

BLACKSTONE COMMUNITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Project Contact: Frida Rodriguez, principal
National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz Award

School Profile

Grades: Fourth and fifth grades participated.

Goal

The teachers of Blackstone Community Elementary School recognized the need for students to be aware of the democratic process at an early age. To accomplish this goal, they would have to design and produce a program that would effectively introduce their young students to the excitement and challenges of the 1996 presidential election.

Highlights of School Activities

A “government bee” was held to encourage the fourth grade students to locate and retain information about the democratic process. A “government bee” is only slightly different from a good old-fashioned spelling Bee.

Political officials were invited to the school to speak to the students and answer questions for which the students had not been able to get answers.

It was a sight to see the students at the school's political rally carrying student-made signs and marching with marine chants for senator.....

Frida Rodriguez

A representative of JFK Library in Boston came to the school to discuss what happens during a press conference. He acted out the parts of both Dole and Clinton for two different classes, answering their questions in such a way as to provide them with the experience of a press conference.

Students were exposed to the techniques politicians use to influence voters during a campaign.

Special Strategies

Media coverage was arranged in small, local, neighborhood papers (*South End News*) and *Boston Globe*. This coverage targeted the immediate community where parents would be sure to see the events and lessons their children were experiencing.

All academic material that was student/parent related was prepared in English and Spanish to accommodate the large Hispanic population in the school district.

The experiences the students had at public and political events were good, positive experiences, leaving the students with a positive image of what they had learned and how they had learned it. This was true even if they didn't agree with the politician or the issue.

Getting Help

*Parents * Business Community *Public Officials * Local Media*

The staff and students of Blackstone Elementary School benefited from the support and assistance of parents, the business community, and public and governmental officials. Local newspapers provided information and coverage of school events. Through this help, the students of this school were able to enjoy a positive and productive learning experience.

Informational Resources

Teachers used traditional curriculum materials and resources available to the class through the normal channels and also provided important links between the students and the real world. With guidance and support, the students became active participants, contacting candidates and business people in the effort to expand their own educational resources.

Publications used included the Center for Civic Education publication *We the People*, *USA Today* election teacher/classroom materials and *Weekly Reader*. Other resources included photos, press clippings, student work, and teacher support material. A letter to Diane Wilkerson, state senator, asking her to come to the school, provided personal interaction and a way for the students to ask more questions.

Lessons and Outcomes

This interdisciplinary unit of learning became part of the curriculum for the entire school year within a broad variety of classes. Rather than just a few weeks and one subject. The excitement and energy it produced generated a neighborhood grassroots organization.

LEONTINE GRACEY SCHOOL

Project Contact: Marc Medefind

National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz Award

School Profile

Grades: Fifth grade, one 3 1 -student elementary school classroom. School population: 50% Southeast Asian.

Goal

Marc Medefind, teacher of this fifth-grade class, wanted to make sure that his students were able to experience every part of the Mock Election in as realistic a manner as possible.

Highlights of School Activities

In order to bring the election “home,” our fifth-grade class became a microcosm of U.S. presidential politics. We started with state presidential primaries (conducted part), conventions (where we wrote platforms and nominated candidates); we campaigned (including sign-making, handshaking, press conferences, debates and even baby kissing); and, of course, conducted the election.

Marc Medefind

Students held platform speeches and debates based on school issues, rather than political issues, which made it easier for the students to identify with the problems addressed. This gave the students a real opportunity to offer solutions to school problems. The students drafted the speeches relating to school issues, basing them on the platforms of the candidate.

The classes nominated candidates who, in turn, chose running mates based on class demographics (i.e., which running mate could reach class demographics that another might not).

Special Strategies

I found that [my] teaching went across the curriculum. We wrote speeches and slogans; discussed issues and debated (reading, language arts, and social studies). We tallied results and found percentages (math). We designed party symbols and made posters in Art and discussed poll closures across the country and how it would affect election turnout in geography. In physical education, we discussed the need for a candidate to possess stamina and maintain good health.

We were careful not to align the students toward any of the major parties. Instead, the classes created their own two-party system made up of the “Floozbongers” and “Disharpoons.” This allowed the students to discover the workings of the political system while exploring their own unique and individual ideas.

