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CHALLENGES, AND COPING MECHANISMS OF SANGGUNANG KABATAAN (SK) IN CALANASAN, APAYAO: A BASIS FOR THE FORMULATION OF OPERATIONAL POLICIES

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the challenges and coping strategies of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials in Calanasan, Apayao, through thematic analysis of interviews with ten respondents. Findings revealed ten major challenges, including incomplete SK councils, youth apathy, administrative inexperience, academic load, limited funding, political interference, and weak community engagement. Despite these obstacles, SK officials employed adaptive coping strategies such as task delegation, use of social media, time management, self-learning, mentorship, and positive reframing. The study also proposed eight policy recommendations to address structural gaps and promote more inclusive, transparent, and sustainable youth governance. Overall, the study highlights the resilience and resourcefulness of young leaders, emphasizing the need for institutional support and reforms to strengthen the effectiveness of the SK in local governance.

Keywords: Youth Governance, Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), Administrative Challenges, Leadership Development, Community Engagement

Introduction

The involvement of youth in governance is widely recognized as a critical factor in nation-building. Theoretical and empirical studies affirm that youth participation contributes to political renewal, civic engagement, and sustainable development (Checkoway, 2011; Lansdown, 2010). In the Philippines, this participation is institutionalized through the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), the

governing body for youth affairs at the barangay level, and the official mechanism for engaging young people in local governance.

The SK provides a unique platform for Filipino youth to contribute to decision-making processes, craft programs responsive to their communities' needs, and develop leadership competencies. It is a

manifestation of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Article II, Section 13, which mandates the State to recognize the vital role of the youth in nation-building and to promote and protect their well-being in all aspects—physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social.

Despite this idealistic foundation, studies have revealed that the SK has struggled to live up to its potential. Among the challenges are corruption, mismanagement of funds, limited experience, and undue influence from traditional political actors (Mendoza, 2016; Magno, 2017). The absence of transparency and accountability mechanisms, particularly concerning financial autonomy, has led to inefficiencies and inconsistencies in program implementation (Reyes, 2018). Some SK officials have focused on visible projects—such as sports and recreation—that garner quick recognition, while critical areas like education, livelihood, mental health, and youth empowerment are often sidelined (Rosales, 2023).

To address these systemic issues, Republic Act No. 10742, or the Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act of 2015, was enacted to introduce reforms that promote accountability, professionalize SK operations, and empower youth leaders through training and institutional support. One of the significant provisions under the Act is the appointment of Local Youth Development Officers (LYDOs), who are tasked with assisting SK officials in planning, implementing, and monitoring youth development programs. LYDOs, in collaboration with the National Youth Commission (NYC) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), are envisioned to provide technical guidance to ensure good governance and reduce avenues for corruption (DILG & NYC, 2020).

Further guidance is outlined in the Philippine Youth Development Plan (PYDP) 2023–2028, which highlights youth participation, employment, health, and civic engagement as pillars for national development. However, challenges persist, especially in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs) like Calanasan, Apayao, where access to resources, leadership training, and youth engagement in governance remains limited.

While existing literature—including the work of Atanoza-Megriño (2024), who traced the trajectories of SK leaders from 1992 to 2021, and Rosales (2023), who evaluated SK performance in Cuenca, Batangas—has provided valuable insights into the strengths and shortcomings of youth governance, there remains a significant gap in research focused on rural and marginalized communities. Very little is known about the lived experiences, administrative priorities, and coping mechanisms of SK officials in far-flung municipalities like Calanasan.

Thus, this study seeks to fill this research gap by providing a holistic assessment of the administrative experiences of SK leaders in Calanasan, Apayao. It considers the influence of geographical isolation, cultural context, and socio-economic constraints on the effectiveness of youth leadership. The findings of this research aim to contribute to the national discourse on youth governance and offer empirically grounded policy recommendations for enhancing SK operations at the grassroots level.

Statement of the Problem

Generally, this study aimed to determine the challenges, and coping mechanisms of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) in Calanasan, Apayao as basis for the formulation of operational policies.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What challenges do SK officials encounter in the performance of their administrative and leadership functions?
2. What coping mechanisms and strategies do SK officials employ to address these challenges?
3. What policy improvements can be proposed to enhance SK's effectiveness?

