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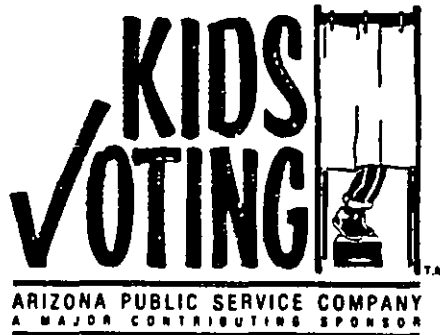
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# **KIDS VOTING: Could It Make A Difference**

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by Bruce D. Merrill

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and Director of the Media Research  
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*Presented at*

**The National Social Science  
Association Convention  
Reno, Nevada  
April 6-8, 1989**

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# **THE KIDS VOTING PROGRAM IN ARIZONA**

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Patterned after a similar program in Costa Rica, where turnout rates of over 90 percent are the rule, the Kids Voting program in Arizona is based on two specific beliefs or goals. The first is that increasing the awareness and interest of young people in the electoral process will eventually result in adults who are more interested in politics and, therefore, more likely to vote. It is also believed that a short-term benefit would accrue from the program in that discussions in the families would increase electoral turnout in the 1988 election, i.e., that some parents who otherwise might not vote would do so either because they were stimulated to do so by their children or because they wanted to be positive role models for them.

Specifically, the program allowed children in grades three through 12 residing in 65 Arizona precincts located largely in the cities of Tempe, Mesa, Chandler and Gilbert to accompany their parents to the polls on election day and to cast a mock ballot. The program was coordinated with local school districts and included a registration process and classroom instruction directed toward explaining the electoral process and discussion of relevant issues and personal candidacies.

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The institutional approach explains much of the decline in turnout as a function of "changing the rules" by which the percentage of the eligible electoral voting is calculated. The 14th, 15th and 16th Amendments to the Constitution enfranchised blacks after the Civil War even as Reconstruction kept them from voting. The 19th and 26th Amendments, which allowed women and people under 21 years of age to vote, more than doubled the size of the electorate. Young adults under 21 still vote in very low proportions, and women, until recently, turned out in lower percentages than men (Conway, 1985).

Tighter registration procedures depressed turnout in the Progressive era by changing the responsibility for registering and voting from a collective responsibility associated with the state and political parties to the initiative of the individual (Teixiera, 1987). Other progressive reforms such as primaries, the use of the Australian ballot, non-partisan elections, and use of the recall and referenda also have caused declines in voter turnout (Rusk, 1974).

Recent empirical investigations have also documented the role of sociostructural and sociopolitical variables in explaining declining turnout rates. In fact, one interesting paradox associated with the lack of turnout at the polls during the 1970s and 1980s is that education, family income, and a decline in manual occupations, all variables associated with elevating voter turnout, increased significantly during this period (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982). The paradox is at least partially explained in these studies by pointing out that while education, income, and the number of people doing manual work has operated to increase turnout, other sociostructural variables such as an increasing number of young people entering the electorate, increased residential mobility, and the increase in the number of single-member families have tended to reduce turnout.

The conclusion seems to be that sociostructural variables such as a decline in the strength of partisanship, lower levels of political efficacy, and a drop-off in the degree to which people follow campaign activities, at least in the newspapers, accounts for about two-thirds of the decline in voter turnout in the last three decades (Teixiera, 1987).

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Whether to determine matters of public policy or to allow individuals to become self-actualized by participating in meaningful societal rites, the success or failure of the "American experiment" rests on citizens exercising their franchise on election day. Because of its importance, few phenomena have been as thoroughly researched in American political science as voter turnout.

Turnout in America has followed a tumultuous path. In the first five Presidential elections, it is estimated that the turnout among the *eligible electorate* was between 4 percent and 6 percent (Teixeira, 1987, Burnham, 1982). Turnout stayed low until stimulated by increasingly strong political party activity associated with the rise of Jacksonian Democracy in the late 1820s. In 1828 turnout was 57 percent of the eligible electorate; by 1840 it had soared to over 80 percent (Teixeira, 1987).

Turnout stayed high, in the 60 percent to 70 percent range, until the end of the century. With the exception of a slight upturn in the election of 1960, turnout in American Presidential elections has been declining steadily since the election of 1896. Turnout in 1988 continued the decline with the number of voters who went to the polls slipping 3 percent from 1984 to 57.3 percent, the lowest turnout since the 50 percent effort in 1924.

