



June 30, 2025

City Council Committee Report

To: Mayor & Council

Fr: Akbar Imran, Corporate Services Governance Student

Re: Kenora Youth Engagement Guide

Recommendation:

That Council hereby accepts the draft Kenora Youth Engagement Guide as presented; and further

That Council directs Administration to proceed with the following programs in the 2025-2026 academic year:

- i. Reactivation of the Student Councillor Program;
- ii. Expansion of the Cooperative Education Program (co-op);
- iii. Participation in the Municipal Rep Day civic education initiative in partnership with school boards;
- iv. Conducting an analysis on amending the scholarship program for the high school graduating classes of 2026; and further

That three readings be given to a bylaw to adopt a new Student Councillor Program Policy #CC-16-1; and further

That bylaw number 100-2012 be hereby repealed.

Background:

Municipalities across Canada are facing increased pressures to prepare for waves of retirement, while also being confronted by lower youth (18-24) turnouts in municipal elections and in recognition of the importance of early civic engagement and long term work force sustainability, we have reviewed the City's existing youth outreach strategies. Further, a review of other practices across Canada and Ontario, have identified several targeted programs and expansions aimed at not just building a civically engaged youth population, but also to inform youth of the pathways into municipal careers.

This guide is inspired by various findings from Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Statistics Canada which have identified civic disengagement as a growing priority to address. Youth voter turnout continues to trend lower than other age demographics, and much of the youth reports a lack of connection to institutions at the local level. In Kenora's context, this is evident in the youth (18-24) turnout during the 2022 municipal election declining from 30.69% in 2018 to 27.5%.

The Kenora Youth Engagement Guide proposes targeted programs (new and expansions to current programs) across different cohorts from grade 4 till grade 12 with specific initiatives aligned with student's level of maturity and understanding. The purpose of this guide is to create awareness, provide exposure and incorporate youth into active participation.

Summary of initiatives:

- a. Grade 4-6 Early engagement through carefully created colouring and other materials:

Younger students within this cohort learn best through creative and indirect ways. The Communications Department has developed colouring pages featuring different areas across the City which have been well received during the City Hall tours. This initiative should now be expanded, with revised materials distributed to local schools during the academic year. These materials will include illustrations highlighting key municipal services such as parks, transit, and waste collection. This low-cost and high-impact tool introduces this group of students to the concept of a municipal government, without needing to spell out what a municipal government is, in a format that is age appropriate and engaging while subtly instilling values of civic pride and responsibility.

This could also be further complemented by contests and games. For example, in May, the Accessibility Advisory Committee hosted a flag design competition which received 23 entries from elementary students helping them explore how the City connects to accessibility and what it means to them. Such contests should be further encouraged as the sense of fun friendly competition allows for significant indirect exposure to local affairs.

- b. Grade 6-7 Municipal Rep Day Program:

Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) has developed a pilot Municipal Rep Day initiative, which in Kenora can be implemented for students between grades 6-7. This initiative consists of three in class lessons delivered by teachers, followed by a classroom visit from the Mayor, City Councillors, and City staff usually during Local Government Week. The visit will include a Q&A session, mock Council session, and informal dialogue around local services and student priorities. This program gives meaning to interactions with elected officials against the backdrop of recently learnt materials on the levels of government, helping students see themselves as potential future leaders or those involved within the delivery of much of these services. The success of this program is tied to support from school boards and principals who are responsible for executing the teaching components of this program.

- c. Grade 9-12 co-op program expansion:

The City currently hosts an average of 3-4 co-op students in departments such as by-law, fire and mechanics. However, there is a strong potential to expand co-op placements to include areas such as Finance, IT, Planning, Parks, Communications, and Recreation & Culture. By partnering with high schools, the City can increase the number of participating students and widen the learning experiences offered, while encouraging future local employment. The success of this expansion is tied to facilitation by department leads who will determine the logistics of having co-op student(s).

- d. Grade 10-12 student councillor program:

To ensure youth perspectives are present in the decision making process, the City needs to reactivate and modernize its Student Councillor Program. First introduced in 2012, the by-law has since remained underutilized. A revised by-law with an updated structure has now been developed to appoint one or more high school students as non-voting student councillor(s). Student councillor(s) will attend Council and Committee of the Whole meetings from October to June, participate in discussions, provide written reports,

and represent the voice of youth across the city. This initiative will build further into the component of civic literacy, and strengthen student representation.

e. Amending the bursary program:

Currently, the City awards one \$500 bursary to a graduating student from each secondary school in Kenora. However, to reflect rising costs and align better with municipal priorities and ambitions, the program should be enhanced through increased total allocation per school with flexibility to divide the amount among multiple students based on the need and future pathways with prioritization given to students who have already been involved with the City such as through co-op placements. This would significantly promote the co-op program, increase chances of students returning for placements while in school and help with a potential future career with the City.

Budget: Most initiatives have minimal costs, however there would be cost affiliated with \$500 honourariums per student councillor(s), as well as any increase affiliated should the Council increase the annual bursaires to schools.

Risk Analysis: There is a low risk associated with this report and only encourages youth involvement and engagement. There is a higher risk not engaging youth as outlined in the report.

Communication Plan/Notice By-law Requirements: New student councillor(s) program bylaw, general promotional communication materials, communication with school boards and school principals