

## **ABRAHAM LINCOLN SCHOOL**

Project Contact: Nora Rylee, 8th Grade Teacher  
National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz Award

### **School Profile**

Grades: Sixth through eighth grade. School population: 85% of the school's student population is Hispanic, with approximately the same percentage being from low-income families.

### **Goal**

*I believe that by creating a true democratic situation — setting up the actual polling place in all its authenticity — the students truly felt the responsibility of being a knowledgeable voter. They realized that decisions could not be made without research and interaction with others. Only the looks on their faces as they exited the polling booth could register their feeling.*

Nora Rylee

### **Highlights of School Activities**

A political cartoon contest showed how students felt about the issues and the candidates. The cartoons were on display when public officials visited the school.

Students did not go out on field trips but rather invited local political candidates, school and local offices and the media to make a field trip to their school and attend the Mock Election kick-off.

Guests of the Mock Election kick-off enjoyed the chorus' singing patriotic songs. Local candidates gave speeches at the rally and the winners of the cartoon contest were announced.

During the kick-off, students interacted with political officials, camera crews and the news reporters they had been learning about. The students were both pleased and surprised to find that those people cared about them.

*Many students have personal business cards from cameramen and/or anchor news reporters. We hope to take field trips to at least two of these stations; two students will have one-on-one advice from the cameramen when they go to visit the television studio in Fresno, and one cameraman plans to visit our video productions class to give students much-needed assistance. It is impossible to gauge the impact of that personal attention.*

Nora Rylee

Students produced daily video bulletins to update the entire school on the day-to-day happenings of the campaign and the election. The students became news reporters for the school, bringing the events of the real world to the school community.

Students learned the intricacies of developing newspaper ads by creating “want ads” for the Office of the President of the United States.

A “Red, White and Blue Day” contest was held at the school. Teachers tabulated the percentage of students wearing each color and awarded a bonus to the winning team.

The real world met the school community when the county elections manager administered an oath to the students of the leadership class. To understand the importance and seriousness of the position, students who wished to become election judges were able to experience what the job entailed.

It was a meaningful experience for students to have the mayor attend the Mock Election and assist students having difficulty inserting their ballots into the voting machines. The mayor frequently visits Abraham Lincoln Middle School and can be seen eating lunch with the students and reading their daily bulletins.

Tom Sheehan, managing editor of the *Selma Enterprise*, and Randy McFarland, a public relations consultant, served as judges in the political cartoon contest.

## Special Strategies

*The students were allowed the freedom to see and experience for themselves that growing up doesn't occur at a specific age, but is instead a process of learning day to day.*

Nora Rylee

As the project developed, students were introduced to new technologies. Many “surfing the Net” and used the fax machine to contact research sources and local public officials.

## Getting Help

*Parents \* Local Business Owners \* Local Newspapers \* Local Television  
Abraham Lincoln Middle School Parent Club*

Resources for activities depended on who and what was available and who answered the call for assistance and support. For the Abraham Lincoln School, the *How To Do It Guide* published by Macmillan McGraw Hill was a beginning. In addition to this publication, the Abraham Lincoln Middle School Parent Club was called on to assist with the project. Added hands and minds found further resources at the Democratic Regional Headquarters, Fresno County Election Department, Fresno County Office of Education, League of Women Voters, Republican Regional Headquarters, California Secretary of State, Selma City Council, Selma Unified School District, *The Fresno Bee* and *The Selma Enterprise*.

## Informational Resources

In addition to the agencies and individuals that so graciously helped with the Mock Election project, the Internet gave computer technology an active role in this project. Using this tool, the Abraham Lincoln Middle School was able to contact and utilize the following resources:

All Things Political (<http://dolphin.gulfnet/political/html>)

National Student/Parent Mock Election (<http://AllPolitics.com>)

Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents 1789-1989 ([gopher:/wiretap.spies.com/00/Library/Classic/inaug.text](http://gopher:/wiretap.spies.com/00/Library/Classic/inaug.text))

League of Women Voters Voter Education Project (<http://www.oclc.org/VoteSmart/lwv/lwvhome.htm>)

Through the “Newspapers in Education” program, teachers received 30 free copies of the local newspaper per week. Students were encouraged to take the papers home and discuss election issues with their parents, inviting interest in the school and classroom activities.

Norma Logan, the Fresno County Elections officer, provided polling booths and voting machines for the election.

## Lessons and Outcomes

There is no better way to measure the success of the Mock Election than through the eyes and attitudes of the students who have participated in it. The students not only encouraged adults to learn more about elections, but they also developed valuable leadership skills. Students will continue to learn about democracy throughout the school year.

*Significant achievements include the increase in pride in our community, school and in democracy. Students encouraged so many adults to become a knowledgeable electorate.*

*Much student leadership was developed as they led assemblies, registered voters, counted ballots and wrote letters to officials.*

*This study will continue throughout the year. It will end for these teachers and students only on the last day of school. As teachers, we will build upon those stepping stones.*

*Many parents who never studied a ballot and the issues before hopefully will continue to do so. The increased pride that was created in our school and community can only grow with the enthusiasm that was generated by participation in this project. I am certain the principles developed in the celebration of democracy will stay with these students forever.*

Nora Rylee

Nora Rylee also noted that in addition to the excitement and community pride the students gained, they also gained valuable personal knowledge about career choices.

# AZALEA GARDENS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Project Contact: Paula Williams, Social Studies Department chairperson  
National Association of Student Councils/Ruth Hollander Award

## School Profile

Grades: Sixth through eighth grade. School population: Approximately 600 students.

## Goal

The teachers at Azalea Gardens Middle School devised a plan to increase voter registration, inform adults of party platforms and election issues, and increase the community's awareness of issues of concern to students. The plan would ensure that the students took the election process seriously and helped them to realize that, individually and collectively, they could make a difference.

## Highlights of School Activities

Students set up voter registration booths to encourage parental attendance. For maximum exposure, the booths were operated during parent-teacher conferences and special evening school. It was hoped that parents would realize the importance of having their children participate in the election process.

Students whose parents or guardian could not attend school events took forms and information home. Returned cards earned students extra credit.

Students analyzed the television election coverage and prepared to present commercials based on the information they had gathered. Creating commercials provided students with the opportunity to learn about script writing, editing and grammar. Students were encouraged to focus on an issue or platform they did not support, giving them a better understanding of the opposite viewpoint.

The student-made commercials were presented at the school's parent night. The students were asked to adhere to certain criteria when making their commercials: commercials could not exceed three minutes; commercials were to be made by a group not exceeding five people and had to be created and produced by students in the same cluster; content needed to promote the group's chosen candidate, following the party platform and candidates' positions and beliefs. Each commercial was videotaped in the library with the help of Mrs. Farris.

