

Annual Report for 2021

The Youth Engagement Committee ended the prior League fiscal year with a great success – the LCPS collaboration “Getting to know Your Local Government”, an event with about 150 high school students spending a day at City Hall, getting briefings from various city agencies, and holding a competition to solve real city problems. Both LCPS and the city representatives were very pleased and planned to make this an annual event. Then COVID hit.

The Youth Engagement Committee did not hold formal meetings throughout the spring and most of the summer of 2020. In late summer, Erika Graf-Webster formed a small subcommittee consisting of Lizz Taylor, Barb Records, Karena Oberman and Naoma Staley to address the feasibility of forming a local Youth Vote group, based on a similar, highly successful effort by the Anchorage Alaska League. This subcommittee has determined that this could not be feasibly accomplished prior to this election. Instead, the YEC agree to continue supporting the ongoing voter turnout efforts at NMSU, DACC and LCPS.

In early winter, the committee met and agreed on two potential activities for the few months: planning the development of the Youth Vote group (tentatively named “We Can’t Wait Squad”) staffed entirely by young people and mentored by YEC; and the development of a “Voter Handbook”, aimed at youths and written in youth-oriented language that would cover information about the “when-where-how” of voter registration and voting, and would also link to information about the offices up for election and the candidates for those offices.

The committee is continuing its close collaboration with the LCPS, termed “The Civic Engagement Project”. During recent meetings with the teachers who participate in this Project, the proposed “We Can’t Wait” squad was discussed. One of the early goals of this squad would be to act as “digital gatekeepers to social media” for young people, thus combating misinformation on those sites. The participating teachers feel that enough course material about media literacy exists and can be used for this effort. In addition, The Civic Engagement Project participants liked the idea of the development of a youth-oriented Voter Handbook. One option for this is to make it a graphics-based book, with a superhero called “Defender of Democracy” who would lead the reader through the information about voter registration and voting. A potential competition among students in the lower grades to design the “Defender of Democracy” character was discussed.

The Youth Engagement Committee looks forward to continued collaboration with the Las Cruces Public Schools for the coming year, as well as its continued relationship with NMSU and DACC students and professors. In addition, once the COVID threat is diminished, plans are in place for further student visits to the Las Cruces city government and possibly the County government as well.