

## Introduction

### The National Student/Parent Mock Election's K-4 Program

When the *National Standards for Civics and Government* was published in 1994, one of the central arguments it raised was that although the goals, curricular requirements, and policies of every state "express the need for and extol the value of civic education, this vital part of the student's overall education is seldom given systematic attention in the K-12 curriculum." With this statement in mind, those familiar with the National Standards will not fail to be impressed by the degree to which National Student/Parent Mock Election's (NS/PME) early grades program "Learning to Choose" incorporates many of the Standards. For those of us who worked on the National Standards project, its influence on "Learning to Choose" is especially gratifying, given the sparse attention so often paid to civic education themes at the lower grades even where they are provided for at upper grades.

"Learning to Choose – the Mock Election in the Early Grades" is replete with general and specific reference not only to the content standards, but also to the participatory skills outlined on pages five and six of the National Standards document. These skills are divided into several categories that refer to training to work with others on common projects, and two others on the skills required, first, for "Monitoring politics and government"; and second, "influencing politics and government." As we will have occasion to notice, "Learning to Choose" trains young students in skills from all of these categories.

From the outset, "Learning to Choose" explicitly states its intention to fulfill various of the K-4 National Standards. Its introductory matter refers to the Standards on basic values and principles of American democracy that are incorporated in the new NS/PME early grades program. The authors correctly point out that in the course of participating in the program students will be required to recognize the individual rights of others, experience working for the common good, and discover the necessity of cooperation and conflict resolution to achieve common goals – all aims of *National Standards for Civics and Government*. Principal examples of the relationship between the National Standards and "Learning to Choose" will occupy the pages that follow.

Lesson 1 of the first Unit of the program is entitled "Freedom and Responsibility," concepts to which the students are introduced. The discussion of rules and the right to make rules corresponds to Section I. B of the Standards, "where do people in government get authority to make, apply, and enforce rules and laws and made disputes about them?" The right to express opinions and learning to respect the rights of others corresponds to Section V.C. in the Standards, "What are important rights in the United States?"

In Lesson 2, "No Rule Land," students discover why they need government, the topic in the Standards in I. C, "Why is government necessary?" Further discussion of the consequences of a lack of rules and government correlates to III.D. of the

Standards, "What are the major responsibilities of local government?"—responsibilities students find unfulfilled in "No Rule Land."

The third lesson, "Our Town" imagines a town where basic governmental services and rules and laws governing them are variously the responsibility of local, state, or federal governments, the subject of III. B., C., and D. of the National Standards, which treats the division of labor among the three levels of American government. This is also the subject of III.A., "How are power and responsibility distributed, shared, and limited in the government established by the United States Constitution." The lesson is designed to present the concept that citizens are obliged to obey local, state, and federal law, a point covering the civic disposition to respect law found in V.D.4. of the Standards, which discusses "Dispositions that facilitate thoughtful and effective participation in public affairs."

In "The Rule of Men vs. The Rule of Law" (Lesson 4), the subjects of the U.S. Constitution and, using different language, constitutionalism are presented. Students learn the difference between life under a "rule of law" and a "rule of men." These subjects are found in III.A.1. of the National Standards, "What is the United States Constitution and why is it important?" where the importance of law limiting the powers of government, therefore protecting the rights of the people, is discussed. The lesson also refers to the place of "We the People" in the American system, introducing the idea of popular sovereignty found in II.A.1. of the National Standards. Further, the lesson distinguishes between the functions of Congress and the President (III.B.2.); and it familiarizes students with the U.S. Constitution, describing it as "the highest law in the land," found in III.A.1.

Also in this lesson key rights of the people are articulated, including freedom of expression, of religion, from unfair discrimination, and suffrage. The fundamental importance of the U.S. Constitution as a means of protecting these rights is stressed, corresponding to National Standards III.A.1 & 2. The overall thrust of the lesson to teach the idea of the rule of law and respect for law is found in the Standards at II.A.1. in discussions of fundamental values and principles. These include, for example, the idea that "the powers of government are limited by law"; and at II.B.1 in the discussion of the distinctive characteristics of American society, which includes "Importance for respect for the law."