*As teachers, we knew the importance of this being a productive learning experience and did not tolerate any mudslinging. Only positive messages were allowed.*

Paula Williams

Students showed their talents in the essay contest on "What Freedom of Speech Means to Me." Almost 400 students participated and provided some well thought-out ideas on the subject.

The students created and produced campaign materials such as slogans, posters and T-shirts. Some items were displayed at the school to educate students and visiting parents while others were sent to local campaign offices.

*Through the efforts of our students, 120 new adult voters were registered in their community, including eight Azalea Gardens teachers. It is not often that students have the ability to see for themselves the difference their work makes in their communities.*

Paula Williams

## Special Strategies

Teachers made this project a well-run event by their planning and strategic guidance. By allowing the students the freedom to learn from a variety of sources, and in a variety of ways, they absorbed all they were given and craved more.

To encourage students to look at both sides of the issues and to learn about all the candidates, they were assigned to research and write about a candidate they would not normally have chosen.

## Getting Help

*Local Businesses \* Public Officials \* Parents \* Private Individuals*

Azalea Middle School received help from within their own school but also from the business and private sectors. By obtaining the voter registration cards, the students could proudly say that they had a significant effect on the number of registered voters in their community. With an increased number of registered voters, there was an increase in the number of voters. Parents and public officials were very supportive and pleasantly surprised that the students registered so many individuals.

## Informational Resources

Computer resources played a large part in the Azalea Middle School's Mock Election. The use of the Encarta program opened many avenues for learning. Students also tapped into the world of World Book encyclopedia. *Time Almanac* gave an important link to the past, present and future. Infotrac was also used to improve the students' resource pool, providing a broader base of information.

## Lessons and Outcomes

*The students became very aware of the importance of thinking for yourself in a democratic society. The right to freedom of speech and stating opinions was exercised through our right to vote. They discovered if the right to vote was abused, we could lose the right ....*

Paula Williams

The Azalea Middle School's Mock Election taught students the importance of voting, being informed, asking questions, and being able to state their position without fear of reprisal.

# **BREWBAKER INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL**

Project Contact: Paulette Moncrief, Principal  
National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz Award

## **School Profile**

Grades: Fourth through sixth grade. School population: 580 students.

### **Goal**

Brewbaker Intermediate School worked hard to provide the best opportunity for their students to enjoy the meaningful experience of the Mock Election. The 1996 Mock Election was the first for this school but the importance and effects of the event were clearly evident.

*This year a foundation was laid upon which to  
build as we approach the 21st century.*

Paulette Moncrief, Principal

## **Highlights of School Activities**

Students who pledged to vote when they come of age were given certificates for their commitment.

An inter-disciplinary approach to the Mock Election allowed the students of Brewbaker Intermediate School to gather information in each of their classes. Using talents and techniques which brought the knowledge of voting into a “real” setting, the students were able to gain the most from their experience.

The school library gave students red, white and blue “Elect to Read” bookmarks while contests tested the students’ knowledge of U.S. presidents.

Students were motivated by watching the national CNN coverage of political events because it allowed them to see how they fit into the big political picture.

The students created a template form letter to the president so they could contribute their thoughts and ideas on the issues facing the country.

Games such as Political Trivia allowed the students to increase their knowledge in an entertaining and competitive manner. Questions included: Which president appears on a penny? In what year did women win the right to vote? Who was the youngest president ever elected? Who was the first president to get married while in office?

Understanding how voters are swayed by political advertisements inspired the students to make their own campaign buttons.

Some teachers read a book about presidents to their students as part of the Mock Election activities. The students could take an Accelerated Reader test on the computer in the library.

Senator Larry Dixon read excerpts from *Ever-Ready-Eddie* to the top-point student involved in the Accelerated Reader program. The senator talked about reading, elections and character, themes woven into Brewbaker’s Mock Election.

Bert Estes, chief clerk of the Probate Office, spoke to students about being an informed voter and responsible citizen. Following the talk, students voted to determine who would be members of Brewbaker's new student council.

Mrs. Moncrief signed and distributed "Responsible Citizen" award certificates.

The music teacher taught the students an election song; a fourth grade class presented a skit called "Voting," and social studies classes included presidential travels.

## Special Strategies

100% of Brewbaker Intermediate School students participated in the Mock Election program. In addition to the students' hard work, 10% of Brewbaker's parents got involved by assisting with voter registration, helping students vote and giving a verbal pat on the back to the students for all their hard work.

## Getting Help

*Teachers \* Parents\* Public Officials \* Local Businesses \* Newspapers*

The participation of the students in Brewbaker's Mock Election came from every part of the community.

*Parents came to the initial assembly and to hear Senator Dixon speak.  
A special invitation was sent to parents to come to school and  
vote on Tuesday, October 29. A Mock Election table  
was set up for parents at the PTA meeting that night.*

The *Montgomery Independent News* published a picture of Senator Dixon with the children who participated in the Accelerated Reader program. The publicity demonstrated the level of patriotism and leadership shown by the students.

## Informational Resources

Publications such as *Ever-Ready Eddie* and *Electing the President 1996* stimulated many favorable comments from teachers. After hearing their teachers read a book about a president, students were motivated to go to the library media center and challenge their knowledge by taking the Accelerated Reader test.

The Internet provided young minds with a vehicle for answering their questions. While the school's phone lines were occasionally down, the students utilized the Internet whenever possible.

Brewbaker's 1996 Mock Election was especially significant because it was tied in with on-going events. Students were able to watch tapes of real world election events, which were then used as part of their studies. That allowed for an on-going expansion of learning material as the campaign and election process unfolded. Of most significance to the students was the educational assembly about the election process with a working voting booth on display.

Paulette Moncrief, principal of Brewbaker, gave each student an educational booklet called "Electing the President 1996" and an educational activity poster called "Election Time."

## Lessons and Outcomes

*Brewbaker Intermediate School has 580 fourth, fifth and sixth grade students. This was the first year Brewbaker participated in the Mock Election. It was a unique event in our school community ....*

Paulette Moncrief, principal

# HILSMAN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Project Contact: Victoria Pettis  
National Association of Student Councils/Ruth Hollander Award

## School Profile

Grades: Eighth grade class. School Population: Sixty-six percent of the student population are African-American.