Arizona, which has a history of low turnout thought to be due mainly to the rapid growth the state has experienced since World War II, ranked 46th in the nation with a turnout on election day in 1984 of 54 percent.

Speculation and controversy regarding why voter turnout has been declining has been a major theme in political and social science journals during the past few years and appears to be loosely centered in two competing approaches, one following Walter Dean Burnham and referred to as the "alienation" theory (Burnham, 1970). The other approach explains the decline in voter turnout as a function of various legal and sociopolitical changes that have occurred in the American electorate beginning with the progressive movement at about the turn of the century (Rusk, 1970).

The alienation approach implies that "the captains of industry" stole the Presidential election of 1896 and triggered reactions whereby the electorate became increasingly alienated from the process by which leaders and policy preferences are chosen in America. Much of the approach is predicated on the belief that the decline is a result of a democratic system in a state of disarray (Burnham, 1970).

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# RESULTS

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The short-term impact of the Kids Voting program is clearly demonstrated in Table One where we see that turnout in the precincts where Kids Voting occurred was higher than in all comparative jurisdictions by an average of 2.7 percent with a range from 2.3 percent to 3.3 percent.

Even assuming an average increase of 2.7 percent, Kids Voting was responsible for bringing an additional 1,300 registered voters to the polls in the 65 precincts included in the program in 1988. If the program had been countywide, an additional 18,800 people would have gone to the polls; statewide, more than 32,513 voters would have been added to the voting polls.

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**TABLE ONE**

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*Voting Turnout for Kids Voting Precincts  
Compared With Other Geopolitical Jurisdictions*

<b>Area</b>	<b>1988 Turnout</b>	<b>Comparison</b>
Kids Voting precincts	70.3%	0.0%
Statewide	67.0%	— 3.3%
Maricopa County	68.0%	— 2.3%
Congressional District 1	67.9%	— 2.4%
East Valley without KV precincts	67.5%	— 2.8%
<i>AVERAGE</i>		— 2.7%

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The questionnaires also give some insights into the value of the program. Unfortunately, one of the major problems encountered in administering the project was coordination with the school districts which participated. One of the major concerns was in determining what specific information the Privacy Act allowed them to solicit from their students. As a consequence, demographic information about the students, including grade level, was not collected. The only information, other than their overall evaluations, that was collected was the school district they attended (Mesa, Tempe, Gilbert and Chandler). Analyses by school district showed considerable variation, indicating that the degree of cooperation with school district administrators is a key variable in the success or failure of the program.

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# **EVALUATING THE KIDS VOTING PROGRAM**

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It may never be possible to evaluate the long-term goal of the program, which is to turn out citizens who vote in higher percentages because they went through the program than peers who did not participate. To do so would require the ability to follow a group of participants and a control group through time. Considering the number of families moving into or out of Arizona, the management and cost of such a methodology would be prohibitive. In addition, the literature in the field of political socialization would not cause us to be optimistic about any long-term effects. Most of the research in this area indicates that few political attitudes or behavior patterns, other than party identification, are transmitted from parents to their children (Jennings and Neimi, 1968).

Since this was the first year of the project, no longitudinal measurements are possible, and one would expect differing effects on children in the primary grades compared to juniors or seniors in high school who have had considerable course work in the democratic process. It should be pointed out, however, that one of the intriguing prospects for the program is the possible long-term impact on young people who are now in the third grade and could conceivably be in the program for eight or nine years.

The short-term impact of the Kids Voting program was tested two ways. First, it was possible to compare the turnout in the 65 experimental precincts with turnout in other geopolitical jurisdictions such as the Congressional District and other precincts where the Kids Voting program was not instituted.

Second, questionnaires were administered to all parents and students after they voted to gauge their attitude toward the program, resulting in approximately 3,100 student and 1,500 parent interviews.

