



Kids Voting 2008: The Results

In November 2008, 102 schools and over 13,000 students took part in Kids Voting for the Parliamentary Elections. 21 city and district councils actively supported the initiative. Kids Voting was an opportunity for the voters and leaders of the future to understand the voting process. Feedback suggests that Kids Voting was successful in meeting its aim: *To raise awareness amongst young people about New Zealand's electoral processes and increase their personal understanding, belief and confidence in the system.*

How did Kids Voting work?

All schools with Year 9 students were invited to participate in Kids Voting from April 2008. Individual teachers registered their school online and were provided with resource materials and encouraged to prepare their students with lessons and activities.

In late October each registered school was provided template voting documents similar to those issued to adult electors in the same area. Classes conducted an election in the week prior to the adult vote on Saturday 8th November 2008. Classes counted their results the following week, and these were collated nationally. Students, teachers, and council staff also participated in evaluation of the project.

What were the results of Kids Voting 2008?

At the close of registrations in September 2008, 152 schools, 917 classes and 24,675 students had registered to take part. Approximately half (13,079) of these students completed their vote and returned their results. This return rate was similar to 2007. Anecdotal evidence suggests many schools used the resources provided by the programme but did not formally participate in voting. Teacher feedback indicates that those who did not formally participate faced time and competing curriculum pressures.

The results were collated by electorate to identify the successful MP and party votes were aggregated nationally to work out the seats won by each party. A week after schools had returned their results, and following the announcement of the official election results, teachers were sent the nationwide Kids Voting results. These can be viewed at <http://www.kidsvoting.org.nz/evaluation/>.

What was the impact of Kids Voting?

Kids Voting 2008 was comprehensively evaluated and the results show that the programme was a success. Kids Voting resulted in increased student understanding of elections and increased discussions with family members about elections. The overwhelming majority of teachers who took part also felt that the project met its purpose.

Impact on students

Students were asked to complete an evaluation form before and after their election to gauge if their attitudes, understanding and/or behaviour changed as a result of taking part in Kids Voting.

Both forms asked students to respond to the following questions on a 4 point scale:

1. Is politics interesting?
2. Are elections easy to understand?
3. Do you think voting can make a difference?
4. Have you talked to your family about the elections?
5. When you turn 18 and are eligible to vote, will you?

The average score increased across all five areas indicating an increase in student awareness and behaviour. The highest shifts occurred in relation to “Are elections easy to understand?” and “Have you talked to your family about the elections?”. In these respects, Kids Voting met its objectives of demystifying the voting process and promoting broader discussions about the election.

The leading factors influencing a successful outcome for students were:

1. Time spent in class preparing for the election (more time spent lead to greater shifts in student awareness and behaviour)
2. The teacher (or council liaison person) supplementing the teaching topics in the Teachers Resource Kit with hands-on, practical activities that encouraged learning and engaged students in the topic.

Impact on teachers

The teachers’ evaluations of Kids Voting 2008 showed that over 90% felt the project met its purpose. Other feedback from teachers was also very encouraging:

- 83% said that the programme supported their ability to teach social studies;
- 87% reported that their class had enjoyed taking part in Kids Voting; and
- 90% reported that their school would participate in Kids Voting in the future.

One of the main areas for improvement in the future is in the amount of time teachers spend preparing their students for the exercise; students with the biggest positive shifts in attitudes had teachers that spent more time preparing them for voting.

Impact on collaboration between schools and councils

Councils have an important role to support Kids Voting in their local schools. Results showed that having the right person(s) within council supporting the process is the key to a successful partnership. This could be someone “hands on” who can work alongside schools, or someone with particular subject knowledge and expertise to support the process. There were some examples of very positive collaboration in Kids Voting 2008 which resulted in interesting and colourful publicity in local media.

Council involvement in 2008 decreased from that in 2007 (local government elections). This is understandable given the particular relevance of local government elections to councils. There are opportunities to support and encourage council involvement each year to provide consistent support and commitment to the programme.

The future of Kids Voting

Feedback from teachers highlighted several areas for future improvement that will be taken into account in 2009. For example, teachers would like see computer based evaluation forms for both students and teachers in order to reduce the cost to schools. Work has already been undertaken to fulfil this suggestion.

To ensure Kids Voting can be experienced by all Year 9 students, the intention is to run the programme every year. It is planned to operate on a three year rotation with students voting alongside the local government elections (Year 1) and Parliamentary election (Year 2) , and an alternative voting experience for the gap years between these two (Year 3).

For more information, or to register for Kids Voting 2009, visit www.kidsvoting.org.nz or email info@kidsvoting.org.nz