## Goal

*In order for me to pass the torch of democracy to the next generation,  
I believed they needed to know what democracy is. They did not.  
Many adults, even those who vote, are many times uninformed  
(or misinformed). I wanted to change that.*

## Highlights of School Activities

*What made the Mock Election project for my eighth grade Language  
Arts class so unique and special was its tailor-made format.  
I wanted to reach several objectives, and did so,  
using an interdisciplinary approach to the program.*

Victoria Pettis

Students learned about the various kinds of writing involved in an election and what guidelines must be followed in producing speeches, press releases and other presentations.

Students were given first-hand knowledge of the candidates and the issues, allowing them to make informed decisions when they voted in the Mock Election.

Students appreciated the connection between social studies and language arts. Studying brochures/pamphlets, campaign posters and bumper stickers, the students learned about the tactics and political strategies used to sway voters. Students used that knowledge to create their own speeches and essays, which were then posted on school bulletin boards.

Students displayed their work on two bulletin boards created for the Mock Election by the art class.

As a lead-up to the Mock Election, many of the teachers at Hilsman taught mini-lessons on voting, the issues and the candidates.

Students studied editorial cartooning and how one's ideas can be expressed visually. Students were asked to use the information they had gathered to create a cartoon of Ross Perot and the opposing candidate.

Students were challenged to create a brochure or pamphlet for their own candidate, stating the reasons they believed their candidate to be the best person for the job.

Students watched the presidential debates and then critiqued the issues and the candidates, determining the position of their candidate on each topic.

The language arts class held an “If I Were President” speech contest. Students worked in cooperative groups to complete the assignment.

*This cooperative learning left some students surprised at what and how much they had learned.*

Victoria Pettis

During a math lesson students learned about how donations from special-interest groups can affect the outcome of an election.

Students designed and created their own campaign posters and bumper stickers, which were displayed on bulletin boards.

Students worked together to create ads, ABC books and group research papers on the three candidates.

Students went to see the local voter registration office where they were able to see how adults register to vote. The students also visited the election offices of two major political parties.

Students helped to register their parents to vote in the election by taking home the proper forms, encouraging their parents to fill them out and then mailing them in.

## **Special Strategies**

The planning for this project began several weeks before the actual implementation in October 1996. Students were asked to bring in newspaper and magazine clippings for discussion in class. Television commercials were also used as a learning tool.

Students were exposed to a month of election knowledge. Every lesson, even a simple spelling assignment, had its roots in the election theme. Students benefited from the constant reinforcement.

Students were randomly selected to serve on one of two research teams: one Democratic and the other Republican. The students were also responsible for researching the Reform Party candidate, Ross Perot.

*With information in hand, my role as teacher was to teach them what I wanted them to create cooperatively and individually for their candidate.*

Victoria Pettis

## **Getting Help**

*Parents \* Major Party Headquarters and Leaders \* Local Newspapers*

This school’s month long program encouraged parents to help bring the Mock Election to life as their children registered them to vote, discussing issues and asking questions.

Students learned how interesting the election process can be when they visited the headquarters of two major parties. Similarly, the students realized that the local community took great interest in their project, allowing them to make field trips to their offices.

## **Informational Resources**

The headquarters of two major parties allowed students to see a small portion of a real campaign in action and feel the excitement. The students were also provided with Internet information that helped them in their research.

## **Lessons and Outcomes**

*I think the students became interested and motivated, because they saw this project had relevance and meaning. They overcame their sense of alienation, powerlessness, and low self-esteem because I had them working together to set goals, make decisions and use their critical thinking skills for the common good of the group. Using the confidence fostered by the group experience, students were given assignments to do independently.*

*It is my hope that the next Mock Election will be bigger and better. By interesting more teachers across the disciplines (math, social studies, science, physical education, art) to join in, and by drawing more parent interest, I hope to make the next Mock Election an even more enjoyable learning experience. By working with my principal and perhaps involving our PTO, I would like to be able to set a school goal for registering a certain number of parents and have the local newspaper publicize our events.*

Victoria Pettis

## INDIAN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Project Contacts:

Patty Conneally: Social Studies;

April Jones: Science;

Martha Howard: English;

Carla Grant: Math

National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz Award

### School Profile

Grades: Sixth through eighth grade. Student population: First generation Vietnamese, Afghanis, East Indians and Americans.

*Our school is made up of a wide ethnic diversity, including first generation immigrants from Vietnam, Afghanistan and India and young American citizens. We were all learning about our political process jointly, so no student or group had an edge. The analyses were accomplished in the most equal manner possible, listening to news reports, reading papers and interviewing people to get the latest information. Discussing the issues with individuals outside their group, students quickly understood that there are no right or wrong answers or views on some issues.*

Patti Conneally

### Goal

Indian Hills Middle School wanted to design a simulation of the political process that would have real-life relevance and sustaining power for the lives of students. It wanted each student to have multiple opportunities to demonstrate knowledge of the subject matter and to show they could apply it to their daily lives. It was just as much a challenge for the teachers, both veteran and novice, as it was to the students.

### Highlights of School Activities

*“Listening to America” was only a part of the unit for most schools, because the subject matter was happening as it was being studied. No one, not even the teachers, had all the right answers.*

Patti Conneally

Middle school students were already aware of their power, but when they began to learn about the democratic process, they began to understand how to put that power to work for themselves.

The classroom became a place where students could obtain the information they needed to make appropriate choices for themselves. The combination of student, parent and teacher gave students the opportunity to learn in a flexible environment and gave them new tools to use in their lives.

Students discussed breaking news events and showed genuine pleasure that their thoughts and ideas were being heard.

Students worked in teams to act out the political events of the 1996 presidential election. Each day's news served as a template for a flexible curriculum.

Students analyzed and debated the issues in class, expressing their own opinions. Learning became a process of shared thoughts and ideas as opposed to memorized information. Students expanded their knowledge base by gathering information from the Internet.

Students utilized the "good, old-fashioned" postal service to write to public officials. Everyone scanned the newspaper and looked to the media to further their research. With a broad-based ethnic population, the students divided into small groups to offer equal representation to the issues.

*Students wrote to public officials and used the media for their research.*

*Teachers used the democratic process, allowing students the opportunity to see democracy at work in their school communities.*

Martha Howard

Parents served as coaches to the student candidates and contacted local officials to speak at the school. Parents also served as role models when they voted in the real world elections. Many parents took their children with them to the polls.