Marc Medefind

Positive and negative tactics such as mud slinging, negative advertising and targeted advertising were integrated into the class Mock Election. These tactics allowed students to experience the strategies used by some candidates and their campaign managers.

Getting Help

*League of Women Votes * Parents * Business Community*

The League of Women Voters was a source of help for this class and their teacher. Students were not satisfied with the information that was given to them, so went out and found information on their own. Others interviewed their parents and family members to gain a better understanding of how they voted and why. The local business community was also very supportive, providing election material for the students to study and allowing “Get out the Vote” posters to be displayed in their windows.

Informational Resources

Like many of the other award-winning schools, the fifth-grade class of Leontine Gracey School tapped a variety of resources, getting information in just as many ways as they shared it with others. Newspapers were a common way to bring news to class, but students also showed interest in the impact made by bumper stickers, fliers, signs and posters. Simply talking to community members opened doors, making this a very real learning experience.

Lessons and Outcomes

The success of this school’s Mock Election can be summed up in the teacher’s story of Rachel:

Perhaps the single most gratifying incident, however, involved my student Rachel and her mother. Rachel said her mother didn’t know a thing about elections. When Rachel brought her learning home each day and they discussed it together, her mother went from “apathetic” to “involved.” Rachel’s mom, who had never taken the elections seriously before, made sure she went to the polls on Election Day and took Rachel with her. When you teach, you wonder if what you have tried to show your students has really hit the mark. When your students carry your teachings beyond the walls of the classroom and give them to others, you know you have made a bull’s eye.

Marc Medefind

LEWIS COUNTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Project Contact: Judy Runion, Teacher

National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz Award

School Profile

Grades: Kindergarten through fourth grade. Student population: Approximately 800 students. “At risk” class hosted school-wide Mock Election.

Goal

Each activity was entered into with the goal for each and every student to become an actively involved, working part of the democratic process.

It was so exciting to see the students so eager and involved. They could hardly wait to cast their vote. Seeing them so excited made this project all worthwhile. The future of our great country depends on the values we instill in our children.

Judy Runion

Highlights of School Activities

Students from Lewis County Elementary School participated in coloring contests, a poster contest and an essay contest in addition to other activities. Students (kindergarten through fourth grade) colored patriotic pictures. One student was chosen from each classroom to receive a prize, along with having his/her picture displayed on the bulletin board. Participants in the poster contest (also for kindergarten through fourth graders) were given creative license to design a half-pasteboard size original poster. Each was based on the theme of “America the Country I Love.” First, second, and third prizes were awarded for each grade with the winners announced on October 28, 1996.

Second through fourth graders participated in the “A Voice for My Country” essay contest. Winners had their works published in the local newspaper and a first, second, and third prize was awarded for each grade. First and second place prize winners received \$10 and \$15 cash awards.

All ages participated in a “Get Out the Vote” parade on November 5th. All the second grade classes (approximately 150 students) marched through town with the banners and flags they had created. Patriotic music accompanied the students’ chants of “Vote.”

Students gladly participated in the “Thank You for Voting” sticker contest. The students who brought in the most stickers, obtained by their parents at the polls on November 5th, won a classroom pizza party and an extra recess.

We converted an empty classroom into election headquarters. Everything was decorated patriotically, even down to the ballot box. A sign-up sheet was sent to every class in our school. Classes were scheduled to vote every 10 minutes. Students had little trouble deciding whom they would choose because a sample ballot had been sent to every room prior to the election. My students, being the host room, were really put to the test. My class is made up of "at-risk" students. They are academically behind six months to one year. This project was a challenge that brought about a wonderful feeling of self-fulfillment. These students who were rarely asked to do anything extra were hosting a school-wide election. Not only was this an exciting experience for them, but it gave each of them a sense of self-worth and importance.

By using a wide variety of activities, all students found at least one area where they felt they fit in. The coloring contests allowed everyone to participate. Students from different age and grade levels shared ideas and worked together, from the planning stages right through to the final event.

Judy Runion

Getting Help

*Parents * Community * Local Businesses * Newspaper *Radio Stations*

Activities always involve planning. For Lewis County Elementary School, parent and community assistance assured the students experienced the program to the fullest. Parents and community members helped out with the decorations for the school's election headquarters, the parade and a variety of other events.

