



2026 Students Inside Albany

The 2026 Students Inside Albany Conference was held May 17-20 with 60 attendees representing 40 local Leagues. The students came from all over New York State from Long Island to Buffalo and Plattsburgh to Binghamton. They ranged from sophomores to seniors in high school. They were energetic and enthusiastic to learn about the New York State government.

On Sunday evening, Erica Smitka, LWVNY Executive Director, presented information on how the New York State Government works. She explained the roles of the various branches of the New York State government and the differences between the state government and the other levels of government, e.g., national and local.

On Monday, the students toured the State Capitol and heard about whose faces are on those engraved stones and the secret of the fireplaces in the Senate Chambers. Students also had the opportunity to walk around the Empire State Plaza taking pictures and learning about the artwork. Back at the hotel, students practiced effective lobbying, learned how to approach legislators, make their arguments, and be persuasive. The students were attentive and eager to ask questions.

Continuing up the hill to the Capitol and Legislative Office Building, the students were directed to find their Assemblymember's offices and shadow their legislator. All the students were escorted onto the Assembly floor as they sat with their representatives at their desks and viewed the chamber in session.

That evening, Emma Quinn, Reporter with CBS 6 News, Aaron Shellow- Lavine, Southern Adirondack Bureau Chief with WAMC, and Andrea Cunliffe, Reporter with Sanctuary for Independent Media, talked with the students about their coverage of state politics. They discussed how they decide what to cover, how to report quickly and accurately, and how they started their careers in the media.

On Tuesday, Generation Vote Director, Brendan Cushing, gave a presentation on how to use activism to make a difference and influence student centered policy making. We also had Kayla Mumtaz, Legislative Affairs and Community Engagement Specialist of Alliance for Quality Education (AQE), present information to the students on the methods that AQE uses to advocate for and educate others on issues important to the organization. The Alliance for Quality Education and Generation Vote both reach the public using different techniques than the League, so it was great for students to be able to compare.

After lunch, students were joined by Liz Mariapen, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs for the City of Albany. She discussed the roles of the mayor's office and how the mayor's office interacts with other levels of government.

The students shadowed their Senator on Tuesday. Unfortunately, the Senate has continued the rules initiated during the pandemic, so students were not allowed onto the floor of the Chamber but watched session from the Gallery. A few students were escorted onto the floor of the Chamber for a short time for a closer look and pictures and later joined the rest of us in the Gallery.

On Tuesday evening, Sam Fein, City of Albany Chief City Auditor, Rachel Powell, City of Albany Common Council, 12th Ward, and Susan Pedo, Albany County Legislator, District 5, spoke to the students about running for office. They outlined how to gather signatures and work with constituents, working with their colleagues, fundraising, and participating in forums. The students had many

questions about the exact procedures and were encouraged to consider running for office at the local level and continue to speak with their representatives.

On Wednesday morning, Erica Smitka engaged the students in a discussion of what they saw in the Assembly and Senate. Much of the discussion surrounded questions on procedures and voting in both Chambers and the role of leadership in each Chamber. The students were also asked if their opinions of the political process had changed, and they all answered that they would be interested influencing public policy and civic education in the future. Almost 1/3 of students were offered or discussed internship opportunities with their representatives. There was also a 100% increase in the number of students interested in running for office after completion of this program.

As a final method for learning how to make their voices heard and how to influence public policy decision-making, voting in NYS was discussed. The process for registering to vote was presented to the students, and they were invited to complete a voter registration form if they hadn't done so already. The options of ways to vote for those going to college in the fall were also discussed. As a culmination of the conference, the students were presented individually with a certificate of completion for the program.

Just for fun, the students also went bowling one night at a local bowling alley and participated in numerous icebreakers and friendly competitions of UNO.

Some quotes from students' evaluations exemplify the impact of the program:

- "Shadowing my [Representatives] was my favorite part [about SIA 2026]. Overall, this program was an amazing experience, and I loved meeting new people with similar interests."
- "SIA has given me insight into complex government topics and provided me with unique legislative opportunities...The program has inspired me to make change and impact in my communities."
- "It was really great to hear so many perspectives on politics and running for office, and it really sparked my interest."
- "It was such an awesome experience and I think [SIA is] a great gateway experience."
- "I loved being able to see and talk with my local representatives. It was so inspiring to see and encouraged me to continue with activism and advocacy."
- "I loved getting to talk to the people who represent me. I liked the freedom of walking up ourselves to meet them."

Thanks to our volunteer chaperones: Mary Rosch (LWV of Albany), Ann Leiter (LWV of Central Nassau) and Maxine Brisport (LWV of Schenectady). We couldn't host this program without the tremendous work and support of these volunteers!



Pre and Post Conference Survey Results

Question	% Correct Pre	%Correct Post
1) What does the Open meetings or Sunshine law provide?	78%	89%
2) What does the term grassroots lobbying mean?	85%	91%
3) What are the three executive branches of the government?	48%	65%
4) Can you register to vote before you turn 18?	96%	98%
5) What does FOIA stand for?	98%	96%
6) What does the FOIA law provide?	89%	96%
7) Is there a limit to how many terms a Senate or Assembly member can serve?	62%	93%
8) How many seats are there in the NYS Assembly and Senate?	39%	84%
9) The NYS Governor is elected for a _____ year term?	78%	77%
10) What is a special interest group?	98%	96%
11) Explain what is meant by the term checks and balances?	96%	98%
12) How often does the NYS Legislature meet?	52%	95%
13) What is the title of the New York State's Chief Fiscal officer?	65%	74%
14) The name of the person currently holding this position is?	44%	60%
15) Which party has majority control in the Assembly?	95%	98%
16) What is the name of the presiding officer in the Assembly?	73%	81%
17) The name of the person currently holding this position is?	40%	68%
18) What is the name of the presiding officers in the Senate?	47%	49%
19) Persons who currently hold that position?	25%	51%
20) What are the basic qualifications for NYS legislators required by the State constitution?	78%	79%
21) What is the highest court in New York State?	51%	89%

Pre vs Post Conference Survey Results