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**TABLE 2**

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*Student Evaluation of Kids Voting*

1. I am more knowledgeable about the election process as a result of the Kids Voting curriculum.

Agree strongly	27%	32%
Agree	42%	50%
Disagree	10%	12%
Disagree strongly	4%	5%
No answer	17%	0%

2. Because of Kids Voting, I was more interested in discussing political issues with family and friends.

Agree strongly	23%	30%
Agree	32%	41%
Disagree	15%	19%
Disagree strongly	9%	11%
No answer	20%	0%

3. I believe the Kids Voting project will help me become a lifetime voter.

Agree strongly	28%	37%
Agree	32%	41%
Disagree	11%	14%
Disagree strongly	6%	8%
No answer	22%	0%

4. I enjoyed participating in the Kids Voting project.

Agree strongly	30%	43%
Agree	28%	41%
Disagree	5%	8%
Disagree strongly	6%	8%
No answer	30%	0%

5. The Kids Voting project should be expanded statewide.

Agree strongly	50%	59%
Agree	28%	32%
Disagree	4%	5%
Disagree strongly	4%	5%
No answer	13%	0%

*NOTE: Percentages in second column are minus the no answers.*

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**TABLE 3**

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*Parental Evaluations of Kids Voting*

1. My child is more knowledgeable about the election process as a result of the Kids Voting curriculum.

Agree strongly	37%	41%
Agree	47%	52%
Disagree	5%	5%
Disagree strongly	2%	2%
No answer	9%	0%

2. The Kids Voting project stimulated political discussions at home.

Agree strongly	30%	33%
Agree	48%	53%
Disagree	9%	10%
Disagree strongly	3%	3%
No answer	9%	0%

3. The Kids Voting program will encourage my child to become a lifetime voter.

Agree strongly	39%	44%
Agree	40%	46%
Disagree	6%	7%
Disagree strongly	2%	3%
No answer	13%	0%

4. The Kids Voting program should be continued and expanded statewide.

Agree strongly	55%	61%
Agree	30%	34%
Disagree	3%	3%
Disagree strongly	2%	2%
No answer	9%	0%

5. I probably would not have voted had my child not participated in Kids Voting.

Agree strongly	2%	3%
Agree	4%	5%
Disagree	20%	26%
Disagree strongly	51%	66%
No answer	23%	0%

*NOTE: Percentages in second column are minus the no answers.*

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Perhaps most importantly, 84 percent of the students who participated in the program enjoyed their experience and 91 percent felt the project should be expanded statewide. Eighty-two percent said they became more interested in discussing political issues, 84 percent increased their knowledge about the political process, and 78 percent said Kids Voting would help them become lifetime voters.

The evaluations of the parents tended to be more favorable toward the Kids Voting program than those of their children. Ninety-three percent of the parents felt their children had become more knowledgeable, 86 percent indicated an increase in political discussions occurred at home, 90 percent felt the program would help their kids become lifetime voters, and 95 percent supported expanding the program statewide.

One additional question the parents were asked also helps us evaluate the efficacy of the Kids Voting program. Six percent of the adults agreed strongly or agreed that they probably would not have voted if it had not been for the program. Analysis of the election returns showed the program turned out an average of 2.7 percent more voters than in areas where the project was not implemented. Actual reports by the parents suggest the impact of the program could have been as high as 6 percent.

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# **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

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The primary purpose of this research was to evaluate an experimental program used during the 1988 general elections in Maricopa County, Arizona, which was designed to primarily increase the probability of young people voting when they enter the electorate as adults. While longitudinal analysis will be needed to determine whether or not students who participated in the Kids Voting program will vote in higher proportions than their peers who were not involved, the attitudes of both the young people who participated and their parents indicate that the program was seen as having the potential to produce better informed and more involved citizens.

When asked how they felt about the program, 91 percent of the students who participated said they would like to see the program extended statewide, 82 percent said they were more knowledgeable about the political process, and 78 percent said the program would help them become lifetime voters.

Ninety-five percent of the parents agreed the program should be statewide. Ninety-three percent said their children were more informed about politics, 90 percent felt there was a good chance their children would become lifetime voters, and 88 percent said the program increased political discussions at home.

It was also determined that turnout was about 3 percent higher in the precincts where Kids Voting occurred. Had the program been statewide, over 30,000 additional voters would have gone to the polls.

Another indirect consequence of the program is that, even in this limited experiment, over 550 individuals volunteered literally hundreds of hours to this program. If implemented statewide, it is estimated that between 6,000 and 8,000 volunteers would be involved. A statewide program would also generate more media attention, which could increase the saliency of the election and cause some marginal voters to go to the polls on election day.