We were given monetary donations from various groups and individuals to purchase prizes for our contest. Our local newspaper and radio station were gracious enough to publish our articles and letters free of cost and give us free air time to promote our activities. Members of the Election Commission helped us by passing out our "Thank You for Voting" tickets on Election Day. This project turned into a great school and community effort.

Informational Resources

At the beginning of our Mock Election campaign we had very limited information on the Reform candidate, Ross Perot. Use of the Internet gave us more information about this candidate's platform and policies. We used the picture we found there to create a sample-voting ballot, which was later duplicated for our Mock Election.

Students used resources such as the Internet in conjunction with units of study on “How We Choose a President.” As a result, the students obtained enough information on the candidates and their platforms and policies that most seemed to have their minds made up when they went to vote, and were obviously anxious to mark their ballots.

Lessons and Outcomes

This Mock Election project started with a simple idea, teach students the step by step process involved in electing a president. It soon escalated into a unique learning experience for all students. It didn't take long for my classroom to take on the appearance of a candidate campaign headquarters. I started with my students. I wanted each student to be actively involved in the democratic process. I wanted them to experience it, so we set up shop in our classroom. Contests were held, winners were chosen, and then the big day finally arrived. It was time for our school to voice its opinion. Who would be president? Whom would we choose at Lewis County Elementary School?

Counting the votes was equally thrilling. It was hard to maintain control as each ballot was pulled from the ballot box and the candidate's name was read and then tallied. Children cheered wildly each time their candidate's name was pulled from the box. I could see it on their faces. They weren't bystanders — they were participants. The seeds of democracy had been planted. These children would grow up knowing their responsibilities as citizens. This would be something they would carry with them throughout life, something they could tell their children about, an early childhood memory that would pave the way for this generation to experience a bit of “The American Dream.”

The most significant achievement of our 1996 Mock Election was getting our community involved in the election. Before our Mock Election project, people in the community seemed apathetic about the election. Many did not want to vote for President Clinton and did not like the Republican nominee, Bob Dole. The general consensus of most was “why vote anyway? my vote won't make a difference.” I feel that our Mock Election campaign made students, parents and the community more aware of the election and their responsibility to vote.

Just as important, the students carried the lesson home and out into their communities. Where adult citizens had not seen any real reason to vote, students were able to instill their sense of self-worth in other members of their community.

Judy Runion

LINCOLN WAY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Project Contact: Doris Cantey, Teacher

National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz Award

School Profile

Grades: Kindergarten through sixth grade. The Mock Election was a joint effort of both the sixth grade teachers.

Goal

Students rarely see or define themselves as “at risk.” It is an adult term used to signify that special attention, intervention and/or guidance may be needed for the student to achieve his/her goal. The challenge, then, is not for the teacher to see the student as “at risk,” but for the student to understand that help is there if needed. It is not something they will have to fight to attain.

Our goal was to involve “at risk” students and their parents in the election process. We wanted them to be able to see the importance of taking an active part in the election of our officials. We were able to take the students to a level whereby they were able to encourage their parents to register or vote on Election Day. This was a joint effort by both of the sixth grade teachers. The project was part of the social studies curriculum, where students met government officials, enhanced mapping skills and researched objectives. Students also met objectives in the area of language arts in their writing, research, speaking and reading skills.

Doris Cantey

Highlights of School Activities

Students showcased their accomplishments through essay writing, poetry and political cartoons. There were also election projects: the students produced television interviews and presidential debates which were performed for the student body and parents.

Music and art classes provided decorations, posters and entertaining music and songs for the event. The audio and visual impact of the patriotic music and decorations reinforced the lessons the students had learned.

Role-playing the candidates (from security measures to what it takes to be a candidate) involved the students in the democratic process and walked them through the steps necessary to make the process work.

The students’ knowledge of the democratic process was clearly evident as they played the roles of the candidates. They were able to speak about matters important to them and their community and defend their positions during the debate.

*It is truly exciting when you see such a clear example
of students “getting it.”*

Doris Cantey

Special Strategies

Lincoln Way Elementary School worked hard to get parents involved.

*Most of the parents have not had good personal experiences with the schools,
therefore, do not care to take any active roles.*

Some parents participated in a variety of positive and educational ways by taking children to different areas of town in order to obtain research material and gather supplies. At the voter registration stations, parents supervised the students and helped them to read and punch ballots, register to vote, and design registration books.

