



Curriculum Guide: Conducting a Student-Run Mock Election at Your School

Introduction: Envisioning what is possible

Every election year since 1990, Leland High School (LHS) in northern Michigan has hosted an increasingly significant mock election event. LHS's mock elections culminate in political rallies that draw significant attention. For the 2008 presidential election, LHS hosted nearly 1,000 students from districts across the state, attracting the statewide press corps, and candidates to local, state and federal offices, all vying to win the mock election in the run-up to the legal election. Ed Wodek, LHS government teacher and developer of this mock election curriculum, is Michigan's coordinator for the 2010 National Student/Parent Mock Election (NSPME).

Using a student-led committee structure has enabled Wodek to broaden the appeal of the event to young people with a wide range of learning styles, skills and dispositions. Wodek has one rule for each new class of mock electioneers: make this year bigger and better than the last.

With Wodek's approach as a model, teachers across the state can ignite an interest in local and national politics, civic engagement and standards-based learning, while coordinating a fun, memorable and potentially life-changing activity.

Using MGTV as a resource for your 2010 Mock Election event

This year, Michigan Government Television (MGTV) is partnering with Leland Schools and the NSPME to offer students, parents and teachers throughout Michigan an array of activities and resources to enhance any election-related classroom activities. (NOTE: Students must vote in the NSPME to participate in any of the following activities.)

Student Participation in MGTV Programming:

MGTV produces and airs live and live on-tape candidate interview shows in which students can participate by videoconference or telephone call-in. In some cases, a small contingent of students may visit MGTV's Lansing studio as a live audience. The 2010 MGTV Michigan Mock Election Project will encompass Michigan races for the US Congress, Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State and Supreme Court Justices.

Interviews will be posted at <http://www.mgtv.org/education/mock-election-project>. Here students/teachers can review and analyze the interviews to help determine the candidates for whom they will vote. Alternatively, MGTV can send DVDs of interview shows to teachers at no cost.

Voting machine demonstrations

In collaboration with local election officials, MGTV can facilitate voting machine demonstrations for your school.

Candidate information, resource links and relevant programming

Find a full listing of candidate links and other relevant information at MGTV.org/Education / 2010 Election.

Mock Election Curriculum

Educational Objectives:

A mock election is a vehicle that can support a number of educational objectives. During the activity, students will learn about:

Citizenship

- Voting process (ballots, right or privilege, etc.)
- Electioneering
- Volunteerism
- Community involvement
- Issue advocacy

Government

- U. S. Constitution
- Federal structure
- State structure
- Committee process

Current events

- Controversial topics
- Candidate positions

Other skills

- Interpersonal communications
- Critical thinking
- Evaluating sources
- Written and visual communication
- Collaborative work
- Working to deadlines
- Independent research

Standards:

Mock election experiences can satisfy a number of the National Standards for Civics and Government (a [full-text of the standards](#) is available at the Center for Civic Education's website), including:

1. What are Civic Life, Politics, and Government?

- a. What is civic life? What is politics? What is government? Why are government and politics necessary? What purposes should government serve?
- b. What are the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited government?
- c. What are the nature and purposes of constitutions?
- d. What are alternative ways of organizing constitutional governments?

2. What are the Foundations of the American Political System?

- a. What is the American idea of constitutional government?
- b. What are the distinctive characteristics of American society?
- c. What is American political culture?
- d. What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy?

3. How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy?

- a. How are power and responsibility distributed, shared, and limited in the government established by the United States Constitution?
- b. How is the national government organized and what does it do?
- c. How are state and local governments organized and what do they do?
- d. What is the place of law in the American constitutional system?
- e. How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunities for participation?

4. (Intentionally Omitted)

5. What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

- a. What is citizenship?
- b. What are the rights of citizens?
- c. What are the responsibilities of citizens?

- d. What civic dispositions or traits of private and public character are important to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy?
- e. How can citizens take part in civic life?

The Mock Election Process:

First week of school

Because the period between the start of the new school year and Election Day is typically about two months, it is important to get to work right away. On the first day of class, introduce the assignment: the class will plan, organize, publicize and staff a mock election rally at the school. Let the students know that it's not too different from planning a party.

Divide the class into Democrats and Republicans in some manner that will result in a roughly equal distribution. These two groups will act as the local party committees, assigning from their ranks certain students to take on key tasks, such as being the campus advocate for various office seekers. This stand-in becomes the classroom expert on that candidate position and qualifications for office. The advocate makes campaign speeches for the candidate to try to win vote in the mock election. The students do not take on the persona of the candidate; rather they are the surrogates for the candidate on campus, and act as the liaison person for the actual candidate when he or she visits the school on Mock Election Day.

Reserve a portion of the first day and several succeeding days for an overview of the election's vocabulary and processes, the difference between state and federal executive and legislative offices, as well as the candidates (local, state and national), proposals or other items that will appear on the ballot in November.