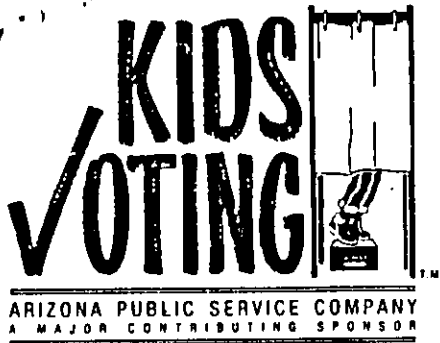
At a time when voter turnout is declining, it has been demonstrated that the turnout in a specific election in Arizona was increased at least 3 percent by the Kids Voting program. The prospects of involving thousands of volunteers and dramatically focusing media attention on a unique attempt to increase turnout can only have a positive effect on the political system.

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# KIDS VOTING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Over the past few years, low voter turnout has ranked among the most negative post-election stories throughout America. In 1990, an Arizona group called KIDS VOTING hopes to reverse this trend by implementing a voter education and involvement program that involves citizens of all ages — from kindergartners through senior citizens.

## **What is KIDS VOTING?**

Based in Arizona, Kids Voting is a non-partisan, non-profit group which has designed a program to make lifelong voters of today's school children, while also increasing current voter turnout among adults. Although the program, also called KIDS VOTING, is available only in Arizona for the 1990 elections, Kids Voting hopes to expand nationally by 1992.

## **How does KIDS VOTING work?**

KIDS VOTING will prepare students in grades kindergarten through 12 for the 1990 general election by providing schools with a special curriculum on voting and the democratic process. Having been taught the curriculum in September and October 1990, Arizona students will be able to accompany their parents to the polls and cast mock ballots on Nov. 6.

## **How will KIDS VOTING impact adults?**

The KIDS VOTING curriculum — including homework assignments which encourage students to debate the relative merits of candidates and issues with their families — is designed to stimulate conversation about voting and the election between children and adults. As an added incentive for adults to become involved in the election, KIDS VOTING asks that at least one parent be registered to vote in order for a child to participate in the election, and that an adult accompany younger children to the polls.

## **What makes KIDS VOTING different from other mock elections?**

While mock student elections are nothing new, KIDS VOTING goes beyond just giving kids a chance to cast a ballot. KIDS VOTING requires that all students — like their parents — take time to register to vote if they want to participate in the general election. Student voters also cast their ballots at the same time and location as adults, thus giving a real-life view of the voting process. Finally, because KIDS VOTING is curriculum-based, students are taught to become more informed and responsible voters.

-more-

**How many students will be involved in KIDS VOTING in 1990?**

The 1990 KIDS VOTING program will involve approximately 600,000 students from 192 Arizona school districts. Schools from every county within Arizona will participate, with special KIDS VOTING voting booths set up at most of Arizona's approximately 2,000 voter precincts.

**What are the voting requirements for students?**

To qualify to vote, students must attend school in one of the 192 districts involved in the program and have parental permission to participate in the program. Where possible, at least one parent must be registered and accompany children in grades K through 8 to the polls.

**Will KIDS VOTING ballots resemble adult ballots?**

Yes. KIDS VOTING ballots for high school students will be very similar to adult ballots. Tailored to the legislative district of each high school, they'll allow students to vote for all state issues, executive offices, congressional representatives and state representatives and senators. Students will also vote on two student issues. Younger children will have a simplified ballot which includes only major races and uses graphics for easier understanding.

**Are students' votes tabulated?**

Although results of the KIDS VOTING election have no impact on actual election results, they will have a great deal of impact on students. Results of the KIDS VOTING election will be computer-tabulated on election night, at the same time the official adult votes are counted. In addition to having the KIDS VOTING results entered as a part of the public record, KIDS VOTING hopes to receive side-by-side media coverage with the official election.

**Who administers the KIDS VOTING program?**

KIDS VOTING is led by a state board of directors and 15 county boards. Although there are some paid staff members (including a manager for each county in Arizona and a core administrative staff), KIDS VOTING is staffed primarily by volunteers. KIDS VOTING hopes to recruit an additional 13,000 volunteers to serve as deputy registrars before the adult registration deadline, assist students at KIDS VOTING booths on election day and help plan and chaperone election night parties.

**How is the program funded?**

KIDS VOTING's primary sponsor for 1990 is Arizona Public Service Co., which has donated in-kind services such as printing and recruited volunteers. Other companies and individuals have also provided grants. Charter sponsors for the non-profit program were Tribune Newspapers, Valley National Bank and the East Valley Partnership.