*The lesson of democracy has brought many in this community
together and opened the way for students, parents and teachers
to have a better working relationship.*

Doris Cantey

The use of music and art in the project allowed students, who might otherwise have been overwhelmed at the idea of joining in the unit, to feel that it was going to be fun and worth the effort. With the “friendly” environment, even “at-risk” students were able to participate, interacting with public officials and learning about the use of computer technology in Mock Elections.

*When students can clearly see that what they are learning or
doing will have a positive effect on their lives, now or in
the future, and will give them greater control in their
lives, they have a greater incentive to learn.*

*It was wonderful when the students who felt they
weren’t good at anything suddenly became Secret Service
agents at the school debates. These students learned
that every person has value.*

Getting Help

*Political Science Instructor * County Board of Elections * Parents*

Lincoln Way Elementary was able to enlist the assistance of a political science instructor from the College of Wooster to help with the educational aspects of the election. As a result, students saw that democracy is not something they learn about and never use again. He was able to help the students understand the Electoral College and many other election words and strategies, about which they had little previous knowledge. They were given maps, diagrams and the (oh so impressive) “blue book.”

Wayne County Board of Elections was also instrumental in helping Lincoln Way Elementary with ballots, voting booths and “I Voted” stickers. The Board of Elections allowed the school to use its machine to tabulate the votes and provide print outs of the school’s results.

*By making the Mock Election as real as possible
for the students ... they will undoubtedly carry the lesson
with them and utilize it in their future lives.*

Informational Resources

Lincoln Way Elementary School utilized a wide variety of resources to supplement its standard curriculum. The television coverage of the election and Mock Election activities were used to provide students with the most up to date information. Newspapers, newscasts, political cartoons and personal interviews all added substance to the daily classroom discussions and the project in general. The involvement of public officials gave the students added support and encouragement.

Computers were used by Lincoln Way Elementary to vote in their Mock Election, and provided access to the Internet, a vital part of the technology research used by the college professor and the students to gain election information.

Lessons and Outcomes

Students learned not only about the democratic process during the Mock Election at Lincoln Way Elementary, they also showed that they were aware of the personal lives and personality traits of the candidates. Many commented on how “rough” or how “neat” it would be to be the child of the President. Internet research also allowed them to learn how other students felt about the various local, state and national candidates.

MOUND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Project Contact: Bob Katz, Principal
National Association of Student Councils/Ruth Hollander Award

School Profile

Grades: Kindergarten through fifth grade.

The Mock Election project of Mound Elementary School was run and directed by a class of developmentally handicapped fourth and fifth grade students in a special-education class.

*They truly deserve to be recognized for their participation
and achievements as a group and as individuals.*

Bob Katz

Goal

Mound Elementary School wanted to introduce its students to many campaign strategies during the Mock Election, including grass-roots strategies and door-to-door campaigning.

*We wanted the students to know that telephone communication
was something more than a way of passing the word
about school closures due to snow.*

Highlights of School Activities

Students at Mound Elementary were self-motivated to start with and when they saw how the student body responded to their excitement, their motivation became more intense and spread throughout the school.

Developmentally handicapped students interacted with other students, spreading the word about the Mock Election program. It was found that the self-esteem of the challenged students increased while mainstream students found a new respect for their classmates.

The students' thoughts and concerns about the issues in the election were shared in a group forum. While many questions were answered, the students found that the forum brought to light new questions.

Students showed their command of knowledge in a mock rally where they portrayed the candidates. Students were all required to register as voters. On Mock Election Day each student who was on the Voter Registration List voted at a polling station. If a student's name was not on the list, they were not permitted to vote. The program raised the awareness of the students about the importance of registering to vote. Parents served as assistants at the polls and provided daily updated political information.

Students of Mound Elementary School were involved in passing out applications for voter registration, making sure teachers and parents were eligible and ready to vote in the real world election.

Students mailed in the applications and received extra credit. Students were given specific tasks; if they could not perform those tasks, they were assigned a mentor to help them. The words “I can’t” was not part of their vocabulary and “failure” was not an option. Students were required to make quick and accurate decisions during the campaign preparation, elections and mock rally.