*One parent graciously agreed to take students to Independence Square on Nov. 4 at 1:30 a.m. to hear Bob Dole in his last stop in the 96-hour marathon.*

Patti Conneally

*They wanted to become a part of history. The experience was video-taped and shared with the students unable to attend. It was this type of dedication on the part of both students and parents that made the Mock Election of Indian Hills Middle School an award-winning success.*

Martha Howard

*A multimedia approach was used by the students during the course of study. Many students took advantage of the Internet to gather information about candidates, while others wrote their own speeches and commercials.*

*Students learned some of the techniques of airing a political advertisement with the help of a local public access television station. The community station was eager to join in and help with the project.*

*Students came to school boasting about getting e-mail replies from Bill Clinton and Bob Dole.*

Martha Howard

*Students played the roles of President Clinton, Bob Dole and Ross Perot during the school's debate. The debate was held before an audience of students, teachers, parents, grandparents, administrators and media representatives. The student/candidates were very well informed on the issues.*

*The student/candidates became the medium through which other students learned about the democratic process, providing an excellent example of students learning from each other.*

The town meeting allowed *the student/candidates* to field questions from members of each township. Moderators, special interest groups, news media and voters *had an opportunity to communicate in an informal manner*. Student/candidates did a wonderful job of explaining their platforms to potential voters.

Student/candidates answered sample questions in preparation for the town meeting. The project was designed so that student/ candidates would help students at all grade levels understand the issues and the democratic process.

The Election Club was started to allow students access to resources and their team teacher after school hours. Participating in the Election Club was part of the commitment made to the project by student/candidates. The student/candidates found ways to juggle their schedules in order to attend the club meetings.

Students were encouraged to transform the school's hallways into a display of campaign posters, slogans, student/candidate pictures and other visual presentations.

*Their energy was contagious. You couldn't walk into the entrance of Indian Hills Middle School and not be taken in by the colorful, patriotic display of election memorabilia the students had amassed.*

Parent

The students discovered that some adults in their community did not share their enthusiasm. Students were stunned by the poor voter turnout, not only from their own community, but the whole country. Not easily swayed, the students encouraged parents to vote and some even went with their parents into the voting booth.

Teachers were careful to ensure that part of each day was used to "debrief" with the students on what had occurred the day before.

Students were quick to understand that the two-party system we are now familiar with will be quite different in the future. The majority of the students expressed their willingness to participate in the creation of a third party system as informed and intelligent voters.

*This project worked so well that students not only learned new information, but a new way of learning. And in, doing so, at times it seemed the students were more informed on the issues than their parents. We did our best to include lessons that would complement all learning styles and reach all of our students.*

Martha Howard

*Ultimately, gifted students went beyond the limits of normal classroom work without being singled out as too smart. "At-risk" students challenged their own limits and reached new levels they themselves did not think they were capable of.*

*A student, whose parent initially said that there was too much work for her child to complete, was asking what else she could do for the unit as time went on.*

Patti Conneally

## **Special Strategies**

Studies focused on four major issues: crime/violence, health care, tax reform and education. Teachers and students brainstormed to conclude that these would be the most manageable issues in the presidential election. Each student chose an issue to research and while they could work with other students, they were ultimately responsible for their own research and final work. Students helped each other by sharing research material and showing that they could work together toward a common goal: learning about democracy.

Teachers knew from the beginning that it would be a challenge to get some students to participate. The inventiveness of the teachers helped to draw students out and have them participate in ways they had not thought possible.

One student who would not verbally participate in class introduced herself and voiced her stand on the issues being discussed.

*Providing students with freedom to direct their own learning and creating a safe environment in which they can learn, makes this especially meaningful. Decisions about the simulation, questions for the candidates, and media events all provided outlets for personal energy and expression of power of our middle school students. Students with different levels of ability were all working toward the culminating activity. Their various jobs fit the diversity of the students.*

Patti Conneally

A unique turn of events could have derailed the Indian Hills Middle School project. Mother Nature dropped seven and one half inches of snow leaving the school without power for 24 hours and many students' homes without power for 5-7 days.

*But a delay in the project was not something the students would tolerate. With everyone pulling together and sharing electricity, the election went off on schedule. Much of the computer work had to be done at the public library, and parents provided transportation to get the students to where they needed to be to complete their work. Kinko's became a popular place. Students were determined to see this project through even though many had to study by candlelight. It is an event the school says it will never forget.*

Patti Conneally

## Getting Help

*Parents \* Local Agencies \* Staff \* Local Businesses \* Journalists*

Indian Hills Middle School received a great deal of assistance from parents, staff and local agencies. These groups provided information and resource material for use in the Mock Election. The project would have been difficult to complete on time if it had not been for the assistance of the library and Kinko's. Real newspaper and television reporters gave students valuable experience and information as they prepared for the debate.

*Being interviewed by real newspaper and television reporters instead of peer student reporters was a very enlightening experience for them.*

*We had tried to prepare them for real media coverage before the simulation, but the concept was difficult to grasp.*

*They quickly learned that there were no right answers when it came to elections issues. Most importantly, they soon discovered that it takes time and research in order to make intelligent decisions about candidates and issues.*

Indian Hills Middle School had 90% parent involvement and attendance at the 9 a.m. Mock Election that Tuesday morning. They also achieved 100% participation of students in attendance on Election Day.

Individuals who supported this project were Linda Braude, mentor for team teachers; Barbara Jones, counselor; Jan Percival, media specialist; Jim Poplau, choral music; Jim Wink, principal; Jennifer Friend, assistant principal; Dr. Hal Jehle, state coordinator Mock Election and social studies resource coordinator; Paulette Manville; Shawnee Mission East, Debate Coach; Henry Bloch, Chairman of H&R Block and involved grandparent; and David Atkins, state representative for the 28th District in Kansas.

## Informational Resources

Many of the resources used by the Indian Hills Middle School came from outside the standard curriculum. Newspapers, television and radio media, magazines, political publications, and personal interviews combined with the "Listening to America" unit made for a wonderfully well-rounded learning experience. Use of computer technology and the Internet provided bridges to external sources not otherwise available to the students. But the personal interaction between students, staff, parents, candidates and government agencies made the program a true winner.

## Lessons and Outcomes

*The way in which the students were discovering and learning the information was very much like the way that well-informed and intelligent voters receive their information. No one needed to ask, "Why are we learning this?" because the students could readily see that they needed the information in order to perform the tasks for the simulation. The students were in charge of their learning; they took control and made decisions about how they were going to learn about democracy. They were eager to accept that challenge because they had enormous freedom during the process, the content was new and exciting for them, and they fed upon the enthusiasm of the teachers. As the process unfolded, a snowball effect occurred and more and more energy developed among the students and teachers. Students took their jobs and roles very seriously and were eager to get the work done. Students acknowledged the challenge of thinking about issues from various points of view, discovered that finding solutions to these issues is quite difficult, and that politicians may also change their positions on the issues while campaigning.*

Dr. Hal Jehle

# KIRBYVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Project Contact: Jennifer Beasley  
National Association of Student Councils/Ruth Hollander Award

## School Profile

Grades: Seventh and eighth grade social studies classes hosted the Mock Election.