**When did KIDS VOTING actually begin?**

Although 1990 is the first year KIDS VOTING has been offered throughout Arizona, KIDS VOTING actually began in Arizona's 1988 general election. In that year, KIDS VOTING conducted a pilot program in 40 schools with approximately 30,000 student participants. A total of 65 voter precincts in four Phoenix-area cities were covered by the pilot. Plans for the statewide program began almost immediately after the 1988 elections.

**What were the results of the pilot?**

In evaluations conducted after the 1988 pilot, 8 percent of parents surveyed said they would not have voted had it not been for their child's participation in KIDS VOTING. In the same survey, 91 percent of students and 95 percent of parents recommended that the program be expanded statewide. 86 percent of parents also said they discussed politics at home because of the KIDS VOTING program. These findings are based on a survey conducted by Bruce Merrill, Ph.D., director of Media Research at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Telecommunications.

**Was voter turnout positively impacted?**

Merrill's research revealed a 3 percent increase in voter turnout in participating precincts and between 1,300 and 1,500 new registered voters as a result of KIDS VOTING. Considering that the 1988 program was "a first-time program with limited resources", Merrill estimated that the statewide turnout in 1990 could be increased by as much as 5 percent.

**Where did the idea for KIDS VOTING originate?**

KIDS VOTING is modeled after a program in Costa Rica, a country which has involved children in the voting process for nearly 40 years and which has an 80 percent to 90 percent voter turnout in most elections. The country is considered to have a very strong and stable democracy.

**What, if any, hurdles needed to be overcome in introducing the program?**

Before allowing children into polling places, KIDS VOTING needed to have special legislation approved by the Arizona state legislature. This legislation, passed in 1988, cleared the way for children to be allowed into polling places.

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**DECEMBER 1990**

# KIDS VOTING News

ARIZONA PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY  
A MAJOR CONTRIBUTING SPONSOR

## ***Kids Voting has a great turnout!***

Thanks to you and students across Arizona, Kids Voting was a big success!

More than 131,000 students voted, most students accompanied to the polls by their parents, making Kids Voting a tremendous success. Even more importantly, nearly 700,000 students discussed aspects of voting with their teachers in the classroom.

There were a few problems at the polls and a few students had to wait for volunteers to show up so they could vote. But the good news is so many kids turned out to vote.

The number of kids voting showed that Arizona students are interested in politics and interested in their state. We know that you will become good citizens because you demonstrated that you care about Arizona.

Arizona also was featured on a lot of national television shows because this is the first time Kids Voting has been held statewide.

In fact you may have seen one of your friends waving on television.

But even if you didn't get on television, you played a

very important part in making Kids Voting a big success and you showed grown-ups across Arizona the importance of voting.

In fact Kids Voting was so successful due to your support that it will be done again in the 1992 election. The Kids Voting staff members are dedicating themselves to making the program even better for you, your parents, and your teachers.

When you look at the results of the Kids Voting, it shows that kids have their own minds and opinions. In fact they voted Terry Goddard into the Governor's office with 53% of the vote and also overwhelmingly approved a paid state holiday for Martin Luther King, unlike the adult voters.

Students also told adults to get tough on the drop-out problem and voted 8,339 to 7,650 to take away the driver license of teens who didn't attend school.

In other Kids Voting results:

✓ Democrat C. Diane Bishop defeated Republican Robert Miller for the office of super-

intendent of public instruction 66 percent to 34 percent.

✓ Democrat Richard Mahoney defeated Republican Ray Rottas in the race for secretary of state, 57 percent to 43 percent.

✓ Republican Grant Woods won narrowly, 51 percent to 49 percent, over Democrat Georgia Staton for the office of attorney general.

✓ Rep. Morris K. Udall, D-Ariz., and Rep. Jim Kolbe, R-Ariz., were returned to office.

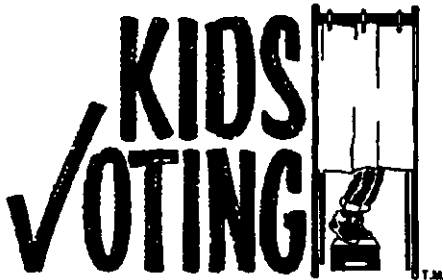
✓ Proposition 202, creating a waste reduction and recycling plan, was approved, 67 percent to 33 percent.