The students and staff assisted in local election activities by working at passing a proposition that would affect their school. Participation included experiencing first-hand campaign strategies such as telephone contacts and door-to-door campaigning.

Students prepared speeches about the candidates’ positions on crime, education, government, drugs, the environment and the economy. The speeches were then presented aloud to individual classes.

Students created posters to hang in windows to encourage attendance and participation in the upcoming rally. Banners, graphs and charts created by the students were displayed throughout the school to show information such as voter turnout in previous years and voter registration percentages.

*It was easy to see the pride in the eyes of those who had created those works.
In an inner city school it is vital that students are able to understand
that they are important and what they think counts.*

Bob Katz

Special Strategies

Our developmentally handicapped students learned about the democratic process within their own classrooms and learning environments and were challenged to pass the knowledge on to other students. They not only integrated with the mainstream students, but showed that they could be leaders in important matters.

Mound Elementary School is just in the process of obtaining new technology and therefore could not provide all students with computers for their studies. However, a number of students used their own computers at home to do research and discover information relevant to the Mock Election. Those students brought their findings back to share with the rest of the school.

This Mock Election gave our children the opportunity and education they will need to participate in the government of which they will one day become a part.

Core information was made available to the host students; from there they decided on the best method to spread the word to the rest of the student body. Students created attainable goals and determined the best way to reach those goals.

Getting Help

*Parents * Teachers Community Members * Local Newspapers*

The participation of parents, teachers, staff and students expanded the Mound Elementary School Mock Election program from a school-wide event to a community-wide event. Local newspapers gave media attention to the program and its events. The support of everyone involved made the program a success.

Informational Resources

Students who had a computer and Internet access at home were eager to share what they learned with the rest of the students.

The school library, along with news clippings and updates provided by parents, gave students additional (and often more accurate) information on a regular basis.

Lessons and Outcomes

Overall, our students received a positive experience that seems to have made a lasting impression on their thoughts and views regarding voting and the democratic process.

Students tracked polling results, researched candidate positions on issues and held a mock rally portraying the candidates. Overall, this experience raised voter awareness and community involvement.

The students came away with a sense of pride and accomplishment when they saw the turnout for their election and also when polling results were displayed.

Bob Katz

POTLATCH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Project Contact: Cindy Braun
National Association of Student Councils/Ruth Hollander Award

School Profile

Grades: Kindergarten through fifth grade. School population: 326 students.

The Mock Election project of Mound Elementary School was run and directed by a class of developmentally handicapped, fourth and fifth grade students in a special education class.

The Mock Election program was a unique experience for our school, due to the grade-spans involved and whole school participation. This is an experience usually left to those older than the students at Potlatch Elementary. But this student-led project included a variety of events and projects which enlisted the combined efforts of the entire school and its 326 students.

Cindy Braun

Goal

For everyone to experience the true meaning of democracy, and for the project to be meaningful to our students, we as teachers believed that there must be authenticity to what the students were learning. A simple show or a play would not have made the impact or provided the benefit of traveling authentic avenues for this part of their education.

Highlights of School Activities

All the students at Potlatch Elementary registered two weeks prior to the Mock Election so they would be eligible to vote when the time came. Students also encouraged their parents to register in plenty of time to be eligible to vote in the November “real world” election.

Students used their language arts skills to write letters to senators, congresspersons and the secretary of state. They were pleased to get responses to their letters.

Art classes produced posters, banners and other forms of election advertisements and materials to spread the word about voting to other students and their families.

Sixth grade students held their student council election at the same time as the Mock Election. While candidates in the Mock Election prepared their strategies, so did the candidates for class president and secretary/treasurer in the sixth grade class.

The school created a poll-site very similar to the ones used to vote locally. The actual voting booths used for the levy election were used by the school and the upper elementary classes. Students were given the opportunity to vote on a state ballot as well as a federal ballot provided for their Mock Election.

Events were video-taped with cassette recorders and video cameras and raw footage was edited and made into a political commercial. The video footage was used by a local television station to promote voting a week before the election.

Students were responsible for collecting and tabulating the votes. They used the information to analyze data and create graphs to provide the rest of the school and their community the opportunity to see how the democratic process works.

Students used office equipment to make copies of the ballots and the supplies from art class to make packets of information for teachers to use in their classrooms.

