

“Among the basic principles of learning are *motivation* and *reward*. Young people gain much greater interest and motivation in activities that get wide recognition. To see that their activities are recognized by the national news media is...exciting and stimulating.”

**Ralph W. Tyler, Former Director Emeritus,
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Behavioral Sciences**

Dear Educators/Parents/Student Leaders,

Twenty-eight years ago, on the night of the very first National Student/Parent Mock Election, I was sitting alone in our office in New York City. I had asked the President of the New York NBC station for the largest studio in “30 Rock,” 8H, for the Mock Election Night festivities of the New York City Mock Election.

Bob had listened good naturedly to my request during lunch, then took me to a window on the 54th floor looking out over New York City. “You see that city out there?” he said. “You will get parents to turn out in any other city - Chicago, Washington, D.C., - but not New York. You don’t need Studio 8H.”

I asked to have it anyway.

Now, on Mock Election Night, 1980, the phone was ringing in the eerily empty office. It was the chief of security at NBC.

“We have all those people we can’t fit into 8H milling around in the lobby,” he said, sounding less than happy. “What do you want us to do with them?”

NBC ended up sending them on the New York City subway to the New York City Board of Elections, escorted by NBC pages, to stage their Mock Election Night event. The crowd understood the motivation and reward TV could provide. It was such an involved and enthusiastic group that the boy, who was black, role-playing Ronald Reagan in the Mock Presidential debate felt called upon to stop the proceedings and say, “Hey, look at me. Do I look like Ronald Reagan?”

It is a different world now. A boy who was still in school then is running for President now in a very real campaign. So is a woman.

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And the television industry is helping the Mock Election involve educators and parents and student leaders. The National Association of Broadcasters Education Foundation and the PTA have partnered with us to provide the motivation and reward that can make all the difference in educating the future voters who will choose the leaders of the world's longest lasting democracy. In an era fraught with danger educators, parents and student leaders, the gatekeepers of democracy, will have Aladdin's lamp if they can learn to use it wisely. Below are some suggestions I hope will help. Please share your ideas and suggestions with us. Together, let us experiment on how to make learning so exciting that students and parents too will turn out en masse to learn together and there won't be enough room for all of them in the studio.

Check out the Tool Kit your local broadcasters are receiving at <http://www.nabef.org/mockelection> - then use the suggestions below to help you work hand-in-hand with your community's broadcasters and public officials.

Let us know how it works.

Sincerely,

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Some Suggestions For Working With Your Local Broadcasters and Public Officials

Decide on Your Educational Objectives

Involve students in the decision if you can. A Mock Election is, in many ways, an initiation into the rites of citizenship. Like a bar mitzvah, a quinceañera, a confirmation, it can mark a turning point in a young citizen's life. A young woman who cast her first vote at 18 in Washington, D.C., wrote to her former principal that she had

really cast her very first vote in the Bunker Hill Elementary School's Mock Election.

Researchers have discovered that those who participated in elections at an early age were far more likely to be involved as adults than those who did not. (Leo J. Shapiro and Associates)

The Mock Election can teach civic engagement. Properly used, it can also teach language arts, math, science, music, history, research skills, critical thinking skills, technological literacy, character education/ethics. It can vastly increase students understanding of the global world in which they live. See our rich curriculum at www.nationalmockelection.org/curriculum or choose whichever curriculum best meets your needs. Share your educational objectives with your local broadcasters and public officials. Ask them to help you achieve them – but remember the basic responsibility is yours.

Plan Your Project

Whether you are dealing with 5-year-olds or college students (all ages can participate in the National Student/Parent Mock Election), put your focus on *experiential education*. You are designing an experience you hope will be remembered for a lifetime. Below are some of our favorites through the years, but don't hesitate to invent new ones to share with others in the years to come:

A Family Feud - The schools in Alabama, who organized a "family feud" with student/parent teams from each school responding to questions about civics and government, had bus loads of students coming to cheer on the families from their own school.

A City Hall Vigil - The second grade class in Massachusetts that organized a candlelight vigil at City Hall and registered 36 new voters, telling all those passing who were over 18 that the second graders weren't old enough to vote but the adults could vote for them. Please do. The children then wrote a book of instructions on how to register new voters. "It is all right to sing and dance to attract attention," they said.

A White House Tea - The parents and students in Memphis, Tennessee who organized a "White House Tea" with parents dressed as past presidents and their wives. The past presidents and their spouses registered new voters at the "tea."

A Neighborhood Reunion – Again in Memphis, the parents who invited the doctors, lawyers, teachers and other professionals who had grown up in a poor neighborhood to come back and spend a weekend meeting with the students struggling to grow up there now. The end result: the students learned how to use the political process to get the neighborhood’s library and swimming pool reopened.

Ghosts of Democracy - The Mock Election kick off rally and tally in Arkansas at the Capitol, attended by then Governor Mike Huckabee, where a student dressed as Uncle Sam stood by Secretary of State Sharon Priest as she addressed the crowd on the importance of their vote. “Ghosts of Democracy”, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Susan B. Anthony, and Thomas Mundy Peterson, the first black to cast a vote after the passage of the 19th amendment in 1870, circulated amongst the crowd.

Pizza and Jazz Party - The Mock Election kick off rally on the steps of the Capitol in Columbus, Ohio where the Governor and his wife spoke with the students at a pizza and jazz party and hundreds of white balloons that said “Vote” were released over the city.