✓ Proposition 104, enacting a victims' bill of rights, was approved, 64 percent to 36 percent.

✓ Proposition 200, providing state funding for parks and wildlife projects, was approved, 67 percent to 33 percent.

For complete election results, please see back page.





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## Kids Voting Election Results

Here are the final Kids Voting results.

### GOVERNOR

Terry Goddard (D) 68945 53%  
Fife Symington (R) 62291 47%

### SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Robert Miller (R) 41980 34%  
C. Diane Bishop (D) 82274 66%

### PROPOSITION 202

Yes 61770 68%  
No 39363 32%

### SECRETARY OF STATE

Richard Mahoney (D) 32519 58%  
Ray Rottas (R) 23833 42%

### DISTRICT 1

No candidate (D) 4166 25%  
John Rhodes (R) 12735 75%

### DISTRICT 2

Joseph Sweeney (R) 7443 47%  
Morris Udall (D) 8447 53%

### DISTRICT 3

Roger Hartstone (D) 10636 41%  
Bob Stump 15237 59%

### DISTRICT 4

Jon Kyl (R) 15791 65%  
Mark Ivey 8543 35%

### DISTRICT 5

Chuck Phillips (D) 8104 38%  
Jim Kolbe (R) 13435 62%

### PROPOSITION 104

Yes 53222 63%  
No 31110 37%

### PROPOSITION 200

Yes 56361 69%  
No 25848 31%

### PROPOSITION 302

Yes 60169 73%  
No 22261 27%

### ATTORNEY GENERAL

Georgia Staton (D) 11963 49%  
Grant Woods (R) 12567 51%

### STATE TREASURER

Tony West (R) 14325 61%  
George Stragalas (D) 9265 39%

### MINE INSPECTOR

No Candidate (D) 4834 23%  
Douglas Martin (R) 15809 77%

### CORPORATION COMMISSIONER

Joe Castillo (R) 10299 44%  
Marcia Weeks (D) 13360 56%

### SUPREME COURT JUDGE BE KEPT IN OFFICE

Frank X. Gordon, Jr. -yes 8801 n/a  
Stanley G. Feldman -yes 9592 n/a  
James Moeller -yes 9002 n/a

### PROPOSITION 100

Yes 9056 41%  
No 13112 59%

### PROPOSITION 101

Yes 7482 34%  
No 14487 51%

### PROPOSITION 102

Yes 14023 60%  
No 9505 40%

### PROPOSITION 103

Yes 14224 63%  
No 8426 37%

### PROPOSITION 105

Yes 6335 29%  
No 1580 471%

### PROPOSITION 201

Yes 8726 39%  
No 13673 61%

### PROPOSITION 203

Yes 6381 29%  
No 15562 71%

### PROPOSITION 300

Yes 5955 28%  
No 15367 72%

### PROPOSITION 301

Yes 10676 44%  
No 13378 56%

### NO ATTENDANCE, NO DRIVE

Yes 11989 52%  
No 11041 48%

### HIGH SCHOOL ISSUE

Yes 8426 65%  
No 4615 35%

## History and Background of KIDS VOTING, INC.

IDEA: Build a renewed interest in political participation among all citizens by getting the whole family involved in political discussions and balloting on election day. Get school-age children involved at an early age in the political process through classroom instruction and by encouraging parents to take their kids along to the polls on election day.

### GOALS:

1. Teach school-age children the real meaning of democracy and its corresponding responsibilities
2. Stimulate political awareness among school-age children and their parents
3. Increase voter turnout among adult voters
4. Increase the likelihood that today's school-age children will vote when they become adults

### STRATEGIES:

1. Increase political education program in the various school systems
2. Set up a voting mechanism for school-age children outside the classroom

## BACKGROUND

Kids Voting was a new program in the Metropolitan Phoenix cities of Mesa, Tempe, Chandler and Gilbert, Arizona designed to boost voter participation among adults and instill life-long voting habits in school-age children. The program featured specially-designed curricula, tailored for grades 3-12, and culminated with children accompanying their parents to the polls on Election Day to cast their own ballots in a simulated election.

## STRUCTURE

### Policy:

Kids Voting is a non-partisan, non-profit program which is funded by grants and supported by the work of volunteers.