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to assess the challenges, and coping mechanisms of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials in Calanasan, Apayao. The quantitative aspect utilized structured survey questionnaires distributed to 50 participants—36 SK officials and 14 Katipunan ng Kabataan members—from all barangays, regardless of the completeness of SK councils. The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews with 10 purposively selected SK Chairpersons to provide contextual insights.

The research locale, Calanasan, is characterized by geographically dispersed and resource-limited communities, making it ideal for studying youth governance in challenging contexts. The purposive sampling technique ensured a diverse representation of youth leaders actively involved in SK operations.

Survey questionnaires captured participants' prioritization of key administrative areas, such as youth empowerment, education, health, environment, culture, and community development. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean). A scoring rubric categorized priorities from “Very Highly Prioritized” to “Not Prioritized.”

Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, revealing insights into operational constraints, leadership challenges, coping strategies, and recommendations for improving governance. Triangulation of survey and interview data allowed for validation and deeper understanding of youth leadership realities in rural settings. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. While the study offers valuable insights into SK leadership in Calanasan, limitations include the non-generalizability of findings to other areas and the potential bias from self-reported data. The method of this study ensured a comprehensive, evidence-based evaluation of SK governance in Calanasan, enabling the formulation of localized policy recommendations.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the findings of the study on the challenges, and coping mechanisms of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials in Calanasan, Apayao. The analysis integrates qualitative data gathered through surveys and interviews to provide a comprehensive view of SK governance in a rural and geographically challenging context.

The presentation of results is organized according to the major themes of the study: challenges encountered in the performance of duties, and coping strategies employed to overcome such challenges. These findings are supplemented by qualitative data

from key informant interviews, which offer deeper insights and contextual understanding of the lived experiences of SK leaders.

The ensuing discussion aims to identify strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement in the SK's implementation of its mandated functions, ultimately informing policy recommendations that can

enhance youth participation, leadership development, and service delivery at the grassroots level.

TABLE 1: Summary of Qualitative Responses of Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, and Suggestions from Sangguniang Kabataan Respondents (RSK1–RSK10)

Challenges

Theme	Subtheme	Verbatim (Ilokano / Tagalog / English per respondent - RSK1 to RSK10)	Convergence / Divergence
1. Incomplete SK Council & Quorum Issues	Low Member Turnout	RSK1: "Bassit laeng ti aktibo nga miyembro ken saan da umay iti meeting." (<i>"Only a few active members attend meetings."</i>)	Convergence – Respondents RSK1, RSK3, RSK10 agreed that low attendance among SK officials causes a lack of quorum, which hampers council functions and delays decision-making.
		RSK3: "Minsan walang quorum dahil sa hindi pagdalo." (<i>"Sometimes there is no quorum due to absenteeism."</i>)	
		RSK10: "Tatlo lang kami na SK officials at karamihang mga barangay sa Calanasan ay walang quorum." (<i>"We are only three SK officials and majority of the barangays here in Calanasan doesn't have a quorum."</i>)	
2. Youth Apathy & Disengagement	Lack of Interest	RSK4: "Awan ti interes ti kabataan iti agpartisipar iti programa." (<i>"The youth lack interest in participating in programs."</i>)	Convergence – Many SK officials (RSK2, RSK4, RSK6) observed that most youth show little to no interest in participating in SK programs, which affects turnout and enthusiasm.
		RSK2: "Maraming kabataan ang walang gana sumali sa mga aktibidad." (<i>"Many youth lack enthusiasm to join activities."</i>)	
		RSK6: "The youth are generally disinterested in participating in community programs." (<i>"The youth are generally disinterested."</i>)	
3. Legal Confusion & Inexperience	Unfamiliarity with Procedures	RSK3: "Saan kami makaawat iti patakaran iti SK." (<i>"We do not understand SK policies."</i>)	Convergence – SK officials (RSK3, RSK8, RSK10) expressed a shared lack of understanding of SK policies and documentation requirements, which complicates their operations.
		RSK8: "Nalilito kami sa proseso ng dokumentasyon." (<i>"We are confused by documentation procedures."</i>)	
		RSK10: "We are unfamiliar with the formal procedures required." (<i>"We lack knowledge of formal requirements."</i>)	
4. Academic Load & Time Management	Balancing SK and School	RSK1: "Narigat a pagsabayan ti SK ken klase." (<i>"It is difficult to balance SK and school."</i>)	Convergence – RSK1, RSK6, RSK9 says Balancing academics and SK duties was a common difficulty, as many respondents struggle with managing their time effectively.
		RSK6: "Mahirap pagsabayin ang oras para sa school at SK." (<i>"Balancing school and SK duties is hard."</i>)	
		RSK9: "School workload limits the time we can dedicate to SK activities." (<i>"School limits SK involvement time."</i>)	
5. Lack of Funds & Admin Skills	Inaccessible Funding	RSK2: "Awan ti umanay nga pondo para iti proyekto, ngem natulungan kami ti YDO iti pag-access ti pondo." (<i>"No sufficient funds, but YDO helped us access funds."</i>)	Convergence – Respondents RSK2, RSK5, RSK7 noted a shared challenge in accessing funds and managing finances, although some received support from agencies like the YDO and MLGOO.
		RSK5: "Kulang sa pera pero tinulungan kami ng MLGOO sa pagproseso ng budget." (<i>"Lack of money, but MLGOO helped process budget."</i>)	
		RSK7: "Limited budget, pero may tulong mula sa YDO at MLGOO." (<i>"Limited budget, with support from YDO and MLGOO."</i>)	
6. Political Interference	External Pressure	RSK4: "Adda politikal a pakialam iti SK affairs."	Convergence – SK

