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Towns Association Essay

Youth in Local Government

Recently, I became a first time voter. When I think of election day, the first thing that comes to mind is presidents, senators, and representatives. However, this particular election concerned who would serve on the school board in my town. It was then that I began to grasp the importance of local government in my life. I went to school every day; it is part and parcel of my routine and greatly affects how I manage my time. It made perfect sense to me that the people who would be elected to the school board would have a great impact on my daily life, but up until that point, I had failed to recognize this fact. If the school board had this much impact on my daily life, then a town board would be tantamount in importance. Wisconsin's leaders can facilitate youth involvement in town boards by emphasizing the importance of local governments in history classes, instilling a sense of pride in being a part of a community, and raising awareness about the problems faced by communities today.

The first item necessary in encouraging young people to have an interest in the town board is education. At my high school, every student is required to take a civics class in ninth grade. However, instead of focusing on the local government that heavily impacts the students, my teacher immersed us on the workings of the national government. I realize that my teacher was following the curriculum he was required to teach, and I have no objections to learning about government on a national level. However, I also feel that it is imperative to also educate our youth about the functions of their local governments and the reach they have in their daily life. If educators in Wisconsin were required to teach their students about town boards and local elections, youth would have a new appreciation for everything that goes into making a

community operate smoothly. By educating younger generations about local governments, these youth can in turn “provide governments with fresh ideas and approaches and ensure that policy outcomes are responsive to the concerns of young people” (OECD 4). Newer generations come with new experiences and ideas, both of which must be cultivated with a thorough education in order to ensure the success of our youth, and in turn, our community.

Communities stand to benefit greatly from young people serving on town boards. However, in order for this to happen, it is essential that youth feel a sense of belonging and acceptance within their respective communities. Without a sense of pride in their town and the people in it, younger generations will feel no need to be a part of their community, and thus will be less motivated to run for a town board. This makes reaching out to adolescents through community activities and town celebrations of the utmost importance. According to the OECD, “membership of youth groups and voluntary organizations correlates with future political engagements and builds trust and transparency between generations and between citizens and their government” (5). Offering youth activities provides an opportunity to instill a sense of pride and acceptance within younger generations, as well as inspiring an interest in the community. However, simply offering youth activities does little to encourage active participation. It is important to meet them halfway through modes of communication that they are accustomed to, such as social media. Social media, the OECD says, is “a more networked, digital approach to communication that expects young people to participate actively” (9). Younger generations have grown up in a digital world, making it one of their primary methods of interaction. Offering surveys and other interactive online activities allows for a more modern approach in generating interest in serving on a town board. When youth feel more involved and included in their

community, they will feel connected to the citizens of their towns and thus more likely to develop an interest in being a part of their local government.

Furthermore, one of the leading strategies in encouraging youth to run for town boards is to raise awareness about current issues that communities are currently facing. According to the OECD, “young people are likely to be interested in open government strategies... especially if they are connected to other issues that matter most to them” (6). There are topics that younger generations feel passionate about. If the current members of the town board were to reach out to young people and make them aware of the problems facing their town today, it would create a call to action for youth and encourage them to make a longlasting change in their community. Without being aware of critical issues faced by local leaders, adolescents and young adults are completely unaware that changes can be made to improve their communities. In creating a call to action and a line of open communication between leaders and youth, this will produce positive, enduring effects that will only benefit the community and, in turn, the town board.

In conclusion, there is a great potential for success in encouraging the younger generations to serve on a town board. It is only a matter of utilizing tools such as education, social media, and communication to encourage youth to feel passionate about current local issues. These changes will not only benefit the town board, but will create a cohesive community that actively works with its citizens to improve aspects of their daily life. Members of the town board have a great potential to reach out to the younger members of their community and inspire them to take action and make worthwhile changes. If youth were inspired to serve in a local office, it would only benefit and enhance the efficacy of local governments.

Works Cited

OECD. "Engaging Young People in Open Government." *OECD*, 2022, www.oecd.org/mena/governance/Young-people-in-OG.pdf. Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.