Cindy Braun

Special Strategies

The national election was actually happening all around the participants of the Potlatch Elementary School. This made for a perfect time to discuss whether or not the media influences your decision on voting.

The media does influence your vote, if you are an undecided or uneducated voter. Students learned that it is important to first know the facts, then form an opinion. Students also learned how difficult it can be at times to find the facts amid all the campaign advertising.

Cindy Braun

All students who became registered voters received a sticker. Students received another sticker when they actually cast their vote.

Notices were sent out to students to remind them to watch the national CNN election coverage. The notice reminded students that they were part of a larger picture and helped to motivate them to become a part of the event. It also served to remind parents to watch the election coverage with their children and to participate in the lessons the students had been learning.

Biweekly meetings were held for the gifted/talented students to focus on the details of the Mock Election. While these students wrote articles for the school newsletter and the local newspapers, a reporter from a local paper was asked to take pictures and interview the students about the election.

Getting Help

Local Newspapers and Journalists * Local Business Owners

The Mock Election program at Potlatch Elementary School extended into the community as local businesses and professional associations included the Mock Election events in their newsletters.

This student-led project focused on the 326 students within the school and initialized the support and assistance of media and local public involvement to enhance the program.

Informational Resources

Students collected newspaper and magazine articles, as part of their journey to knowledge. When the written and televised reports weren't enough, students used the Internet to get the answers and information they wanted.

Students also went on-on-one with members of the community and the public, asking parents, friends and public officials the questions they could not find the answers for anywhere else.

Lessons and Outcomes

*We showed leadership by setting a good example of being an informed voter.
When the votes were collected, tallied and phoned in, students continued
to experience the election through post-election articles and press releases.*

Cindy Braun

Cindy Braun and the Potlatch Elementary school feel their most significant achievements included:

- A 94% voter turnout;
- student enthusiasm for the process;
- a chance to bring an election to the entire school.

SPRING HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Project Contact: Dr. Verneda Edwards, building administrator
National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz Award

School Profile

Grades: Kindergarten through fifth grade.

Goal

Students and staff were to jointly participate in a month-long project titled “Making Wise Choices.” Student activities were based on the 1996 elections. Each grade level selected learning activities appropriate for their age and abilities but were required to reinforce the “Democracy in America” program theme.

Highlights of School Activities

Kindergarten and first grade students learned about the significance of our country’s colors (red, white and blue) and the symbols of political parties (the donkey and the elephant). The students attended a school-created convention hall where Mock Election candidates presented their speeches and debated the issues.

Third grade students performed an extensive study of landmarks in Washington, D.C., and their symbolism. Each class used a broad base of resource materials to prepare a written report and an oral presentation. Part of the project included building a scale model of the topic landmark and giving a “tour” of the site.

An exciting example of the “hands-on” tour activities these students enjoyed was having their fingerprints taken by the FBI.

Fourth and fifth grade students did extensive research on “What it means to be a leader.” Students interviewed parents, staff and peers to find out what qualities they look for in a person to lead our country.

Student teams (manager, writer and candidate) were responsible for producing an essay on the subject matter. Older students selected two of the essays written by younger students to read to the student body during a political convention.

To illustrate the point that citizens must register prior to an election in order to vote, the Student Council held a three-day voter registration. Students were encouraged to register before and after school and during recess. Registered voters participated by going to designated polling stations while Student Council members acted as precinct workers.

Since younger students had more difficulty understanding the issues, they participated in a Mock Election for the animal of their choice. A voting box was brought in and while some students cast their votes, other students acted as voting judges to report the results.

Bill Meek, a school board member, spoke to the students about how to run a campaign and how campaign tactics might change depending on the office they were running for. Senator Mark Parkinson, state senator, talked to the students about how the government is organized and about a government official’s responsibility to those he represents.

Second grade students searched many different forms of media for questions they could share with Kansas State University Education majors.

Special Strategies

Students participated in several support activities to reinforce lessons about the buildings they had been studying. Several guest speakers visited the school and spoke with the students.

The Kansas State University college students answered questions and, in some cases, reported back to the second graders.

The Johnson County Election Commission spoke to the students about the privilege of voting and provided materials for parents to vote early by mail. The material was distributed to members of the community.