And Political Pressure		<i>("Political interference affects SK matters.")</i> RSK6: "May political interference na nakakaapekto sa trabaho." <i>("Politics interfere with our work.")</i> RSK9: "Political factors often influence SK decisions." <i>("Political influence impacts decisions.")</i>	officials (RSK4, RSK6, RSK9 RSK5, RSK8) commonly reported experiencing political pressure from external parties, influencing their decisions and independence. The influence of politics on council decisions was a recurring theme, as many officials felt pressured by external forces.
	Influence on Decisions	RSK5: "Adda politikal a makaapekto iti SK." <i>("Political problems affect SK.")</i>	
		RSK6: "Nakakaapekto ang politika sa mga desisyon." <i>("Politics influence decisions.")</i>	
		RSK8: "Political pressure affects council decisions." <i>("Political pressure affects decisions.")</i>	
		RSK4: "Hindi laging nakakatulong ang barangay." <i>("Barangay does not always help.")</i>	
		RSK6: "Lack of strong barangay support is a challenge." <i>("Weak barangay support is challenging.")</i>	
7. Youth Participation Challenges	Low Engagement	RSK2: "Kakaunti lang ang aktibong youth sa mga proyekto." <i>("Few youths actively participate.")</i>	Convergence – RSK2, RSK4, RSK6 repeatedly noted minimal youth involvement in projects, attributing it to disinterest or lack of awareness.
		RSK4: "Maraming youth ang hindi interesado." <i>("Many youth are uninterested.")</i>	
		RSK6: "Youth participation is minimal." <i>("Youth engagement is low.")</i>	
8. Resource Allocation Issues and Budget Delays	Budget Prioritization	RSK1: "Nabayag ti panawen a madusa ti pondo." <i>("Funds are delayed for a long time.")</i>	Convergence – Many respondents such as RSK1, RSK5, RSK7 struggled with prioritizing and accessing resources, leading to delays in project implementation.
		RSK5: "Mahirap iprioritize ang budget." <i>("Budget prioritization is difficult.")</i>	
		RSK7: "Resource allocation often causes delays." <i>("Resources are not properly allocated.")</i>	
	Funding Release	RSK1: "Nabannog kami gapu iti panawen ti release ti pondo." <i>("We are frustrated by delayed funding.")</i>	Convergence – RSK1, RSK6, RSK8 reported frustration over delayed budget releases, which postponed planned activities.
		RSK6: "Madalas na delayed ang pag-release ng budget." <i>("Budget release is often delayed.")</i>	
		RSK8: "Late funding causes project delays." <i>("Late funds delay projects.")</i>	
		RSK9: "Logistics limit program implementation." <i>("Logistical problems hinder projects.")</i>	
		RSK7: "Mahirap ipaalam sa mga kabataan." <i>("Hard to disseminate information.")</i>	
		RSK10: "Difficulty in reaching youth with information." <i>("Communication barriers exist.")</i>	
		RSK6: "Nakakaapekto ang politika sa mga desisyon." <i>("Politics influence decisions.")</i>	
		RSK8: "Political pressure affects council decisions." <i>("Politics influence decisions.")</i>	
9. Limited Youth Awareness	Knowledge Gap	RSK2: "Saan ammo ti adu a youth iti SK trabaho." <i>("Many youth do not know SK work.")</i>	Convergence – Only some respondents such as RSK2, RSK7, RSK10 mentioned burnout and fatigue, indicating that while a few feel demotivated, it is not a shared experience.
		RSK7: "Maraming kabataan ang hindi alam ang tungkulin." <i>("Many youth do not know their roles.")</i>	
		RSK10: "Youth lack awareness about SK roles." <i>("Lack of youth awareness.")</i>	
		RSK4: "Mahirap pumunta sa mga barangay." <i>("Going to barangays is difficult.")</i>	