A Community Parade/A Get Out The Vote PSA - The students in Brighton, New York, who organized a “get out the vote” parade with a voting booth towed by a car, then worked with their local TV station to put together a PSA on “Why Vote” with the young writers starring. The tape was seen all over the country.

The First Vote Bus - The class in Norfolk, Virginia that culminated its Mock Election lessons when their teacher organized a school bus trip to each polling place for the students over 18 and as each group trooped in to vote they carried the American flag in with them. They gave each other high fives when they returned to the bus.

Mock Conventions - The students in Texas and Louisiana who organized mock conventions, calling out just as at a real convention, “The great parish of _____ home of _____ cast x votes for _____ and x votes for _____ .”

Patriotic Hat Contest - The patriotic hat contest at the Old State

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Capitol in Louisiana where prizes were given for the most innovative head gear and one girl wore a model of the White House on her head.

Presidential Minutes on Radio - The elementary school students in Texas who created a series of "Presidential minutes" for their local radio station and presented them on the air weekly, winning a \$5000 award for their school in the process.

A Random Telephone Poll - The same elementary school did a random telephone poll using the telephone book to create their sampling and as a result predicted the winner of a congressional seat while all the professional pundits said the children must be wrong.

Historic Mock Elections – In Mississippi Lincoln debates Douglass again, Jefferson and Adams square off. How would you have voted?

Mock Debates - All the schools across the country and around the world who organized mock debates in which "look alikes" represented the presidential candidates and their spouses. They debated the issues of most concern to Americans as they headed for the polls. Some organized debates between students and parents, students and public officials, students and candidates.

Patriotic Decorations – The colorful patriotic decorations from flags and bunting to actors in Uncle Sam costumes and red, white, and blue balloons that made the schools events "camera ready," instead of talking heads in front of a blackboard.

The Wonderful Skits - Students wrote and acted with great panache. How about Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson dropping in to visit the America of today?

State or Local "Election Headquarters" – The television stations that provided computers, a fax machine, a telephone bank to collect the votes on Mock Election Night, and encouraged Mock Election debates, panel discussions, quiz shows, candidate forums, and a host of other activities as the votes came in.

Inaugural Balls for Students and Parents – These ranged from formal ballroom dancing to an Indian pow wow. There was a

Cowboy Ball, a golf cart decorated with hunting and “secret servicemen” in dark glasses running alongside the newly elected President and First Lady. Each gave a brief address to the crowd. In Frankfort, Germany 1200 students and parents turned out. In Texas hundreds attended a banquet dinner before the Ball. The Inaugural Balls are a celebration of Democracy, not of victory.

Mock Election PSAs or Commercials – KGUN9, the ABC station in Tucson, hosted a luncheon meeting to invite Tucson businesses to sponsor a commercial inviting enrollments in the Mock Election. Their proposal is attached. Ask your local station manager about the possibilities of PSAs or commercials for your local Mock Election project. Can the students help with the creative process? The production?

Note that each of these activities provide great visuals for TV cameras to pick up. Students reciting memorized passages in front of a camera would have ended up on the cutting room floor. Of equal importance, each activity had a lesson plan that went with it, e.g., the Inaugural Ball followed a study of the powers of the president.

For further ideas, see “Guide to the National Student/Parent Mock Election” and “Reports from the Real World at <http://www.nationalmockelection.org/curriculum>

Create an ACTION PLAN

Who will be responsible for what? By when? Who will have overall responsibility?

Write to your local radio or TV station and ask for an appointment (see the sample letter attached)

Take a leadership group of students with you for the meeting. The trip itself is an important introduction to the real world.

IMPORTANT

Discuss your ideas with your local TV or radio station at the BEGINNING of your project. Form a partnership to make exciting things happen. Which resources can they offer to enhance your project? What cautions will they share? How does your need to provide a real education experience, not just an action picture, mesh with their needs to hold the interest of their

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viewers and increase their ratings? What adjustments might each of the partners need to make?

Discuss the etiquette rules for the visit with your students before your trip; proper attire, how to handle introductions, how to listen attentively, how to frame good questions. These will be useful career skills one day. Your students will be learning from every aspect of their Mock Election experience.

Talk with your station about inviting public officials to join you in the Mock Election experience. What makes the interaction between students, parents and a public official interesting? A meaningful educational experience?

Talk with the stations about how students can help publicize their Mock Election project, speak on public affairs programs, participate in panel discussions, create successful events for the entire community. How can you involve your local newspaper? Can they print ballots? Help you involve parents? Encourage viewers to tune in? (Contact both the newspaper-in-education coordinator and the education reporter. See the sample press release attached. Don't wait until October.)

Choose a still photographer to record each step.

Help your students document their experience

Have your students keep a diary, a journal or a scrapbook of their education in the world of communication.

Save students' work

Ask students to reflect on their experience

What did they learn? What could they have done differently? What would they like to try in the future? Has their interest in civic engagement changed as a result of their participation in the Mock Election?

Submit your class project for an award

Awards are given by several professional associations working with the National Student/Parent Mock Election. Outstanding Mock Election projects nominated at the school, school district and state level receive awards from the National Association of State Boards of Education, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Student Councils, and the League of Women

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Voters. (See awards at http://www.nationalmockelection.org/tools_awardapp.html) Note that all grade levels are encouraged to apply.

Attachments:

Sample letter for radio and television stations

Sample press release

KGUN9 sample sales brochure (powerpoint presentation)