## Goal

*From a teachers' point of view, we wanted a way for  
the students to enjoy learning the political process.*

Jennifer Beasley

Students brainstormed and decided they would conduct an "Election Watch Party." Groups of students gathered to decide on committee tasks while coming up with ideas on how to create an event that would be fun and teach others about the election process and the importance of voting.

Students designed games called "Pin the tail on the donkey" and "Pin the nose on the elephant" as part of the entertainment.

Students formed committees responsible for food, entertainment, games, set-up, the tally board, invitation and thank-you letters. Parents and students worked together, organizing and seeking community contributions. Students enjoyed working cooperatively with parents and being able to share what they were learning.

The "Election Watch Party 1996" was the perfect way to encourage participation in the political process. Students heard about the election on the radio and television and read about it in the newspaper. Students learned about the political process while having fun.

## Special Strategies

Students, parents and community members all participated in this event. Members of the community were pleased to see the students so actively involved in the political process. Parents contributed significantly by putting in numerous volunteer hours and helping to provide refreshments. Students, however, were committed to organizing and hosting "Watch Party '96" and let nothing stand in their way.

## Getting Help

### *Local Businesses \* Parents \* Public and Government Officials*

The community contributed much to the success of this Mock Election. Both individuals and businesses donated time, funds and hard work. Those who supported the Mock Election were: Wal-Mart (always ready and willing to help with prizes); the county commissioner, Finis Keys and Assessor James Strahan (taking time to come by and say a few words); Country Mart; Consumers Save-A-Lot, Coca-Cola, Frito-Lay and Highland Dairy. A local radio station reminded parents and community members to stop by the school where a local theater provided music for the evening.

## Informational Resources

Kirbyville Middle School teachers used every resource available to educate their students. Videos, newspaper and magazine clippings added to the research material obtained from encyclopedias and the Internet. Candidate speeches were reviewed and discussed and students met with political officials to ask questions and hear how the candidates felt about the issues.

## Lessons and Outcomes

*At the conclusion of this program, I felt that every student played a major role in the success of Election Watch Party 1996. I feel confident, and the evaluations show, that the students completed the unit with a greater understanding of the political system.*

Jennifer Beasley

The invitation committee kicked off the project by booking local officials to speak at the event. The thank-you committee completed the project by using the computer to create and then mail thank-you cards to all those who supported and/or participated in this project. From start to finish, the students were able to learn about and appreciate the workings of the political system.

# PEARL C. ANDERSON LEARNING CENTER

Project Contact: Michael Cressey  
National Association of Student Councils/Ruth Hollander Award

## School Profile

Grades: Seventh and eighth grades. Student population: Approximately 96% of the student body participated, totaling 1,00 students.

## Goal

This school is comprised mostly of students whose family income is approximately \$9,000. Most of these students participate in a subsidized school lunch program and if they complete college, will be first generation college graduates. It was a vital part of Pearl C. Anderson Learning Center's goal to show these students that they have a voice in their future and in present day events.

## Highlights of School Activities

The Mock Election was preceded by a "Celebrate Democracy" assembly. The school acted as host to candidates, winners of the cartoon contest were announced, the school's chorus and band provided entertainment and cheerleaders performed patriotic cheers.

Students made posters to encourage other students to vote in the Mock Election and to get involved by contacting a political candidate. "Get out the Vote" messages were displayed around the school.

The Pearl C. Anderson Learning Center began its rally with a local chapter of the ROTC and the posting of the colors (including the American flag).

Students designed and created posters reflecting the thoughts and ideas generated by the Mock Election and national election activities.

*After teaching several lessons on citizenship and voter responsibilities, students started simulating a precinct in the classroom. They got voting machines and ballots. When several of the candidates spoke at the rally, the students had a chance to speak to real people running for office.*

Michael Cressey

The media provided news coverage of the rally and debates. The candidates fielded questions and enjoyed debating with the students.

Two students were given the opportunity to perform a live telecast with Channel 2 News.

To encourage parent participation, the Parent/Teacher Association hosted a "Get-Out-the-Vote" day. Students discussed the issues with their parents and accompanied them to the polls. Parents also helped monitor the school's Mock Election and were asked to bring a friend or neighbor to the school political rally.

## Special Strategies

It is important to note that although a significant number of the students at Pearl C. Anderson Learning Center come from low-income households, they had little, if any, trouble in obtaining assistance from outside sources. The students had no reason to believe that a lack of income would mean a lack of importance in the election process.

Student motivation was kept high with winners of the cartoon contest, red, white, and blue contest and photos of the events being displayed in the school library and boardroom.

Students were entrusted with setting up and running the Mock Election and rally. They had to inform other students through their newspaper (*Morehouse Tiger News*) and call in the results of the election to Channel 2 News.

*Of the 200 schools [in Dallas] who participated in the Mock Election program, 74 were able to get their results tallied and called in by 5 p.m.*

Michael Cressey

## Getting Help

*Government Officials \* Private Business Owners \* Parents  
Other Schools \* County Elections Manager*

Local government officials and the private business sector were called upon to support Pearl C. Anderson students with their Mock Election program. Many were supportive and responded positively to the needs of the students.

Help also came from other Dallas schools participating in Mock Election projects. Working with other schools demonstrated the benefits of working together as a team.

The county elections manager assisted by helping the students to register to vote and by swearing in the student officials.

## Informational Resources

Pearl C. Anderson Learning Center used the Dallas Convention as a source of information. The live, “real world” contact showed the importance of the election and the democratic process and assured students that they would apply what they had learned. Books, the Internet, newspapers, magazines, T.V. and radio spots were additional sources of information for the students.

## Lessons and Outcomes

*Better than 96% of our students voted in the Mock Election. Two of the area schools (Grambling/Jackson State) won awards for the highest percentage of student voters. Another school, Morehouse College, started a newspaper to promote the election. Our students learn through “Performance Based Activities” (they learn by doing). Participation was motivated through daily announcements, the student newspaper and teachers in all disciplines having students discuss and debate political issues. The project was school-wide and community-wide. Students encouraged their parents to vote. Our PTA hosted a parent “get out to vote day.” Candidates were invited to speak. We had a 96% turnout at the Mock Election and received numerous letters supporting our work with this program. The program was clearly a success.*

Michael Cressey

# PIPER MIDDLE SCHOOL

Project Contact: April Hawkins

National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz, Award

## School Profile

Grades: Sixth through eighth grade. Student population: Participating class population approximately 700.