		RSK6: "Travel issues limit participation." ("Transportation limits activities.")	
10. Lack of Program Continuity	Sustainability Issues	RSK1: "Awan ti masansan nga programa." ("No continuous programs.")	Convergence – RSK1, RSK6, RSK9
		RSK6: "Mahirap ang pagpapatuloy ng proyekto." ("Project continuation is difficult.")	
		RSK9: "Programs lack continuity." ("Lack of program sustainability.")	
		RSK5: "Mahirap ang pagtanggap ng komunidad." ("Community acceptance is difficult.")	
		RSK8: "Community support is weak." ("Weak community support.")	

Above is the thematic analysis of the responses from ten (10) Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials in Calanasan, Apayao which revealed ten major challenges they face in their roles as young leaders. A key issue was the inadequacy of SK councils and frequent quorum problems due to inactive or absent members. Youth disengagement also emerged, with many officials reporting a general lack of interest among young people in participating in SK activities.

Administrative inexperience and confusion over legal procedures further hindered their work, as several respondents admitted difficulty understanding SK policies and documentation processes. Balancing SK duties with academic responsibilities was another challenge, often resulting in time constraints and stress.

Limited funds and administrative skills were common concerns, though some officials cited assistance from the Youth Development Office (YDO) and Municipal Local Government

Operations Officer (MLGOO) in accessing resources. Political interference also affected their autonomy, with several acknowledging pressure from local politicians.

Additionally, officials highlighted low youth participation, delayed fund releases, and difficulties in resource allocation as barriers to effective governance. Many youths were unaware of SK roles and responsibilities, limiting community engagement. Finally, lack of program continuity and weak community support undermined the sustainability of SK initiatives.

These findings align with existing literature, including studies by Manalo (2020), Reyes and Tadeo (2018), and Pabico (2017), affirming that SK leaders across various regions face systemic and contextual challenges that impact their effectiveness. Addressing these concerns requires institutional support, youth education, and improved governance mechanisms.