Students were rewarded when the election information they compiled was reported on the back of the school newsletter each week. This newsletter went to all the parents and school board members. A local radio show used some of that information as part of its morning show on November 5.

Spring Hill Elementary teachers recognized that issue awareness was limited to taxes, health care and education. This was positive for the students because they could focus and become knowledgeable in specific areas, forming definite opinions.

It was very important to the building that there was a feeling of connectedness across the curriculum. Content areas, such as social studies, communication and math, were integrated to demonstrate how one topic can meet the objectives of several curricula. Support areas, such as enriched reading, physical education and music, also supported the theme. The music teachers studied historical patriotic music and the qualities a musical patriotic piece would contain. The physical education teacher shared information about the health of candidates on the road. She also discussed what presidents might have done to stay fit and alleviate stress. The counselor supported the activities by providing appropriate information about qualities of leaders and what traits past presidents have possessed.

Dr. Verneda. Edwards

The majority of work was done in cooperative learning groups, enabling the students to accomplish their tasks.

The students were graded on those identified criteria and their ability to learn at a pre-determined competency level.

Dr. Verneda Edwards

Getting Help

*Kansas State University Education Majors * Parents * Local Businesses*

Spring Hill Elementary was able to implement technology in many different ways. Its “on-line” status with Kansas State University made it possible for it to access assistance. Parents provided support and assistance when needed. Local businesses allowed students to have student-made posters in their windows.

Informational Resources

Once again technology has opened a door to knowledge. This time the link came between Spring Hill Elementary and its college mentors, the educational major students from Kansas State University. In addition to the print and non-print resources available, the link between the two learning centers provided a valuable bridge in education. Direct interviews with parents and local community members also offered information to the students.

As a result of our participation in the Mock Election, the staff, students and parents were unified in the pursuit of understanding what makes an effective leader. The entire building was focused on the democratic process and the work it takes to be an informed voter. The students had a real sense of accomplishment when they reviewed all they had learned and accomplished.

Dr. Verneda Edwards

Lessons and Outcomes

These students know that their opinions do count and that they have the right and responsibility to let their voices be heard.

STEWART ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Project Contact: Bonnie Arloski
National Association of Student Councils/Ruth Hollander Award

School Profile

Grades: Fourth and fifth grades. School population: 450 students.

Goal

Stewart Elementary School wanted to make sure its fourth and fifth grade students enjoyed the lesson of democracy.

Highlights of School Activities

*Students learn and retain information they feel involved with.
To achieve this, it was necessary to keep providing new
information while providing encouragement for students
to remember what they had learned from days before.*

Bonnie Arloski

Each day one student from Bonnie Arloski's fifth grade class read a question about a past president on the Public Address System. Each class submitted an answer by the end of the day. A prize was awarded to the three classrooms with the most correct answers.

Students tracked the travels of presidential candidates on a map in the school hallway. The students followed CNN and *TIME* Web pages, as well as newspapers, television and radio news to find out where the candidates were going next.

Students researched and studied the local candidates and their positions on the issues through a variety of news sources. They learned how issues and political platforms might affect their lives depending on the outcome of the vote.

A member of the League of Women Voters visited the school during the Mock Election and spoke to Bonnie Arloski's class, later posing with the students for a newspaper picture.

Special Strategies

The Mock Election was run by one fifth grade class that showed its knowledge and abilities by taking care of its responsibilities. Class members verified the registration of the other students and took them to their precincts. The class registered 100% of the students, and 100% of the students voted. This included six special education students and several "at-risk" learners.

Not one child was left out of the process. All students voted using computers and each proudly received an "I Voted Today" sticker that the students created using their school computers.

Getting Help

League of Women Voters

Bonnie Arloski and her class solicited the help of the League of Women Voters and a number of other agencies willing to provide information, supplies and support to the Stewart Elementary Mock Election.

Informational Resources

Political publications such as *All Politics* and news coverage via CNN and *TIME* offered a wealth of information and provided students with information on opposing candidates. Newspapers, magazines and audio/video broadcasts are excellent sources of information that can be easily supplemented by the Internet and local political figures to answer questions about the issues.

Lessons and Outcomes

Stewart Elementary is very proud of Ms. Arloski's fifth grade class for hosting such a successful Mock Election project. It is not often that a community, even if it is a school community, can boast of a 100% turn-out in an election. For Stewart Elementary, even the challenged and at-risk learners know that their voice counts.

