WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

4-H KNOW YOUR GOVERNMENT

2016

BY THE NUMBERS

- More than 220 high school students and 50 mentors attend the KYG Conference.
- 90% of participating youth, on average, reported significant gains in civic knowledge over the past 5 years.
- Since 1978, KYG has provided hands-on civic education.
- More than 3/4 of Washington counties are represented at the KYG Conference in any given year.

The 4-H Know Your Government program empowers youth and adults to engage in leadership, citizenship, and life-skill development and application.

ISSUE

Civics in America is in decline and it's an alarming trend among American youth. A lack of civic engagement and civic literacy among youth is widespread. They often do not have the knowledge or experience necessary to connect civics facts and concepts to the responsibilities of citizenship. The National Assessment of Education Progress 2006 report on civics competencies indicates that barely a quarter of the nation's 4th, 8th, and 12th graders are proficient in civics, with only 5% of high school seniors able to identify and explain checks on presidential power. Only 35.5% of teenagers can correctly identify "We, the people" as the first three words of the Constitution (National Constitution Center; 1998). Civic education plays an essential role in strengthening our democratic society, informing citizens, and cultivating a habit and culture of civic participation. Youth need civic learning experiences to enable them to become informed, active, and participating citizens in their communities.

RESPONSE

Know Your Government (KYG) is an experiential civic education program developed and produced by Washington State University Extension 4-H to increase youth understanding and practice of positive citizenship. The KYG program strengthens the connection between youth and our political and social networks through education, experience, application, and inspiration. This hands-on program plays a critical role in providing civic education to high school youth. It enhances the students' understanding of citizenship by teaching civic knowledge and linking that knowledge to practical experiences. Focus is put on developing life skills that strengthen the development of positive, contributing citizens.

Each year, more than 220 high school students (Grades 9–12) and 50 adult mentors participate in the KYG program. Participants are introduced to the democratic process in an interactive and informal way through a four-year program of rotating civic topics covering the legislative process, the judicial process, elections and party platforms, and politics and the media. Students study civics and practice what they've learned through debates, mock trials and legislative processes, elections, and discussions at county 4-H meetings—all of which culminates in the annual Know Your Government Conference in Olympia, Washington.

For more information, contact Nancy Deringer, 4-H Associate Director | WSU Extension 4-H, 140 South Arthur, Ste 500, Spokane WA 99202 | 509-358-7788 or **washington.4h@wsu.edu**.

QUOTES

"The most important thing I have gained from participating in the 4-H Know Your Government Program is a new-found appreciation for the work that goes into each aspect of a trial."

"I have learned more about our judicial system and more about myself in the process."

"This in-depth learning experience taught me how complicated the government processes can be, yet how important it is."

"I know more about the government than ever before and I had fun while doing it."

"Through the KYG program, I learned how to respect my rights and not take them for granted, and how to use them to improve my community."

IMPACTS

Both the community service aspect and the service learning emphasis of the program provide students with a strong sense of accomplishment, and the development of civic dispositions leads them to stay involved. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Students who receive effective civic learning are more likely to vote and discuss politics at home, are four times more likely to volunteer and work on community issues, and are more confident in their abilities to speak publicly and communicate with their elected representatives.

Over the past three years, 85% to 93% of participating youth reported significant gains from pre- to post-program in the following life-skill areas and in civics:

- Leadership;
- Communication;
- Decision making;
- Organization;
- Accepting differences;
- Knowledge of the judicial and legislative processes, and how a citizen functions in them; and
- Realization that democracy requires responsible citizenship and participation.

Research shows that civic education of youth leads to:

- Young people who are engaged in civic education, with greater political involvement and regular participation in elections;
- Participants seeking additional civic education for themselves and their community;
- Social improvements and more active, positive citizenship;
- Increased participant willingness and likelihood to address social problems at the local level and beyond; and
- Civic improvements accomplished by engaging a community in its entirety.

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For more information about the Know Your Government Conference, visit **http://4h.wsu.edu/conferences/kyg/**.