The fifth lesson, "The Class Constitution," incorporates material relevant to the Standards' I.E., "What are the purposes of laws and rules?" II.A.1., "What are the most important values and principles of American Democracy?"; III.A.1., "What is the United States Constitution and why is it important?"; V.C.1, on the rights of American citizens; and V.D.1. on the responsibilities of American citizens. Rules for the class are compared to rules for the nation as found in the U.S. Constitution. In the course of constructing a class constitution, a basic vocabulary of civic terms and ideas, such as majority/minority, freedom, rights and responsibilities, is explored, with older children helping younger children with the aid of a dictionary. A chart of terms and definitions is constructed and exhibited to the class.

If the creation of a body of rules is the theme of Lesson 5, the next lesson, "Choosing a class Monitor," deals with the selection of leaders for their enforcement. As treated in the lesson, this subject accords with section V.H.1. of the National Standards, "How should Americans select leaders?" and tangentially with material III.B.1. dealing with the responsibilities of the executive branch of government to carry out and enforce law.

Lesson 7 then turns to the key distinction between power and authority covered in National Standards in I.B.1., "Defining power and authority." This theme is followed by a lesson called "Making a Decision," which deals with procedures for making good leadership choices. The process models conscientious civic behavior in seeking and evaluating information about candidates and coming to a decision. This lesson also correlates with V.H.1., "How should Americans select leaders?"

Lesson 9, "Voting for Class Monitor," brings the preceding lessons to fruition by modeling the leadership selection process through voting. The entire extended school community, including both school administrators and parents and grandparents is recommended for involvement. This process is covered in detail by the National Standards in V.F.1., "How Can Americans participate in their government."

The first lesson of Unit 2, "Our Government," introduces students to the real world of political decision-making by familiarizing them with actual voting procedures, with the need for representative government, and with the distinctions among national, state, and local government. Among other aims, it also seeks to involve parents in voter education, a laudable aim for any civic education program. Among the Standards applicable to the lesson, perhaps most relevant are III.B.1, C.1, and D.1, on the functions of the three levels of American government as well as V.F.1, cited above.

The following lesson entails inviting a public official to speak to the class about community needs and potential provisions for them. As a follow-up activity, students are asked to consider the public officials required by a [make believe] town. These activities are relevant to several National Standards, including V.F.1., on political participation; the portion of V.D.1., civic responsibilities, on staying informed; and V.H.1., on leadership selection. In addition, a thank-you note sent to the visiting official models civility, discussed in V.E.1., civic dispositions that "enhance citizen effectiveness and promote the healthy functioning of American democracy."

The last five lessons (3-6) of Unit 2 deal in some detail, first collectively, then separately, with the division of responsibilities among federal, state, and local levels of government, the subject matter of section III.A-E of the Standards. After dealing with each level in turn, lesson 7 carefully reviews the functions of each branch (executive, legislative, and judicial) naming the principal officials or bodies at each of the three levels of government. Here, the functions of the judicial system are reviewed for the first time, carefully laying out its main functions, at an age-

appropriate level of understanding. The text rightly notes that teachers should not be concerned if at this early point in their civic education students do not completely master this material. It is enough that it is introduced to them; it will be repeatedly presented to them later in their education.

A notable feature of lesson 7 is the effort made to acquaint children, using charts as teaching tools, which level of government performs various functions, exactly correlating with material found at section III. E.1. of the National Standards. This is notable because a typical (and notorious) failing of adult American citizens is their inability to choose the proper level of government to solve problems. Telephone calls from citizens to congressional offices demanding action on street potholes or inadequate trash collection is an all-too-common occurrence.

