



Kids Voting 2007: The Results

In October 2007, 83 schools and over 8,000 students took part in Kids Voting for the local elections. 43 city and district councils actively supported the initiative. Held nationally for the first time, 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.*

What is Kids Voting?

Kids Voting is part of the "Growing Active Citizens project", co-ordinated by *Local Government New Zealand* with support from a range of central and local government partners. The project aims to increase active participation in decision-making locally, regionally and nationally by developing a range of resources to support citizenship education for young people in schools.

Kids Voting was developed in the United States and has been run successfully in Auckland City since 2001 for both local and central government elections. Kids Voting was offered nationally for the first time in 2007 in conjunction with the local elections. It is designed to fit with the Social Sciences curriculum for Year 9.

How did Kids Voting work?

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 close of the adult vote on Saturday 13 October 2007. 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 2007?

By the close of registrations in October 2007, 17,000 students in 115 schools were enrolled to take part. Approximately half (8,000 students) completed the vote and returned their results. 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.

Comparisons of the results with the actual elections results are available at <http://www.kidsvoting.org.nz/evaluation/>.

Nationally the most obvious difference was turnout, with students appearing much keener to have their voices heard. In some areas the student vote mirrored adult voting patterns. In general there was variation between the candidates young people selected and those that were elected.

What was the impact of Kids Voting?

Kids Voting 2007 was comprehensively evaluated and the results show that the programme was a success and made significant achievements in its first year. Kids Voting resulted in increased student understanding of elections and belief that voting makes a difference. The majority of teachers and council staff who took part felt the project met its purpose.

Impact on students

Students were asked a series of questions before and after Kids Voting took place about the services provided by local government and whether:

- politics is interesting
- elections are easy to understand
- voting makes a difference
- they intended to vote at 18
- they had spoken with family about the elections.

Over 5,500 student evaluation forms were returned. Over two-thirds of the participating classes showed increased scores in relation to “elections are easy to understand” and “voting makes a difference”. In these respects, Kids Voting met its objectives of demystifying the voting process and raising awareness that voting can make a difference. Discussions with family about the local elections also increased after the vote.

Kids Voting was less successful in improving students’ views of politics as interesting and their intention to vote when 18. Overall, Kids Voting had little impact on students understanding of the role and services of local government.

These results suggest that providing students with the opportunity and means to participate alone does not necessarily lead to an improved perception of elections as interesting, an intention to vote, or an increased understanding about the role of council. This highlights the need in the future for more education on local government and elections to accompany the programme.

The schools with the most positive impact on students shared three common factors:

1. Students had a good level of awareness of the candidates and what they stood for;
2. Students were encouraged to debate and discuss the issues arising to help determine whom they should vote for; and
3. A strict procedure was adopted for the actual election to ensure the experience was as realistic as possible.

Impact on teachers

Teacher feedback indicates that Kids Voting was successful in terms of:

- meeting its aim (93%)
- supporting teaching (86%)
- class enjoyment (80%)
- intention to participate in Kids Voting for the 2008 Parliamentary Elections (82% yes, rest undecided, no-one said no)
- increasing class knowledge significantly or absolutely (64%)

Over a third of the 133 teachers that returned evaluation forms reported that their own knowledge had increased significantly as a result of Kids Voting, indicating that their level of knowledge of local government was limited at the start of the programme.

Impact on collaboration between schools and councils

Many councils found that Kids Voting helped build relationships with teachers and schools in their area, opening up the potential to work more closely in future. Some very positive examples of collaboration between schools and councils were developed. In particular, council staff who familiarised themselves with the curriculum, organised face-to-face meetings with staff, and suggested ways to help complement students' learning, helped create incentives for teachers to participate. They also highlight the important role that council liaison can have in supporting Kids Voting.

Lessons for the future

Feedback from participants highlighted a number of areas for future improvement. For example, teachers would like to receive more resources in an easily accessible document, and earlier, in order to start planning lessons ahead of time.

Kids Voting 2008

Kids Voting will be run again in 2008, in conjunction with the Parliamentary elections. The lessons from Kids Voting 2007 will be used to help deliver an even better programme for 2008. For more information, or to register for Kids Voting 2008, visit: www.kidsvoting.org.nz

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