Back to School, Ready to Serve

As Citrus Heights students head back to school, it is a timely reminder that one of the most important ways we can serve the next generation is by listening to them.

Earlier this year, the City partnered with San Juan Unified School District to survey students in grades 6 through 12. We wanted to learn what helps them feel connected to their community, what prevents them from participating and where they see opportunities to make Citrus Heights even better.

We distributed 2,500 survey invitations across six local schools, and one-third of students responded. Their feedback offered valuable insight into what matters most to our young people.

Students told us they want more safe and welcoming places to gather, affordable activities designed for teens and cleaner, well-maintained public spaces. They also want better information about programs and events, greater support for their well-being and more opportunities to share their ideas. Cost and transportation were among the most common barriers to participating, and schools emerged as one of the best places to connect students with community opportunities.

To make the survey a little more fun, we promised ice cream parties to the grade levels with the highest participation. Congratulations to the sixth- and seventh-grade students at Kingswood K-8 and Sylvan Middle School! Thank you to every student who participated and to the administrators, teachers and San Juan Unified staff who helped us reach them.

Listening is an important act of service, but what we do with that information matters most.

One next step is the City's new Youth Advisory Commission for students in grades 8 through 12. The commission will give young people an ongoing opportunity to advise City leaders, develop leadership skills and serve their community. It will also help reinforce an important message: young people do not have to wait until adulthood to make a difference. For more information or to help a student apply, visit www.citrusheights.net/youthadvisorycommission

The survey results also highlight opportunities where residents, schools, nonprofits and businesses to step forward. That might mean volunteering with a youth-serving organization, mentoring or coaching a student, sponsoring an activity, helping address a barrier to participation or simply connecting young people with opportunities already available.

If these results spark an idea for a program, partnership or volunteer effort, I would like to hear from you. Share your idea with me at mlopeztaff@citrusheights.net. The City can help

bring the right people together, and the strongest solutions will come from a community ready to listen, collaborate and serve.

As a new school year begins, let’s show Citrus Heights students that their voices matter and that their community is ready to help them thrive.