

# Schools

## Election Day, November 6 -- At CJDS

The stage was set for the decision of who would be president of the United States. Both conventions wrapped up so the games began.

Although many adults still do not understand all of the issues for which both candidates claim to have answers, it's reasonable to ask how we expect our children to understand what is going on. This year our challenge was to create a learning environment that would build a new generation of informed voters. Many of these students still have seven to eight years before they are eligible to vote, so you may wonder why we think it is important for them to learn about elections and government. Often the adults' opinions on the government or politics are what the children see, hear, and repeat. Your political views become theirs. Because they love their parents and trust that they are making an informed decision based on beliefs, reasoning, and desire for the greater good, the opening question to our unit on elections and government was "Do you know what democracy means?" The answers that the fourth and fifth grade students gave at CJDS were right on. The responses ranged from "freedom to say and choose what you think is right" to "the freedom to choose your own path."

The students realized that in order to choose the "right" candidate, they need to be informed citizens/voters and learned about the many jobs of the president and how strenuous it can be. Through understanding what the president has to do, the students began to see what candidate would be right for the job. Students had to learn what the political views of the two major political parties were and the characteristics and strengths of the candidates. They understood that their voting decision should be made based on who fits best in that role.

A common misconception was that anyone can vote. This quickly led us to look into the evolution of voting laws and amendments. Many of the students did not know that you had to be eighteen and a United States citizen to cast a vote. Most of the students did not know that you can only vote

in the state that you live in. This raised many questions about soldiers who are fighting in other parts of the world. The questions they posed were "Do soldiers get to vote?" or "What if you are on vacation in another state?" Naturally, the conversation about absentee ballots and early voting ensued.

What does all that voting mean? Students thought that when you vote for President the vote goes directly to the candidate. Needless to say, the discussion of the Electoral College proved to be both challenging and rewarding. For this discussion, we asked a student to research and provide a visual for the class on how the Electoral College functions. Lengthy discussions and supplemental resources have assisted the students in gaining a better understanding of this process. This concept is difficult for many adults to understand so we were happy as educators that students grasped it so easily.

With the groundwork laid, we began to apply what we know to our own school student council elections. Candidates understood that they need to stand for something and revisit several characteristics that they feel most people want. One of the biggest claims of our school candidates was that they are "honest, reliable, and respectful." This topic spiraled into a class discussion on why so many candidates are trying to bad mouth the other. "To win votes!" one student says. This led to the question: "Is it okay to ask someone to vote for you?"

Our students quickly divided into two groups. Group one said it was not right to ask someone to vote for you because you could hurt someone's feelings. The majority of the students agreed with this. Only a handful of students defended their stance and said it was okay to ask for votes. After many back and forth discussions, slowly group two began to win votes and students were switching sides. A respectful debate was evolving. Many wavered several times. In the end, students were still divided on the answer to the question. So they asked their teachers what they thought. We jumped in and shared the types of

propaganda that candidates use to gain votes. We decided not to answer and to let them keep their belief intact, echoing the beginning of the unit that you have to vote for what and who you believe in.

The children also contributed to the election wishing tree with some of these comments:

"America should be kind to Israel's Jews."

"If you are sick and poor, you do not need to pay to go to the doctor or get food."

"How much longer till the elections is over?"

"More freedom to choose."

"Make taxes lower because my mother complains."

The primaries took place in the classrooms. Second thru fifth grade each nominated two students for class representative, fourth grade nominated two students for Vice President, and fifth grade nominated two students for President. Speeches were delivered on November 1 and the voting took place on November 6. The question/answer session rivaled televised any press conference. The answers were off the cuff, well-crafted, and on the ball. Promises ranged from more recess, hash browns back on the lunch menu, and snack shop in business again. Very important issues. The students created flyers, posters, and stickers to distribute. One of the campaign managers for vice president made a comment that it pays to give stickers to the Kindergarteners because they will do anything for a sticker. Wonder where she learned that!

On Election Day the school was decorated in true form. Red, white, and blue tablecloths

adorned the lunch tables and lunch was appropriately prepared with Constitutional Chicken Parmesan with Presidential Pasta, Swing State Salad Bar, and Star Spangled Sun Butter and Jelly Sandwich.

When filing to run, the students were asked to write the reason they wanted to involve themselves in this process. Some excerpts of their dreams:

"Three years ago I ran for class representative and promised a four square court and you got one. Now I want to bring in another recess activity called corn hole."

"I will work with the school's administration to make recess every day. I will promote new programs that are fun."

"Our class is small, but our spirit is big. I will continue to be a cheerleader for second grade and CJDS."

"I also am respectful and I listen to what other people have to say."

Creating and nurturing leaders is one of our goals. We are well on our way. ☆



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Photos [L to R]: Stacy Marx, the original Mitey Rider, with Harry Swimmer | Swimmer Insurance Today

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