

We recently received this unusual note from a parent:

“This email is to report that my daughter is going to be absent today. The reason for her absence belongs strictly to Mr. (Dan) Jacobs, her teacher in government class. I felt like this needed to be reported.

“Mr. Jacobs has done such a wonderful job teaching my daughter. I've never seen her so excited and passionate about something. Mr. Jacobs has really got her into our American government and how important it is to our future and especially hers.

“The reason my daughter is missing school today is because she wanted to go to the Sarah Palin rally in West Chester. There was no way I could possibly tell her that she couldn't miss school for that reason.”

We use the election as a teaching tool, in age-appropriate ways, throughout the district. Even some of our elementary grades are taking part in a nationwide voting project. But our high school government teachers say they have never seen so much interest from the students. Every student, not just a handful, is part of the passionate classroom discussions.

In these government classes, students examine candidates' positions, review campaign material, and find out what their own political leanings are. They watch and review the debates, and tackle intriguing questions: What makes a good president? What would George Washington think? They learn about historic political conventions and elections. They tie together different periods in our country's history, analyzing whether this election will produce a sea change in the way that Andrew Jackson's did, more than 150 years ago. They study race as a factor in an election, and how events like a \$700 billion bailout bill becomes a campaign issue. Students look at polls and work to understand their limitations and why they're different. They examine the party platforms. And, of course, they study the Electoral College, the thinking behind it, and how it determines who wins the election.

The government teachers at the high school are Kim Young, Adam Reed, Ben Zoeller and Jacobs. Kim says Smartboards, the large electronic display screens in some of our classrooms, make a huge difference. With her computer's Internet connection, she can instantly show images that have changed the course of elections: Michael Dukakis in an Army tank, the Howard Dean scream, and others.

“It makes everything so visual, and these kids are visual learners,” she says. “Instead of just telling them about something that happened, you can find video of it in seconds and put it on the screen. It comes alive for them and leads them into discussing it, passionately. And everybody is participating.”

Students are registering to vote and 187 have signed up to be poll workers. The walls outside the government classrooms are covered with candidates' pictures and biographies and other information about the election. Even students from other classes stop to look at

them.

The teachers have their own feelings about the election, of course. But they work hard to keep them private. One teacher includes this fill-in-the-blank question on a quiz: "I am a registered"

The only correct answer: "...voter."

Please remember to vote on Election Day.

Paul Waller is the principal of Fairfield Senior High School.

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