance was 75 youth plus 14 adult chaperones from 23 Michigan counties. Grade levels reached were: 11—9th, 32—10th, 24—11th, and 8—12th graders; 55 were female and 20 male. People of color comprised 16% of youth attendees.

Objectives

This youth development conference is designed to help youth:

- Discover how to be actively involved in influencing policy decisions.
- Explore different aspects of a policy issue that may affect individuals and communities.
- Learn about the policy process at the state level.
- Increase youths' communication, team work, citizenship, and leadership skills.
- Foster participants' ability to meet new people and make new friends from different places and backgrounds.
- Develop and expand career and personal interests.
- Develop social and academic skills needed for a successful transition to college and life as an adult.

Description

Youth development and experiential education theory and practice are fundamental to the program's design and implementation. Teens participate in a nine hour Michigan Legislative Simulation over four days. The youth are assigned to an issue group; such as health, education and jobs & the economy. As part of the simulation, they research and propose Senate and House bills; conduct House and Senate leadership position elections; participate in legislative committee meetings; debate and vote on bills and have their bills signed into law by an acting governor. When not participating in the simulation, the youth spend time with their legislators, observe an actual House and Senate session; and visit community and state agencies, lobbyists and legislative aides. There are 39 intentional contact hours.

In 2012 there were 16 MSU faculty/staff, 1 MSU student and dozens of Michigan government experts involved.

Outcomes

A pre-/post-survey was used to measure participants skills and perceptions. Below are response highlights for youth who "strongly agreed" with targeted skills. Before the event responses are shown in parentheses.

- *I can think critically about public policy issues and suggest ways for improvement—(6%) 49%*
 - *I know who to contact to get things done—(6%) 58%*
 - *I am open to different points of view—(17%) 61%*
- The outcomes below were post-event responses only; they are a combined measure of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree."
- *I plan to vote when I turn 18—97%*
 - *I think that teens can influence state government policy and policy makers—97%**
 - *I think that teens and adults working together can influence state government and*

Select comments from Teen Participants

- *It made me realize how important it is for teens to get involved because in a few years we will be the people who are making governmental decisions.*
- *It makes me think that I have more influence in my community than I thought; it's amazing what one vote can do.*
- *It has made me a more confident leader which has given me more options to consider as a career.*

Funding

This is a fee-based program. A limited number of partial and full scholarships are available at the county level based on merit and need. Partial scholarships are available at the state level.

Contact Information

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