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Introduction

Reports from the Real World is composed of accounts from some 28 elementary, middle and high schools throughout the country describing how they implemented the National Student/Parent Mock Election. This introduction will examine the extent to which Mock Election activities fulfill what ought to be a principal benchmark for judging the value of any civic education program in American schools. That benchmark is the relationship of the program to the educational standards marked out in the virtually universally accepted publication *National Standards for Civics and Government* developed by the Center for Civic Education with the active participation of thousands of educators and parents from every state.

Before examining the relationship between Mock Election programs and the national standards, we might also notice how Mock Election programs simultaneously model ways in which practically every elementary and middle school subject — even the health component of physical education classes — can be made to serve as a forum for civic education. This is a pertinent point, since a central proposition of the *National Standards for Civics and Government* is that civic education should begin in kindergarten and be systematically pursued throughout the curriculum until high school graduation.

The descriptions of Mock Election activities found in *Reports from the Real World* fully illustrate how schools can use the full curriculum for civic education. Thus, Mock Election activities were pursued in English and Language Arts classes, where essays, poems, articles, letters and other forms explored a number of approaches to civic writing and civic speaking, and reading classes used appropriate written material. In one instance, even spelling classes were drawn into the program. At Mound Elementary School Language Arts students prepared speeches on candidates' positions on principal issues; and at Thornton Township High School in Illinois, English Department faculty critiqued student Mock Election essays.

In addition, science classes pursued politically relevant issues such as environmental issues, as at Pizitz Middle School; and math classes used statistics, charts and graphs to analyze the substance of certain political issues. Thus, at Hilsman Middle School a math lesson showed students how donations from special interest groups could affect the outcome of an election, and at Urban Middle School, math classes compiled and analyzed weekly straw polls, posting their findings on school bulletin boards.

Social studies classes served to provide basic information on government, elections, election campaigns; many classes researched and studied political issues, candidates and elections. At Surrey Elementary School, for example, students studied the differences and similarities between current elections and past elections.

Art classes created political posters, explored the possibilities of portfolios for civic purposes, and used creative mediums to illustrate patriotism and patriotic ideas. At Potlatch Elementary School, an art class produced posters, banners, and other forms of election advertisements and materials; at Lewis County Elementary School, students colored patriotic pictures.

Other subjects which found avenues to further Mock Election goals include music, in which patriotic songs and other patriotic music were sung and played. At the Piper Middle School, music students presented appropriate songs at an assembly. History brought the past to bear on the present at Lake Taylor High School, where the history of voting was studied. Voting in ancient Greece and Rome was compared with voting today. At Stewart Elementary School historical study entered the program when a series of presidents were chosen for study. Finally, in one instance, even the health component of physical education classes was brought to bear on the election process, as the demands made on candidates' health by rigorous campaigning were examined.

Beyond illustrating how the entire curriculum can be channeled to fulfill the recommendations of National Standards for Civics and Government, Mock Election projects and learning activities partly or completely fulfilled many of the individual national standards. This will be demonstrated by citing standards from 4th, 8th, and 12th grade levels, with individual schools as examples. To become better informed about the standards, readers are urged to consult the document itself. The standards are available from the publisher, the Center for Civic Education, at 800-350-4223.

Mock Election activities wholly or partly fulfilled several “fundamental values and principles” found in the second section of the National Standards (“II. What values and principles are basic to American Democracy? A. 1.”). These include patriotism, diversity, telling the truth, search for justice, pursuit of the common good, and individual rights. Of these, patriotism was most frequently featured in Mock Election programs. At Abraham Lincoln School, patriotic songs were sung. But others, such as individual rights, the common good, diversity and telling the truth also found their way into various programs.

Item II.B.2. of the 5-8 standards under “What are the distinctive characteristics of American society” is “the role of voluntarism in American life.” This key item is also found in the K-4 standards under II.B. 1. and II.B.2. of the 12th grade standards. Voluntarism in various forms is found throughout Mock Election programs: at McKinney High School, students performed some 460 hours of community service.

H. C. “Why is it important for Americans to share certain values, principles, and beliefs?” might be said to be an underlying theme of the whole election process, since it is a process that substitutes ballots for bullets and assists in promoting the social coherence of an often fractious society.

Relevant in this regard are such national standards as (K-4 formulation) “I.E. How should conflicts about diversity be prevented or managed?”; “evaluate ways conflicts about diversity can be prevented” such as: “working together on school and community problems and projects”; “adhering to the values and principles of American democracy”; “provide opportunities for people to present their points of view”; “listening to different points of view.” All of these were fulfilled to varying degrees by virtually all of the schools participating in the Mock Election. At Leontine Gracey School, homework assignments were used to draw parents into an expression of their views; at Crockett High School students met with public officials to discuss their views.

In “II.F.” of the K-4 Standards “How can people work together to promote the values and principles of American democracy?” an example of “I. Promoting ideals” is “volunteering for school and community service,” which several schools engaged in. Another part of fulfilling this standard is given as “participation in government,” for example, by “voting [and] becoming informed on public issues,” which all participating schools engaged in.