Tip for success:

This instructor should communicate the mock election plans to the whole school, all faculty, staff and students. Many colleagues will have thoughts on tie-ins with their own classes or activities and might work with you to make the event even better.

Ongoing Assessment: Class discussion

Asking open questions is an excellent way to determine how well students understand the political process, the candidates and issues.

Second week of school

Volunteerism assignment:

Each student is expected to volunteer a minimum amount of time doing grassroots campaign or issue advocacy work within the context of an actual campaign organization. This can take the shape of pounding the pavement on behalf of a candidate or ballot proposal, or other voter education activities like literature drops. Local party headquarters are an excellent resource for getting students involved. In Leland, party organizers have come to expect student participation in preparing mass mailings, making phone calls, and canvassing. As a consequence, the local parties are eager to get the students in front of candidates.

Students are assessed on the amount of time volunteered and must meet minimum standards to receive a passing grade. A time log is signed by a campaign representative to show the hours of effort.

Mock Election Committees:

The day-to-day work of putting on a successful mock election rally is the responsibility of the various student committees. Each student belongs to multiple committees and is expected to multitask. This list of committees used at Leland High School is intended to be suggestive, not exhaustive.

Ideally, the committee activities will vary a great deal, offering students who claim no interest in civics to do something on behalf of the event that will capture their attention and keep them exposed to and involved in the ongoing instruction. In addition to the partisan committees, LHS includes:

Commercial Committee: Charged with writing and filming a 30-second and a 60-second advertisement for each major candidate. Example: [Leland Mock Election Commercial 1](#) (Available on YouTube.com).

Slide Show Committee: Creates an exciting, patriotic music-driven, multi-media presentation to play during the run up to the speeches on Mock Election Day. This might include photographs taken over the course of the previous weeks, documenting the various activities. Of course, the candidates should be identified and spots run. This presentation should include the commercials and other spots developed by the commercial committee on behalf of the various candidates.

Website Committee: Establishes a web presence for the event.

Program Committee: Creates the program for the event, as well as the thank-you follow up letters to major participants, sponsors or supporters.

Decoration Committee: Obtains or makes patriotic decorations for the event and transforms the gym and school hallways with bunting, student created campaign signs and posters.

Construction Committee: Undertakes the design and construction of balloon arches, flags, USA signs, etc., for the Decoration Committee.

Ballot Committee: Responsible for the design of the ballots, whether paper or online. This committee also tabulates the vote and reports the number to the NSPME.

Hospitality Committee: Acts as media liaisons, writes press release, welcomes the candidates or their representatives. LHS prepares a hospitality room, with a breakfast of fruits, pastries and other refreshments, and live music for the candidates and teachers from other schools. Candidates use this area as a green room prior to their speeches.

Ongoing Assessment: Participation and deadlines

To keep students on task, the classroom instructor's job is to verify or set deadlines and monitor progress of the various committees.

Instructor's Role Prior to Rally Day

The instructor plays a vital role in making sure the mock election rally happens as planned. This includes communication with relevant people in the building or district to ensure the auditorium, gymnasium or other suitable area is available for the day.

In order to secure their cooperation—and perhaps outright support in the form of budget dollars or materials—it is essential that the administration (at an appropriate level) be on board. There are a number of benefits to hosting a mock election, not the least of which is deepening the school-community tie by opening the building to media, candidates and other participants.

Tip for success:

Make a formal invitation to all candidates. Follow up by phone to explain the educational purpose and secure their attendance. Candidates will typically attend events where media coverage is expected, especially if the competitor will be there as well.

Mock Election Rally

On Mock Election Day, the coordinator opens the event by with a welcome address and goes over the ground rules, (i.e., length of speeches, no negative campaigning, etc.) and then gives control over to the students.

Each student advocate makes a 5-minute election speech to the assembly, after which they introduce the candidate or designee. Example: [Student representative introduces State](#)

[Representative](#) Candidate, Dan Scrips (Available on YouTube.com). Student timekeepers ensure speeches run on time, using green, yellow and red cards.

After speeches, the student advocates escort candidates to different classrooms, so each of the voting students has an opportunity to circulate and ask the candidates questions directly. (Note: To maintain a conflict-free interaction, parents and community members are not encouraged to participate in this process.)

Voting takes place in the schools media center, where study carrels are used for privacy. Students are brought in class-by-class. Ballot committee students hand out one ballot to each participant, receive the completed ballots, and then count the votes at the end of the process. The final votes are reported out to the National Student Parent Mock Election and to the community.

Assessment

There are a number of ways an instructor might assess student performance, including committee report -outs to the class, capstone essays, and more.

Wodek uses a 130 point system, based on 3 main elements:

Volunteer time: 30 possible

2 hours 10

4 hours 20

6 hours 30

Participation 40 possible

Final Project 60 possible

Expansion options:

A mock election is an excellent opportunity to collaborate across disciplines. For example,

- English classes might write editorial or correspondence
- Math classes might tabulate votes or provide a statistical analysis
- Art classes might create logos or other forms of visual communications