The first lesson of Unit 3 of "Learning to Choose" closes in on the central activity of the NS/PME program, participation in mock elections, by introducing the concept of political parties, a subject dealt with among the forms of political participation in V.F.1 of National Standards. In this and the next lesson, forms of learning include skills found among the "participatory skills" section of the National Standards (p. 6.). Students watch news reports and consult encyclopedias, including CD-ROMs. In addition, they take a significant step in developing public speaking abilities, a key civic skill, by giving oral reports.

Subsequent lessons in Unit 3 (lessons 3-6) deal with creating and registering a political party, preparing for party nominating conventions, and participating in a convention, material relevant to section V. F. and H. of the National Standards dealing with political participation and the selection of leaders. Material in lesson 5 is notable for its careful enumeration of desirable qualities of leaders taken directly from the Standards, such as a commitment to the values and principles of constitutional democracy. The final three lessons of the Unit find students preparing for and holding candidate debates and participating in an actual election, activities correlated to V.F.1. of National Standards as well as to various of the participatory skills of p. 6 of the Standards' front matter.

The lessons of Unit 4, "Political Communication," are significant for their concentration on participatory skills, dealing with substance at the same time. In Lesson 1, letters are written to U.S. Senators. As background, considerable knowledge about both houses of Congress is covered, some of which is more rigorous than National Standards (III.A.1.-B.1.). A newspaper article is read and dissected, and legislative members are invited to class. In lesson 2, a mock press conference is held, followed by a lesson that prepares students for interviewing candidates, activities relevant to V.E.1. and participatory skills (pp. 5-6) of the Standards.

The next lessons (4-6) role-play and evaluate a mock press conference; followed by lessons (7-9) dealing with "call-in" programs, especially televised versions of call-in programming. All of this teaches how to participate in government (V.F.1.). but it also fosters a range of desirable civic dispositions (V.E.1.). Material dealing with freedom of speech and its limits, assurance of diversity of opinion, and other rules

of the road, as it were, for call-in programs is relevant to Standards on values and principles of American democracy (II.A.1.) and promoting the ideals of American democracy (V.F.1.). Emphasis on volunteering fosters this deeply important trait of American society (II.B.1.); while sending thank you letters to parents who volunteer to assist in the program reinforces both voluntarism and civility (V.E.1.)

The climactic unit of "Learning to Choose" is titled, as might be expected, "The Election." Lessons in this unit deal with consideration of a number of the electoral offices involved in biennial and quadrennial elections at national and state levels, including election of congressional representatives of both houses of Congress, governors, and the president. A commendable technique of "Learning to Choose" is illustrated in the first lesson, which reviews material of earlier lessons on the three jurisdictions of government as preparation to understanding the complexity of electoral races and choices in elections (III., B., C., D. in National Standards). Significant, too, is that even in these early grades, students are directed to the World Wide Web to gather relevant information (see, "participatory skills," pp. 5-6 of National Standards).

The lessons deal with various of the National Standards. Lesson 2 is particularly instructive in that it calls for a clearly unconstitutional measure to be passed and signed into law, but is struck down in the courts. This highlights a key idea of American constitutionalism, that of limited government (I.G.-H., II.B.1., and III.A.-B. of the Standards). Lesson 3 includes a number of participatory skills as well as content standards, such as III.A.1. Lesson 4, on the presidency, has students research the U.S. Constitution itself to learn the president's powers and, significantly, asks students to see how the president's powers are limited, and goes further by asking them *why* the Framers limited the president's powers (see National Standards, I.G.-H. and III.A.1.). The Unit is rounded out by lessons on organizing a mock presidential debate, getting out the vote, and, finally, the Mock Election itself. In this final lesson, students act-out some of the complexities of modern elections, such as arranging for voter registration, ballot distribution, poll and ballot box watching, and vote tabulation (National Standards F., G., H.; participatory skills, pp. 5-6).

In summary, the National Student/Parent Mock Election's "Learning to Choose" program for early grades incorporates numerous of the K-4 National Standards for Civics and Government. Its lessons relate to every section of the National Standards except foreign affairs. It is gratifying and commendable that the authors took such pains to incorporate so many of the Standards into lessons that might in other hands have drawn on only a few.

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