### Program Founding Sponsors:

The East Valley Partnership  
Tribune Newspapers  
Valley National Bank

### Program Founding Contributor:

Scantron

### Key Personnel of Pilot Program:

Program Coordinator - Donna Green, volunteer  
Program Administrator - Carolyn Parrish, salaried  
Curriculum Coordinator - Jinx Patterson, volunteer  
Public Relations Committee -  
Steve Roman of Valley National Bank  
Kevan Kaighn of Valley National Bank  
Heather Cronrath of Tribune Newspapers  
Carol Jennings of Joanie Flatt and Associates  
Barry Reichenbaugh, A.S.U. graduate student  
More than 550 volunteers

## BRIEF HISTORY

Kids Voting is modeled after a program in Costa Rica, a country which has involved children in the voting process for nearly 40 years.

The program encourages parents to take their children with them to the polls, where the kids cast mock ballots of their own. School homework assignments prompt students to participate in pre-election discussions and debate the relative merits of candidates and issues with their families.

Involving children in the voting process may even have some effect on voter apathy -- Costa Rica frequently achieves an adult voter turnout of better than 90 percent of the eligible population.

Kids Voting co-founders Bob Evans, Max Jennings and Chuck Wahlheim heard about the program during a fishing trip to Costa Rica. They brought the idea to the East Valley and quickly gained sponsorship from the East Valley Partnership and Tribune Newspapers.

The organizers solicited a \$20,000 grant from Valley National Bank, a grant of in-kind services from Tribune Newspapers for media support and a grant from Scantron for preparing and tabulating special Kids Voting ballots.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Forty schools in Mesa, Tempe, Chandler and Gilbert participated in the Kids Voting pilot program. Approximately 30,000 school-age children in grades 3-12 were exposed to the Kids Voting curricula over the six weeks leading to Election Day.

The students learned about the democratic process and what it means to be informed voters via the classroom curriculum. The classroom education combined with parent, teacher and media information and excitement were all designed to impress upon the children the importance of voting.

Students were then eligible to vote in a simulated election along with their parents on Election Day provided their parents lived within the project boundary and were registered voters. The concept of the children and parents going to the polls together was essential for meeting the program goals.

Organizers felt it was necessary to limit the pilot project to 65 precincts to keep the experiment manageable. The pilot project needed to cover an area small enough to ensure adequate private funding, volunteer support and program success.

## METHODOLOGY

Kids Voting was established as a pilot project for the rest of Arizona and the nation to emulate. Resources were not available to conduct longitudinal studies of voting trends and patterns. A comparison was made, however, of voter turnout in the precincts contiguous with those in the project.

A total of 6,755 children cast ballots on November 8, 1988. The adult voter turnout was 70 percent of registered voters for the Kids Voting precincts, 68 percent for Maricopa County and 67 percent for the state. Voter turnout was down from the 1984 general election when the project precincts turned out 74 percent of registered voters and the county and the state had a 72 percent turnout of registered voters.

## CONCLUSIONS

Kids Voting cannot take credit for the higher voter turnout in the pilot project precincts since it was not a controlled experiment, but it certainly can take pride in the high level of awareness the project helped generate among parents and students regarding the 1988 general election. The curriculum and resource materials were effective and well-received by parents, students, teachers and school administrators.

Parents reported to Kids Voting both formally, through evaluation forms sent home, and informally to teachers and project organizers. The general feeling of parents was that they liked the program and wanted it to continue. Student and teacher evaluations and personal comments were overwhelmingly positive.

More than 550 volunteers who helped the student voters at the polls also reported parent and student enthusiasm and support for the program. The volunteers enjoyed their shifts at the polls and said afterward they are eager for the program to expand.

Additionally, the program administrator took more than 200 calls during the three-week period following the distribution of information/registration packets from disappointed parents and students who live outside the project area. Further evidence of the high level of interest was shown when many "non-eligible" students showed up at the polls and were allowed to vote on Election Day.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A program of this nature takes time to show quantifiable results. Adult voter turnout has been steadily decreasing in Arizona and throughout the nation for decades. In a fairly short time, this pilot project raised the level of awareness and education regarding the importance of voting. Awareness and education are the first step toward making people of all ages active and informed voters today...and tomorrow. Kids Voting should spread to communities and states throughout the nation in the coming years.

It is important to realize that the Kids Voting program is very new. Because this is a new concept, it can and will be improved. Methods which worked in metropolitan Arizona will likely have to be revised for rural communities.

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