## Goal

*The presidential election is always an exciting time in the United States. But there is a growing concern that the apathy of voters will undermine the democratic system. In an effort to teach the students of Piper Middle School about the democratic process, we were faced with the challenge to inspire the eighth grade classes to become educated as to how the system works, and to the importance of being an active participant in their own future. We worked together to design a program that would connect the political process and the election to our students' lives, and show them that their community was involved.*

April Hawkins

## Highlights of School Activities

Eighth grade students hosted an "election tea" and invited senior citizens. Guests shared their memories of past elections and candidates and discussed their views on the current election. Two or three students were grouped with a senior guest and encouraged to discuss similarities and differences between past and present elections.

Refreshments for the tea were prepared by the home economics classes. The recipes for the cookies and other treats were taken from Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Dole's recipe collection.

While parents were invited to participate in political discussions, they also volunteered their services to set up the tea and clean up afterward.

Students conducted interviews with parents, friends, family and members of the business community to learn about others' experiences.

Students used the results of their interviews to find ways to effectively combat voter apathy. The students brainstormed and developed some good ideas.

Piper Middle School went to an assembly promoting the democratic process and encouraging citizens to get out and vote. The mayor of Kansas City and other prominent officials spoke at the election assembly. Each speaker explained how they became involved in community service and the democratic system and why they remain active.

Eighth grade fine arts students presented appropriate songs during the opening and closing portions of the assembly.

Debates allowed the students to exchange, and sometimes defend, their ideas. Students either adopted their candidate's platform or researched an issue and developed their own opinions.

## Special Strategies

Teachers of Piper Middle School planned the entire unit during their 40-minute planning sessions. This work was in addition to other curriculum objectives and requirements and so students were left with the majority of work and decision-making for the Mock Election.

## Getting Help

### *Business Community \* Parents \* Teachers*

As in many other communities, Piper Middle School teachers and students received a great amount of support and assistance from the business community. The excitement of the students touched the lives of others and the enthusiasm spread. Parents provided students with support and encouragement and helped whenever needed.

## Informational Resources

Piper Middle School used resources from every walk of life, providing the current and up-to-date news or an edited version of the past. They learned from those who had been there to witness past elections. Transcripts of the student interviews were made available and will be used as a reference resource for student essays in the future. The students were also asked to make an informative summary of what they learned from their experience. Newspapers, magazines, books, television newscasts and the Internet offered a broad-based supply of information.

## Lessons and Outcomes

*There was not an area of education that the Mock Election program did not touch or was not a part of. Science, math, language, arts, reading and social studies became studies that actually affected the lives of the students involved. No one could walk away from this experience and think they had no voice in our society.*

*Our achievements were the amount of involvement from the community and the excitement this generated among our students. Because our students were sharing what they learned with adults in the community, they were much more motivated to become "experts" on the issues that were important in the '96 election.*

April Hawkins

# PIZITZ MIDDLE SCHOOL

Project Contact: Donna Watkins  
National Association of Student Councils/Ruth Hollander Award

## School Profile

Grades: Sixth through eighth grade. School population: 94% of the student body participated.

## Goal

*Our school became the site of a bustling campaign in the months of September and October as teachers and students prepared for the 1996 Student Mock Election. Preparations began in the summer when two parent volunteers and three students attended the Mock Convention at Hoover High School. The convention laid the foundation for a slate of election activity. A parent volunteer, a teacher, and students met and put the plan in motion. The primary objectives of our election were to: 1) increase student awareness about candidates and issues, 2) encourage voter participation among students and adults, and 3) experience the energy and excitement generated by an election.*

Donna Watkins

## Highlights of School Activities

Pizitz Middle School was pleased to have Spencer Bachus, congressional representative from its district, visit on October 11<sup>th</sup>. Rep. Bachus, along with many other well-known citizens and elected representatives, led the school's Assembly on Citizenship. Rep. Bachus spoke to the students on the meaning and significance of being a United States citizen and the importance of making informed decisions. It was a proud moment when awards were given to the school and students for demonstrating outstanding leadership.

Two teachers, a parent volunteer and eight students (representing all three grade levels) attended a City Council meeting requesting supplies for the Mock Election. The mayor, City Council members and the City Clerk graciously responded by lending the school polling booths and donating pencils and stickers for each of the students. General Services delivered the equipment to the school the day before the election.

Art teacher Larry Gibson and his students displayed their political cartoons in a left and right-winged eagle.

The enrichment teacher challenged the eighth grade classes and pods of seventh grade classes with three lessons. The lessons covered computer research of the major issues, the history of voting rights and participation in a campaign.

Classrooms became election headquarters and students were charged with developing and mapping out the last minute strategies used by candidates.

Students designed buttons, pamphlets, posters and television and radio jingles to promote the election.

Sixth grade students participated in a “scavenger hunt” using newspapers and the Internet to find relevant campaign materials.

Natalie David, Birmingham Southern professor, former Senate candidate and political analyst, spoke to the students at Pizitz Middle School in a town hall meeting. She answered questions and spoke on “Figuring Out the 1996 Election.” At the conclusion of her presentation, the students posed as candidates and debated the issues.

On Decision Day '96 the school's polls opened at 8 a.m. and 135 volunteers served as poll workers and watchers. Local poll volunteers assisted the student workers with their duties and helped tabulate the votes when the polls closed.

Three teachers and a parent volunteer posed as Bill Clinton, Bob and Elizabeth Dole and Ross Perot. There was much excitement when the candidates roamed the halls, vying for votes. Mayor Reynolds found the time to escort the candidates to some of the classrooms where they answered students' questions. Mayor Reynolds, City Councilman David Skinner and City Clerk Thelma Moon dropped by to cast their vote at the school's polling booths.

Debates allowed the students to exchange, and sometimes defend, their ideas. Students either adopted their candidate's platform or researched an issue and developed their own opinion.

The Pizitz Powerline, the local news program, provided special coverage of the election reports at the end of each class period. Amy Baldwin and Bob Farley of *The Birmingham Post* were on hand to cover the election news.

When the polls closed, Pizitz Middle School tabulated the votes and reported a proud 94% voter turnout. Students cheered as they heard the tally.

*Student participation didn't end there. Students followed the election returns on November 5 and colored states by electoral votes. Students were reminded to encourage their parents to vote and offer their assistance at home so parents could have that extra time. Students were rewarded in numerous ways for their participation.*

Donna Watkins

Science classrooms became the center for discussions on environmental issues and the top three environmental concerns for the 21st century. Medical issues were also open for discussion. Students wanted to know the candidates' views on alcohol and drugs as well as teenage smoking. Space exploration, medical research and health care also found their way into the discussions.