The third of the standards is “How does the government established by the [U.S.] Constitution embody the purposes, values and principles of American democracy?” Under it is -B. “What does the national government do,” to which the K-4 standards adds, “how does it protect individual rights and promote the common good?” Mock Election participants will have grasped a number of issues regarding this standard and heard arguments about how the national government could fulfill its obligations under the U.S. Constitution. This was a subject of mock presidential debates, including those at McKinney High School. A further standard in this section is “F. How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunity for participation?” Here the Mock Election is especially outstanding, providing activities and events relevant to nearly all of the national standards of this section. Thus, students are enveloped in the public agenda and how individuals help to set it (F. 1.); in a wide variety of forms of political communication (F.2.); in learning and participation in political parties, campaigns and elections (F.3.); in observing and in some cases participating in the political activities of associations and groups (F.4.); and in aspects of forming public policy (F.5).

Spring Hill Elementary School students became involved in tax, health care and education issues; 5th grade students at Leontine Gracey School acted out state presidential primaries, party conventions, campaigns, and elections, including debates and press conferences; and a number had visits from representatives of the League of Women Voters or studied the League's literature, as at Urban Middle School.

Especially relevant is the involvement of Mock Election students in forms of political communication. The 12th grade standards (III.E.3.) speak of "Political Communication: television, radio, the press, and political persuasion."

Reports from the Real World presents a wealth of evidence that Mock Election students become immersed in such political communication as they watch televised election events such as debates, press conferences, political advertising, and the like. Some made their own political advertisements or performed a live telecast with local television stations, as at Pearl C. Anderson Learning Center; while others, as at Surry Elementary School, played the parts of reporters and other members of the media at mock debates. At Leontine Gracey School, students made a special study of negative political advertisements.

Other standards direct attention to state and *local governments*. Although Mock Election activities were often focused on the national election, this was by no means exclusively so. Considerable attention was paid to local issues and sometimes to state issues. Thus, under D. 1., on the "Organization and major responsibilities of local governments," one standard asks students to "describe how local governments are chosen" and "how people can participate in local government?" Students at Surry Elementary school, for example, visited Town Hall to learn how local government operates; other schools undertook similar activities.

The Mock Election is often especially effective in fulfilling the national standards for local government, since the standards call, for example, for "being informed and — taking part in discussion of local issues" and "voting [and] volunteering services." The standards also ask that students be able to "explain why it is important that people participate in their local government," with which many Mock Election participants will have become intimately acquainted by visiting local government offices and listening to and interviewing local officials. At Piper Middle School, for example, students could hear the mayor of Kansas City speak on the democratic process and community service.

Further, the national standards (5-8) ask under 111. D., "Who represents you in local state, and national governments?" Here, many of the participating schools asked candidates to appear at school or other public forums and studied candidates and their positions on issues. At Blackstone Community Elementary School, for example, public officials were asked to speak to students; at Stewart Elementary School, students researched and studied the positions of local candidates.

Finally and in the view of many civic educators, most important, the Mock Election involves students in myriad forms of political participation, including nearly all the forms called for by the national standards in "V. What are the roles of the citizen in American democracy?" Section E., "How can citizens take part in civic life?" details many examples of civic participation that citizens can use to fulfill a principal role of monitoring and influencing public policy.

These forms of civic participation deserve special notice, since critics of civic education programs that focus on elections and voting often complain that civic participation should be conceived as a constant activity, not just at election time. In this regard, it is significant that Mock Election activities point beyond elections themselves as forms of civic participation to a variety of civic-participation activities.

Forms of civic participation other than voting itself for which Mock Election activities prepare American youth include attending public meetings; joining political parties; working in election campaigns, as at St. Francis High School, where students were required to work 5-10 hours in a “real world” election campaign, or at McKinney High School, where students were encouraged to work for a party that they or their family normally did not support (an approach also adopted at the Azalea Gardens Middle School); participating in public debates and discussions of public issues, including Mock Election debates, as at Surrey Elementary School; attending meetings of governing bodies; engaging in various forms of civic writing, such as composing essays, political speeches, articles, and letters to the editor — not simply letters to school newspaper editors, but to those of community newspapers and other media that stimulate community interest in the issues of the day, for example at the Scripps Ranch High School in California; involving others through personal contact, not just other students of pre-voting age, but adults as well, in public issues.

The multitude of varied Mock Election activities illustrate that the experience gained in this program centered on elections is “fungible” — that is, it is transferable to a host of civic activities that occur all the time, not during elections alone. Writing, speaking, researching, debating, interviewing, person-to-person persuasion and other endeavors involved in the Mock Election program can be applied throughout the life of adults in varying forums.

Mock Election programs also fulfill some of the national standards found in V.C. of the 12th grade standards, “What are the Responsibilities of Citizens?” Thus Mock Election activities deal with more of item “2. Civic responsibilities” than the responsibility to vote; they also take into account “being informed and attentive to public issues” and “registering to vote and voting knowledgeably on candidates and issues,” as illustrated by the wealth of research sources and techniques found throughout *Reports from the Real World*. For example, students consulted books, journals and magazines at libraries; interviewed a number of adults, including candidates and public officials; studied media presentations; and made copious use of the Internet for research purposes, as at Indian Hills Middle School, Kirbyville Middle School, and Crockett High School.

In sum, Mock Election programs may be said to have dealt — and dealt fruitfully — with a considerable number of the National Standards for Civics and Government and function as a valuable tool for preparing American youth for effective and responsible democratic citizenship.

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