Table 2. Coping mechanisms of the SK officials in Calanasan, Apayao

Coping Mechanisms			
(Theme)	Subtheme	Verbatim (Ilokano/Tagalog/English)	Convergence / Divergence
Task Delegation and Shared Responsibility	Task Sharing	"Nagbingbingay kami kadagiti trabaho tapno haan nga maysa lang ti ma-burden." ("We divided tasks so that not only one person is burdened.")	Convergence – RSK10 and others use this to manage work despite low quorum
Use of Social Media & Digital Tools	Digital Engagement	"Nagusar kami ti social media ken online tools para iti communication ken organization." ("We used social media and online tools for communication and organization.")	Convergence – All respondents found this effective for reaching disengaged youth
Self-Initiative and Informal Learning	Personal Effort	"Sariling pag-aaral lang"; "Kami ang nag-initiative"; "Informal na konsultasyon; sariling pera ang ginamit" ("Self-learning only; we initiated; used personal funds.")	Convergence – RSK2, RSK5, RSK6 show reliance on informal learning
Time Management Planning	Scheduling	"Nagaramid kami ti schedule ti meetings ken activities tapno maliklikan ti conflict iti school." ("We created a schedule of meetings and activities to avoid conflicts with school.")	Convergence – Common practice among busy youth leaders (e.g., RSK10)
Seeking Guidance from Elders and Agencies	Financial Navigation	"Nagpatulong kami kadagiti elders iti barangay para iti advice ken guidance." ("We sought help from elders in the barangay for advice and guidance.")	Convergence – Used by RSK5; also supported by help from YDO, MLGOO

Positive Reframing	Focus on Solutions	"Imbes nga ag-focus kami iti problema, nag-focus kami iti solusyon ken positive outcomes." (<i>"Instead of focusing on the problem, we focused on solutions and outcomes."</i>)	Convergence – Reported by RSK4 to handle political tension positively
External Coordination with Community Groups	Partnership	"Nakipag-coordinate kami sa mga guro, alumni, at school clubs para sa mga programa." (<i>"We coordinated with teachers, alumni, and school clubs to support programs."</i>)	Convergence – RSK6, RSK9 used this to encourage more youth participation
Celebrating Small Wins	Motivation	"Ine-celebrate mi dagiti small achievements tapno ma-motivate kami." (<i>"We celebrate small achievements to stay motivated."</i>)	Convergence – RSK1, RSK3, RSK7 used this to combat frustration from delays
Utilization of Technology for Awareness	Information Dissemination	"Nagusar kami ti social media ken online tools para iti communication ken organization." (<i>"We used social media and online tools for communication and organization."</i>)	Convergence – Universal strategy for awareness and orientation
Setting Time Boundaries and Consistency Practices	Personal Limits & Routine	"Nangikami iti limitasyon iti oras nga i-dedicate mi iti SK tapno haan nga maapektaran ti personal life." (<i>"We set limits on SK time to avoid affecting personal life."</i>)	Convergence – Practiced by most to prevent burnout and sustain involvement

The Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials of Calanasan, Apayao demonstrated a range of adaptive coping strategies that reflect resilience, collaboration, and innovation in addressing governance-related challenges. Through thematic analysis, ten core coping mechanisms were identified, both at the organizational and individual levels.

A key strategy was Task Delegation and Shared Responsibility, which helped reduce individual burdens and sustain SK operations despite quorum issues (Reyes, 2021). The Use of Social Media and Digital Tools emerged as an effective method for communication, organization, and engaging disengaged youth—enhancing transparency and participation in rural settings (Garcia & Valdez, 2023). Many officials employed Self-Initiative and Informal Learning, drawing on personal funds and experiences due to the lack of formal training structures (Cruz & Mendoza, 2020).

Time Management Planning proved essential for balancing academic and civic duties, with officials crafting schedules to prevent conflicts (Abad, 2019). Additionally, Seeking Guidance

from Elders and Agencies emphasized the value of mentorship and institutional support in navigating bureaucratic systems (Alonto, 2016). To maintain psychological resilience, many adopted Positive Reframing by focusing on solutions and achievable outcomes (David, 2021).

External Coordination with Community Groups, including partnerships with teachers and alumni, bolstered program reach and community support (Quintos & Fernandez, 2018). Celebrating Small Wins provided motivational reinforcement, sustaining engagement over time (Bañaga, 2018). The Utilization of Technology for Awareness allowed SK officials to orient and inform youth, consistent with findings of the National Youth Commission (NYC, 2019). Finally, Setting Time Boundaries and Consistency Practices enabled young leaders to avoid burnout and maintain personal well-being (Manalo, 2020). Overall, these strategies underscore the capacity of youth leaders to adapt and thrive amid governance challenges, reinforcing the relevance of resourcefulness, collaboration, and a solution-oriented mindset in local leadership contexts.