Students looked at which programs depend on large sums of money and what portion of taxes go to fund the various programs. They also studied how the Electoral College works mathematically, how a flat tax compares to the present tax, and how voter turnout at the polls is determined.

English and language arts classes not only researched the candidates and their positions on the issues, but some students made pamphlets and wrote their own political advertisements.

Art students created posters or street signs to hang on the school walls and buttons depicting the campaign of the candidates. Students also produced long banners that graced the election headquarters and polling places. Music students created musical jingles as political advertisements for the radio

Social studies classes discussed the candidates and the issues and held the election celebration (class party) on election eve, emulating the candidates. Social studies students were rewarded with 100% class voter registration and/or voter turnout.

## **Special Strategies**

Excitement was high when the City Council provided students with tickets to see President Clinton during a surprise campaign stop in Vestavia Hills. While many students could say they had seen the president on television, the students at Pizitz Middle School would be able to, one day, tell their children that they had seen the president in person.

## **Getting Help**

A surprise campaign stop by President Clinton.

*Government Officials \* Private Businesses \* Newspapers  
TV Journalists \* Parents \* Teachers \* Private Individuals*

Help with the Mock Election at the Pizitz Middle School came from a number of sources. Government officials, private businesses, newspapers and journalists, as well as parents, family and friends, provided insight, suggestions and support to the students and staff of Pizitz Middle School. It was with their assistance that this project succeeded in being a strengthening force for the students.

## **Informational Resources**

The number of informational resources can never be limited when the desire to learn is so strong. For the students of Pizitz Middle School, the resources varied from newspapers and political publications to personal interviews and the world of the Internet.

## **Lessons and Outcomes**

*Through a team effort — administrative support, community involvement and support, parent volunteers, interdisciplinary teaching and teacher, staff and student participation — future voter participation and public awareness were strengthened. The right to vote was seen not only as a privilege but as an honor, and as an exciting, memorable and powerful event in one's life.*

Donna Watkins

## **URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Project Contact: Kathleen Nelesen, social studies teacher  
National Association of Student Councils/Ruth Hollander Award

### **School Profile**

Grades: Sixth through eighth grade. Students participating: 130.

### **Goal**

*Our election activities were both unique and creative because they permitted the students to democratically develop their own goals as a group and then facilitated student success by allowing them to meet those goals using their individual talents, interests and knowledge. It gave students a variety of real-world experiences and raised them to levels far above those gained by the transfer of content in a more traditional manner.*

Kathleen Nelesen

### **Highlights of School Activities**

A team of teachers identified the core information in the American election process and decided on the best way to deliver this information to students.

Teachers identified a number of key areas on which to focus their lessons. They would focus on: the election; the constitutional background of the election process; the balance of power between the three branches of government, the history of some of the presidents; the current issues and where the candidates stand, and political vocabulary.

Social studies classes became the central arena for the discussion of the election process, teachers in other disciplines used every opportunity to work the Mock Election into their curriculum.

Students developed commercials with the support and guidance of the language arts teachers, using their own language to convey their message. The commercials were shown to other students and presented at Parent/Teacher conferences.

When all the commercials had been viewed by students in the classroom, the best commercials were chosen for re-recording and sent to the local cable station. The commercials were aired one week before the election and provided incentive for adults to vote.

*The teacher responsible for delivering the tape to our cable company reported that, on Election Day, when she took a thank-you note' the students had written to the individual who edited the program, he was wearing an "I Voted" sticker. He told her after working with our commercials he was so inspired by the students' sincerity and belief in the system, he had the other workers at the cable company view the commercials and they had decided as a group to all vote on Election Day. As the teacher looked around the office she realized every worker was wearing an "I Voted" sticker.*

Kathleen Nelesen

Students demonstrated their artistic talents by designing "Promote the Vote" door hangers to remind people to vote. Students canvassed the town, even asking a local pizza company to deliver similar fliers with each pizza purchased five days prior to the election.

Seventh grade students contacted a local sign company owner for help with a sign promoting the vote. The owner was so impressed that seventh grade students would consider taking on this kind of responsibility that he offered to hang their sign for free.

As the word of community generosity and involvement spread, one student challenged teachers and staff with the comment:

*That's great that Mr. Cramer (the sign company owner) wants to give us the billboard for free. But isn't that too easy? If we want people to take us seriously, shouldn't we earn the money and pay for it ourselves, instead of having an adult pay for it for us?*

Urban Middle I School Student

Many discussions and debates followed the students' request for financial autonomy.

*In the end, the students decided to decline the free offer of the billboard and raise the money for the project themselves. Without exception, every student felt and knew that the message would not carry as much weight, if they, as a student community, failed to "put their money where their mouth was."*

The students decided that, even with a financially diverse community and the fact that some students would have difficulty donating money, each of them should donate whatever money they could to the project.

Artistically inclined students picked up mini billboard forms and began designing. All the samples were collected at the end of the week and put on display for the vote to be held the following Monday.

Students spent the weekend collecting aluminum cans for recycling. All the money collected was donated to the sign fund.

Fund-raising for the billboard took the form of babysitting, raking leaves, doing odd jobs for family, friends and neighbors and raiding piggy banks. Some students donated their dessert money, while others handed over pocket change accumulated from their own pockets and their parents'.

*Bake sales during lunch added to the billboard fund. And in only four and a half school days, the students were able to raise \$ 111.07.*

Kathleen Nelesen

One person who heard about the children raising their own funds for the sign, was so moved by the students' sense of responsibility and purpose that she began spreading the story to co-workers.

Many had said they weren't going to vote before, but after hearing how hard the students had worked, and with such determination, the common reaction became, "I'll have to go vote."

Local Businessperson

The owner of the sign company would not accept payment for the sign but donated the funds to the James Madison School, a local elementary school for physically handicapped children. The donation was made in the name of the students from Urban Middle School.

The sign company owner also relocated the billboard two blocks from the school so that students would have more opportunities to see it.

*It was truly a privilege for me as a teacher to be in a position to observe the business community valuing the work of students and wanting to provide the best possible reinforcement for those students.*

Kathleen Nelesen

The school hosted an Election Day rally where students submitted applications to play the roles of candidates in the presidential race. The applications included who the student would play, how they would portray the character and what they would do to make the role most lifelike. Students also played the parts of Secret Service agents, debate team members and the press.

While one student sang the National Anthem at the rally, other students took on the work of stage crew and lighting and sound operators.

Students demonstrated a pride of ownership with the Mock Election. One student took the initiative to place 100 ads on the Internet, reminding Internet users to vote.

Students compiled information from the League of Women Voters literature and distributed the information package to social studies teachers to use in their classes.

