

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE, A COLUMN DEDICATED TO RECOGNIZING SUCCESSFUL "BRIDGES" BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS, REPORTS ON RESEARCH WITH PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

## POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AFTER THE ELECTION: WHAT'S NEXT?

Millions of youth were mobilized in the 2008 election cycle. Youth voter participation increased by at least 3.4 million young people compared to 2004. Moreover, youth were a constituency that was targeted by numerous campaigns, and many young people actively worked to elect the candidate of their choice.

### HOWEVER, A RESULTING QUESTION THAT HAS BEEN ASKED BY THE MEDIA, PUNDITS AND OTHERS IS: WHAT WILL YOUTH DO AFTER NOVEMBER 4<sup>TH</sup>?

However, a resulting question that has been asked by the media, pundits and others is: what will youth do AFTER November 4<sup>th</sup>? To answer this question, it's important to recognize the fact that there are many groups and organizations, in schools and otherwise, whose youth programs operate year-round, and are focused on youth contributing to their communities in various ways, including but not limited to electoral participation. For many organizations, the election has fit into a broader plan for engaging young people.

As a result, even before the election, numerous organizations and schools were thinking about what to do after November 4<sup>th</sup>. In fact, there are so many examples that we could not possibly share them all here. But we have identified two that we would like to highlight. The first example showcases the efforts of Mobilize.org to provide financial resources directly to young people so they can implement their own ideas to impact policy. The second example features a day-long conference for teachers called "Teaching Election 2008." This conference was designed to enhance teachers' understanding of major election issues and provided teacher training.

### MOBILIZE.ORG IS PROVIDING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR MEMBERS OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION TO LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER AND BUILD FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THEIR OWN IDEAS.

**EXAMPLE #1 Mobilize.org:** Mobilize.org is providing the opportunity for members of the Millennial generation to learn from one another and build financial support for their own ideas. On January 9-11, 2009 Mobilize.org hosted a "Constitutional Convention: Building Democracy 2.0" in Philadelphia. The "grant summit" format of this event is something that Mobilize has been using to put resources directly in the hands of young people who have ideas and are ready to act. The event led participant teams through a series of sessions where ideas are discussed, written-up, "pitched" and assessed by others at the event. In the end, a handful of ideas will received up to \$10,000 in support from Mobilize.org.

"Throughout the election we've been looking at November 5<sup>th</sup>," says Ian Storrar, Chief Operating Officer of Mobilize.org. The rationale for this format, Storrar says, is that they "want this to be an institutionalized model for discussing big ideas [and] coming to some kind of consensus around things that we can do." "Constitutional Convention: Building Democracy 2.0" had many partners, including: the National Constitution Center, Change.org, Why Tuesday, Generation We and Declare Yourself.

For more information on "Constitutional Convention: Building Democracy 2.0" please visit <http://www.mobilize.org/>.

### TEACHERS ALSO LEVERAGED THE 2008 ELECTION SEASON FOR STUDENT LEARNING THAT COULD SET THE STAGE FOR STUDENT DISCUSSION AND INVOLVEMENT AFTER THE ELECTION.

**EXAMPLE #2 Teaching Election 2008:** Teachers also leveraged the 2008 election season for student learning that could set the stage for student discussion and involvement after the election. Diana Hess and Joey Anderson were ready to take advantage of this opportunity, as the organizers behind "Teaching Election 2008," which occurred on September 20, 2008. Associate Professor and Associate Preceptor, respectively, at the University of Wisconsin's School of Education, Hess and Anderson report that the event gathered over two hundred people, the majority of whom represented teachers of varying k-12 grades.

The event was organized as a daylong series of practical work-

shops for teachers around specific topic areas or teaching skills. For example, there were workshops that were geared at helping teachers before November 4<sup>th</sup> (Example: “Comparing the Candidates: Key Policy Positions of McCain and Obama”) and other workshops were helpful beyond the election (Examples: “The U.S. Role in a Changing World: Engaging Students in Foreign Policy” and “What Causes Young People to Become Politically and Civically Engaged”).

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Many of the workshops provided the opportunity for teachers to learn and talk about tools for ongoing civic education, particularly for discussions of important public issues. These workshops included: “Preparing Students for Civic Deliberation on Difficult Public Issues,” “Student Voices & Annenberg Classroom: Tools for Lasting Civics Education,” and “Kids Voting USA – A Community Commitment to Democracy.” Each participant at the event was given a resource guide filled with listings of electronic teaching resources that provided information on where to find curriculum and lesson plans, as well as ideas for where to go for fact-checking federal and state issues.

Teaching Election 2008 is proving to have an effect on teacher practice and on the community at large. According to Hess, “I know many of the teachers (and student teachers) who developed units using the materials that were showcased at the conference. We were especially pleased to get feedback from elementary school teachers about how the conference motivated them to teach about the elections. There was lots of media attention—[TV] and newspaper...so I think another way the conference had an impact was to let the public know about what was happening in the schools with respect to election teaching—and also to encourage parents to build on what was happening in classrooms.”

For more information on Teaching Election 2008 please contact Dr. Diana Hess at [dhess@wisc.edu](mailto:dhess@wisc.edu).