

Twenty-Five Ways City Officials Can Help Youngsters Learn About Local Government

1. Order the *Our Town, Texas* curriculum—interactive lessons on local government in Texas—from the Texas City Management Association, and then distribute the materials to schools in your area. Separate educational materials for K-1, 2-5, and middle school—including teacher’s guides and activity handouts—are available on CDs. Visit www.ourtowntexas.org for more information, and call the TML office at 512-231-7400 to order the CDs.
2. Sponsor an essay contest on “Why I’m proud to live in _____,” “How my city deals with _____,” or “What my city will be like when I first vote.”
3. Make city information kits available to teachers, with suggestions on how they might be used in different cases (for example, math problems based on the city budget, a history lesson based on local history, or an English lesson using a city report).
4. Offer a “mentor” program in which teachers in any subject area can meet and consult with one or more city officials to learn more about their city functions, and/or offer a summer workshop for teachers to familiarize them with city operations. The instructors can then pass along what they learn to their students.



5. Volunteer to speak at schools and encourage other city officials to make visits to classrooms to talk about local issues and procedures. (Proper preparation is essential, and the teacher should be able to advise how to present the information for various grade levels.)
6. Develop simple slide shows—ideally tailored to the school neighborhood—to describe how city services are delivered and how the young people are affected by them.
7. Develop a “city coloring book” depicting history, services, unique features, economy, and so on, to distribute to students.
8. Open city hall and other city facilities to field trips and conduct tours that emphasize how services are provided and how they affect students.
9. Develop local “case studies” for classroom use to engage students at all grade levels in researching solutions to local problems, such as playground

vandalism, traffic problems, even land use or fiscal or social problems that will capture their imagination.

- 10.** Offer students an opportunity to observe local officials at work to learn how and why things are done and then report back to their classes.
- 11.** Sponsor youth government programs that engage students in dealing with actual city issues. Send youth representatives from your city to the annual Youth Advisory Commission Summit (YAC), sponsored by TML, to be held February 23-24, 2008 in Lake Jackson (please call the TML office at 512-231-7400 for more details).
- 12.** Sponsor mock debates on local issues, primarily those that impact young people.
- 13.** Encourage schools to hold community celebrations in which students can display knowledge of their city.
- 14.** Sponsor history hunts or scavenger hunts in which students bring back information about the city. Students might interview a city official about a specific local issue or an elderly native about his or her childhood in the city; bring back a flyer from a local museum or a photo or drawing of some local site; or write a report on a civic event, place, or official.
- 15.** Establish regular contact between city officials and public and private school officials to explore and develop mutually helpful ideas.
- 16.** Ask local service organizations and businesses to contribute time, talent, and financial support to efforts to teach about the community and citizenship.
- 17.** Encourage the use of local newspapers, publications, city newsletters, and so on, as sources of classroom discussion.
- 18.** Develop slide or video programs that describe city issues and processes, such as how the city plans land use, how the city recreation and parks program operates, how the city library can help students, how to bring an issue to the attention of the city council, how the police handle a typical juvenile problem, or how to get help from the city.
- 19.** Send city representatives to school carnivals or festivals to help children—and their parents—get to know their city. This might include displays of neighborhood zoning maps, plans for improvements, or special equipment, like police cars or fire trucks. Even a street sweeper with information about its operation can be of interest to young people.
- 20.** Be sure your city library has available and can assist all grade levels in using materials about your city, its operations, history, plans, and so forth. This goes for school libraries, as well.
- 21.** Involve the leadership of the schools, private sector, press, and government in an ongoing program to foster citizenship education in your city.
- 22.** Engage students in special city interest efforts, like water or energy conservation, anti-litter or anti-graffiti campaigns, or reporting problems like a broken street light or traffic sign.
- 23.** Sponsor citizenship award competitions for individual students, classes, or schools.
- 24.** Cosponsor community service programs for students, offering them an opportunity to gain practical work experience while they assist their cities in some needed effort.
- 25.** Develop a version of “Trivial Pursuit” to teach children—and adults—about their city. ★