During the role-playing that took place at the rally, Urban Middle School's "President Clinton" discovered the importance of correctly wording your thoughts. When questioned by a "reporter" as to what his stand was on the drug problem in this country, the "President" replied earnestly, "I'm against all drugs except for those that make you feel good." It was a very red-faced "President Clinton" who amended amid much laughter, "I mean the ones that make you feel better when you're sick."

## Special Strategies

*The special-needs students, varying from the cognitively disabled to the gifted and talented with all the gray area, “at-risk” and unlabeled learners in between, are encouraged to engage on the level of their choosing and to the best of their ability. All work and workers are valued because, just as in the body, the foot does not outrank the hand, neither do the fits, talents and interests of one student out-value those of another.*

Kathleen Nelesen

*Giving students information and then empowering them to use it as they see fit is the most effective motivational tool we have at our disposal and it’s vital we use it, for it would be impossible to reach this high level of accomplishment and student involvement if the students were not intrinsically motivated to complete the task. But because [students] are encouraged to think, to dream, to envision possibilities, and then decide what’s possible, given the constraints of time, space, money, talent, and technology, students not only became involved, they became unstoppable. The challenge and excitement for the educator is in supplying materials, information, and skilled instruction to the learners as they complete the task they’ve set for themselves.*

## Getting Help

*Local Businesses \* Local Media Outlets \* Parents  
League of Women Voters*

Urban Middle School received a great deal of support from outside sources. The local cable station and a local billboard-advertising firm provided some of the more unique sources of help, but were by no means the only ones to offer support. The League of Women Voters provided information so that students could create and distribute their own information packages. Parents, and even local newspaper carriers, contributed ideas to the school’s Mock Election.

## Informational Resources

Internet access allowed students to obtain information for research and project use. Along with phone, fax, and copy machines, the computer played an important role in gathering and disseminating information. Students were able to take an active role in promoting their own education and informing others about the importance of voting. Students also used newspapers, television newscasts, magazines and personal interviews as research tools.

## Lessons and Outcomes

*The most significant achievement of our 1996 Mock Election activities was the high level of student involvement that provided the impetus for all we accomplished. The activities were multidisciplinary and needed the talents and abilities of all the students to be implemented. All of our 130 students contributed in one way or another to make this a successful endeavor. Just as the democracy needs all its citizens to contribute to the greater good, our election activities did the same. It didn't matter what students' talents were, the important thing was for them to put them to use as they completed the task at hand. The way they worked individually and as a group resulted in what the philosophers would call "utility," or the greatest good for the most people ... a powerful lesson in how our society functions at its best when individuals do what they can where they can to benefit others, and, in the process, help themselves.*

Kathleen Nelesen

*The election activities accommodated the bakers and the sellers, the mathematicians and the organizers, the leaders and the followers, the thinkers and the doers, and all became problem-solvers as they worked past the obstacles standing between them and the goals they had set set for themselves — sometimes working overtime, or using computers, or working in groups, or soliciting help, or sometimes by simply learning from their mistakes.*

## **WEST RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Project Contact: Ricky Vickers, Social Studies Teacher  
National Association of Secondary School Principals/John Herklotz Award

### **School Profile**

Grades: Sixth through eighth grade. Sixth, seventh and eighth grade social studies classes organized and hosted the Mock Election.

### **Goal**

West Ridge Middle School wanted to motivate all their students to learn about, and participate in, the democratic process.

### **Highlights of School Activities**

Students prepared themselves for the Mock Election by conducting and participating in a voter registration drive. The students registered parents, staff and the general public for both the Mock Election and the real world election.

West Ridge Middle School's voter registration drive was advertised throughout the school on colorful displays created by the students. Journalists from a local television station provided media coverage.

Students interviewed parents to learn about political ideology from veteran voters. Students were required to interview at least one Republican and one Democrat to gain a understanding of both political parties. Parents, motivated by the students, offered to help with other Mock Election activities.

Students became more informed about the issues by watching and discussing the presidential debates.

*Daily classroom discussions of the issues, and candidate performance  
were something the students anticipated and enjoyed.*

Ricky Vickers

Coverage by the local media provided incentive for the students. Faxes were sent outlining the events of the Mock Election.

After learning about the Electoral College, students divided into Republican and Democratic parties and elected a candidate to represent their party. Students explored the current political infrastructure, how candidates win votes and why candidates campaign more heavily in some states than others. Students studied how states traditionally vote and then studied the voter opinion polls, translating them into possible electoral votes.

Students used computers (with a program designed by the computer lab teacher) to cast their votes. When the results were in, they were displayed on the school's Internet page. The screen saver displayed the message: "Uncle Sam Wants You."

*Students found themselves determining what each presidential candidate should do to win the additional electoral votes needed to put them over the top.*

Ricky Vickers

## **Special Strategies**

Parent participation was kept to a minimum to assure that the students ran the election precinct by themselves. For the sixth grade class that hosted the West Ridge Middle School Election, parents participated by allowing themselves to be interviewed, an assignment which encouraged students to become aware of the political ideology through discussions with their parents.

Other grades and disciplines were not specifically asked to participate in the West Ridge Middle School project but became involved as the program spread throughout the school.

*Self-contained special education students were included and each was registered and participated in the process, rather than remaining bystanders.*

Ricky Vickers

West Ridge Middle School teachers had not planned to use an interdisciplinary approach to their Mock Election but as the excitement and energy of the program spread throughout the school, social studies, science and art classes began to get involved.

Science students used both their math and science skills to analyze data and determine who might win the election.

## **Getting Help**

*Parents \* Governmental Organizations \* Local Business People*

While parent participation was limited, the Mock Election project could not have been accomplished without the support and assistance of parents.

Additional assistance from government organizations and local business people helped make the Mock Election a success.

## **Informational Resources**

Volunteers, students and staff members found newspapers and television broadcasts useful tools in soliciting energetic classroom discussions. Political cartoons were viewed as more than just entertainment and studied as a reflection of social opinion.

Students found the surveys and interviews with parents to be both informative and educational.

## Lessons and Outcomes

*As an educator, I realize that organizing a school-wide event in addition to the regular classroom curriculum is a great undertaking. Sometimes you wonder if it is worth the effort and sacrifice necessary to make sure a commitment works. However, when it is finally completed and the students and parents thank you for that extra effort — effort that does make a difference in a student's life — it is then that I remember what teaching is all about and I automatically begin to think of ways to make it more effective the next time around.*

*During 18 years of teaching, I have never witnessed so much interest in a presidential election. I believe that so much interest was generated by an intensive study of the election process from start to finish in the social studies class and student involvement in running an 'in-house' election in our building.*

Ricky Vickers