Principal

SURRY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Project Contact: Lynn Bonsey

National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz Award

School Profile

Grades: Kindergarten through eighth grade. School population: 150 students. Mock Election activities targeted a 17-member, 7th grade class while grades 6-8 voted.

Goal

We had to reach the diverse learning needs of all the students in order for them to learn to work together on this unit. As teachers, we were responsible for challenging these students. They had to understand how the election process affected their lives and how their participation affected the election process.

Lynn Bonsey

Highlights of School Activities

In this rural Maine town of approximately 1,000 people, all of the students participated in the Mock Election in some capacity.

The project grew to include events such as the Town Meeting and a Mock Election debate. These events brought students and their ideas to a common forum where issues could be discussed.

Role playing as a debate team member, a candidate, moderator, reporter/journalist or videographer offered the students a valuable learning experience, giving them a better understanding of what goes on behind the scenes during a campaign and an election.

Some students wrote articles or simulated newscasts and presented them to their class. Students also wrote speeches and essays on the election process, with their choice for president.

Students tracked the movements of the candidates during the election campaign and studied the differences and similarities between the current elections and past elections.

Students devised their own original party platforms in their communication arts class, working in small groups to research the issues. They used their Math class to poll other students and their Science lessons to synthesize their findings. Commercials, produced and developed by the students, conveyed the information back to parents and the student body.

Students kept election logs to track their findings and record their own understanding of the information. The logs helped students to apply what they had learned.

Parents and other adults were polled on their political views and the information was used to analyze the effect of the Mock Election on the community.

Teachers and students worked together to make the Mock Election a success. Art teachers provided the direction and guidance for students to create political posters and campaign buttons. Social studies classes used art to make political cartoons.

Special Strategies

Students who were developmentally and/or behaviorally “at-risk” were placed in cooperative learning groups and assigned appropriate tasks and/or tasks that specifically interested them. This meant that while some students were writing newspaper articles, others appeared in simulated newscasts at the “town meeting.” Some students who were unable to watch nightly newscasts gained research exposure at daily in-class newspaper readings or classroom discussions. The research was used to formulate entries in the students’ election logs.

Getting Help

*Parents * Business Community * Government Agencies*

Government agencies were also a source of help. The Surry Town Administrator gave permission for students to take a field trip to the town hall where students were able to see a polling place and learn about voting procedures.

Parents were a great source of help. Through the combined efforts of parents and teachers, detailed weekly assignment sheets were sent home with students, allowing the parents to be aware of the activities taking place in the classroom.

Informational Resources

Government agencies often encourage students to come and learn in a hands-on environment, adding a boost to the learning experience.

*The more opportunity for realism, the more the students learn,
retain and apply the knowledge they collect.*

Lynn Bonsey

Newspapers, newscasts and other media coverage of election and campaign events allowed the students to learn about the candidates’ personalities and their willingness to listen. Students applied what they had learned in the debate or Town Meeting and were better able to listen to the ideas of others and express their own feelings and viewpoints.

Lessons and Outcomes

Students at Surry Elementary learned that the information in a newscast does affect them. When encouraged to listen to and understand the information, these students became more aware of the world — beyond the small rural area that surrounded them. Being allowed to participate in the system that shapes their daily lives, the students found they had more reason to become involved.

By working together, the students were able to use what they learned in every lesson or activity of integrated social studies and language arts.

The diverse needs of students were met by encouraging collaboration, independent research, role-playing and the free exchange of ideas.

These students were able to experience and comprehend the necessity of becoming responsible, informed, participatory citizens.

On September 10, 1996, one student wrote in her election log, "I don't watch the news, and when I do, I only pay attention to the weather and that's it.

The rest is too confusing for me." Two months later she wrote,

"Now I watch the news almost every night, I read and count the signs by the roads, I talk to my parents about what I want, who I want, and why I want these certain candidates."

Lynn Bonsey

Before my mom could only talk with my dad, to her family and dad's family. Now she can talk to me, and I understand what she says to me.

Now my sister feels left out because she doesn't understand what the issues we talk about are. What's really fun is when dad joins in on the conversation on and I disagree with him and mom.

— A student wrote