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**AUSTIN, TEXAS, INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
RECEIVES AWARD FOR VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT**

AUSTIN, TEXAS -- The Austin Independent School District in Austin, Texas, will be honored by the American Association of School Administrators for Outstanding Leadership in Voter Education. AASA co-sponsors the award with the National Student/Parent Mock Election, the nation's largest voter education project. Joe Ramirez, Austin's social studies administrative supervisor, and Terry Loessin, the social studies curriculum specialist, will accept the award on behalf of the district's superintendent, Pascal Forgione, during AASA's National Conference on Education, Feb. 19-21, at the Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco.

The National Student/Parent Mock Election promotes civic education by encouraging students and parents to learn about the nation's election process and involving them in a full-fledged campaign. Throughout the program's 28-year history, over 50 million young voters have cast their ballots and practiced what it's like participating in a democracy. The national project, which receives support from The Election Assistance Commission and the Kaplan Foundation, is headed by longtime president Gloria Kirschner.

The Austin School District's award-winning education project was pulled together by the seven-member social studies department, who worked in cooperation with teachers, students, parents, instructional technology departments, state and local organizations. The various activities that were implemented throughout the district included:

- A field trip to the state capitol for 300 high school seniors from all of the district's high schools for the viewing of the Texas Young Lawyers Association's presentation of "Vote America," a documentary about the history of the voting rights struggle among minority groups in the U.S.;
- A mock voter registration process;
- Student volunteers taking on the roles of mock election officials, judges and clerks; and
- Students acting as voter outreach educators by visiting classrooms, fielding questions, providing information, designing posters and organizing public forums.

The social studies curriculum website was also a vital resource for helping students and teachers access election materials, such as mock voter registration cards and ballots, classroom activities, and non-partisan information about the candidates, political parties and issues. The website kept classrooms up to date with the various activities and learning opportunities taking place in schools, as teachers created and shared lesson plans with one another.

Over 40,000 students in the district participated in the actual mock election which was held during the week of October 27-30 on 78 campuses that included elementary, middle and high schools. Students cast ballots, written in both English and Spanish, which mirrored the ballot created by the Texas Secretary of State's office, and results were reported to the social studies and instructional technology departments, resulting in an average voter turnout of 61 percent.

Post-election resources were also made available on the web for students and teachers to analyze voting results and incorporate math and social studies into their classroom curriculum.

Austin's voter education project aimed at not only generating student interest in the recent election cycle, but to teach students the importance of civic participation. By having them practice and implement the social studies concepts taught in their classrooms, the social studies department sought to educate students about the voting process, the nature of election campaigns, the constitutional requirements regarding the president and the constitutional amendments affiliated with the voting rights struggle in the United States.

According to the district, reports and reflections received from teachers indicated that the impact the project had on the school community was profound. As one high school senior commented, "If I could do it again, I would. I felt like I was helping America elect the next president."

About AASA

AASA, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders across the United States. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children.

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