



Vanessa Tolle <vanessa.tolle@isd15.org>

Fwd: Girls State

1 message

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To: Vanessa Tolle <vanessa.tolle@isd15.org>

Mon, Jun 22, 2026 at 12:00 PM

I know this is last minute, but can you add this as my board report, that way I can just highlight it at the board meeting and not have to go into as much detail. I'm not sure that I have ever added pictures to a board report but I thought they added to the story.

American Legion Auxiliary Minnesota Girls State

I'd like to highlight the American Legion Auxiliary Minnesota Girls State program that my daughter, Emily, attended last week at Bethel University and what a great opportunity it is for these girls across the state.

Before she attended, I honestly didn't know a lot about the program. I had heard of Girls State, but I didn't fully understand what it was or the impact it has on the young women who participate. After learning more about it and hearing about her experience, I came away extremely impressed.

American Legion Auxiliary Girls State is held in every state across the country each summer. Minnesota Girls State just completed its 79th session and welcomed 220 young women from throughout the state. Participants have all completed their junior year of high school and come from small towns, suburban communities, and larger cities. They spend an entire week together, living in the dorms from Sunday through Friday, learning from one another while developing leadership skills and a deeper understanding of government and citizenship.

What makes the program unique is that the students don't just learn about government, they actually build and run their own government. The participants are divided into two fictional political parties and spend the week forming cities, counties, and a state government. They elect local officials, county officials, and state officials, including a governor, attorney general, state auditor, legislators, supreme court justices, and many other positions.

Throughout the week, they campaign, caucus, debate issues, vote, and learn parliamentary procedure. They draft legislation and work through the same processes that exist in real government. The program provides a firsthand understanding of the duties, privileges, rights, and responsibilities that come with living in a democratic society.

The students also spend a day at the Minnesota State Capitol, where they receive an in-depth tour and have the opportunity to sit in the House and Senate chambers while debating bills they have written themselves. During the week they hear from a variety of elected officials, attorneys, law enforcement leaders, veterans, and community leaders who help them better understand how government works at the local and state levels.

One of the things I appreciate most about the program is that it teaches students not only how government works, but also how to work with people who may have different perspectives and backgrounds. In today's world, that's a valuable lesson that extends well beyond government and politics.

I would like to recognize Peggy Tesdahl, our district's Transportation Supervisor, who serves as the Director of Minnesota Girls State. Peggy, along with the many volunteer members of the American Legion Auxiliary who staff the program, dedicates an incredible amount of time and energy to making this experience possible. These VOLUNTEERS spend an entire week away from home, living in the dorms and working long hours to ensure the program runs smoothly and that every participant has a meaningful experience.

What stood out to me was seeing the impact Peggy had on the girls. At the closing ceremony, she effortlessly recognized and thanked countless volunteers, staff members, and supporters without a single note in front of her. It was clear how much she cares about the program and the people who make it successful. Her knowledge, organization, and passion were on full display.

What happened after the ceremony may have been even more impressive. As families gathered and students prepared to leave, girls lined up to take selfies and photos with Peggy. It honestly felt like watching a celebrity surrounded by fans. While it was fun to see, it also spoke volumes about the relationships she builds and the positive impact she has on these young women. The respect, admiration, and gratitude they showed toward her was impossible to miss.

Programs like Girls State do not happen without dedicated volunteers and strong leadership. Peggy's commitment is a big reason why Minnesota Girls State continues to be such a meaningful experience for hundreds of young women each year. We are fortunate to have someone from our district leading a program that helps develop future leaders from across the state.

After seeing the impact this program had on my daughter, I have an even greater appreciation for the opportunities it provides. Participants leave with stronger leadership skills, a better understanding of government, a renewed appreciation for civic engagement, lasting friendships, and memories that will stay with them for years to come.

I want to thank Peggy and all of the volunteers who make this outstanding program possible and encourage us to continue supporting opportunities like Girls State that help develop the next generation of leaders and engaged citizens.

Thanks,
Rob Schoenrock

4 attachments



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