Table 3. Proposed Policies for the Improvement of the Sangguniang Kabataan in Calanasan, Apayao

Theme	Policy Proposal	Description
Governance Support for Incomplete Councils	1. Financial Assistance Policy for SK Councils Without Quorum	Provides temporary financial and administrative assistance to SK councils that cannot operate effectively due to incomplete officials and failure to achieve quorum.
Youth Participation and Political Awareness	2. Strengthening Policy through Youth Advocacy and Awareness	Promotes awareness of SK roles and ethics through education drives, advocacy campaigns, and barangay-based initiatives to combat youth apathy and disengagement.
Institutional Funding and Sustainability	3. Required Funding for the Local Youth Development Office (LYDO)	Requires LGUs to allocate at least 2% of their general fund annually to sustain LYDO operations and support SK programs.

Evidence-Based Planning	4. Youth Programming Policy: Evidence-Based and Inclusive	Emphasizes inclusive program planning by requiring regular Youth Situationer Assessments and community consultations for the Barangay Youth Development Plan (BYDP).
Transparency and Accountability	5. Policy for Transparency and Digital Governance	Ensures public access to SK information by mandating the posting of reports, resolutions, and financial statements on physical and digital platforms.
Collaborative Youth Engagement	6. Policy on Youth Convergence and Inter-Barangay Cooperation	Encourages inter-barangay collaboration through joint initiatives like youth camps and summits, funded and facilitated at the municipal level.
Holistic Youth Development	7. Agenda Policy for Integrated Youth Development	Requires SKs to implement well-rounded annual programs addressing livelihood, mental health, skills training, and environmental concerns.
Performance Recognition	8. The Best SK Practices Recognition and Incentive Policy	Establishes an annual municipal awards system recognizing SK councils that show excellence, innovation, and accountability in youth development work.

To enhance the effectiveness of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) in Calanasan, Apayao, eight policy proposals are recommended across key thematic areas. First, a Financial Assistance Policy aims to support SK councils hampered by incomplete membership and quorum issues. To address low youth involvement, the Youth Advocacy and Awareness Policy promotes civic education and participatory programs. Ensuring institutional sustainability, a Funding Requirement for the Local Youth Development Office (LYDO) mandates LGUs to allocate a portion of their budget to support youth initiatives.

For inclusive and data-driven planning, the Youth Programming Policy requires regular assessments and community input in crafting the Barangay Youth Development Plan (BYDP). Transparency is reinforced through a Digital Governance Policy, mandating the publication of financial and operational records. The Youth Convergence Policy promotes inter-barangay cooperation through municipal-level initiatives such as youth camps and summits.

The Integrated Youth Development Agenda Policy pushes for holistic programs addressing youth livelihood, mental health, environmental action, and skills development. Finally, the Best SK Practices Recognition Policy incentivizes innovation and accountability by recognizing high-performing SK councils. Together, these proposals aim to strengthen youth governance, improve service delivery, and empower young leaders in Calanasan.

Conclusions

The study revealed that Sangguniang Kabataan officials in Calanasan, Apayao face multifaceted challenges, including quorum issues, youth apathy, political interference, and limited resources. Despite these, they demonstrated resilience through coping strategies such as task delegation, digital engagement, self-initiative, and community collaboration. The proposed policies aim to address structural gaps, enhance participation, ensure sustainable funding, and promote transparency and holistic youth

development. By institutionalizing these measures, local governments can empower SK officials to fulfill their mandates effectively. Ultimately, supporting youth leadership through policy reform and capacity-building is crucial to strengthening grassroots governance and fostering active civic engagement among the Filipino youth.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Local Government Unit of Calanasan institutionalize supportive policies to strengthen the Sangguniang Kabataan. These include providing assistance to incomplete councils, funding the LYDO, and promoting transparency through digital governance. Regular youth situation assessments and inter-barangay collaborations should be encouraged to foster inclusive and sustainable programs. Additionally, recognizing outstanding SK practices will motivate excellence. Continuous capacity-building and mentorship must also be prioritized to develop competent, engaged, and empowered youth leaders in the community.

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The author hereby declares no conflict of interest and that this article is his original work.

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