



# CHALLENGE



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A Herff Jones IMPACT Resource for Students

## Election Campaigns

School election time can be a stressful time for student leaders. It's a risky thing for a student to put him- or herself forward and risk losing. One of the challenges for those involved in running elections is structuring the process to encourage participation by all those interested in holding office. Establishing clear-cut guidelines for election campaigning can help create an equitable race and take some of the stress out of running for office. When developing election guidelines, consider the following:

■ **Candidate meeting:** Be sure the election process is clearly explained to all interested students. A candidate information meeting is a good method for ensuring that all candidates receive the same information. Hold the meeting during the school day so no students with after-school obligations are left out. Create handouts that explain the qualifications for candidates and rules for campaigning, distribute the election timeline, and give out any other necessary information.

■ **Length of campaign:** The campaign period before an

election should be long enough to give candidates an opportunity to effectively publicize their objectives, but not so long that the election loses focus. One or two weeks is usually sufficient.

■ **Campaign expenses:** To help ensure fairness to all candidates, set a dollar limit on campaign expenditures and



create a campaign spending form that must be turned in at least two days before election day. Or, make organization supplies available at designated times before or after school to all candidates for creating posters, fliers, buttons, and other campaign materials. Another option would be to prepackage basic art supplies—markers, tape, glue, glitter, and poster board—for each

candidate and distribute them at the candidate's meeting.

■ **Campaign materials:** Establish rules about what types of campaign materials can be used. Consider such things as:

- How many and what size posters can a candidate hang?
- Can materials be professionally printed or created with graphics software, or must they be made by hand?
- Are fliers or handbills acceptable?
- Are stickers and buttons acceptable?
- Where can posters be hung? Are there any off-limits areas (e.g., newly painted walls, windows, etc.) or restrictions on what kind of tape can be used?
- Are freebies such as candy and gum allowed if they are attached to campaign materials (e.g., “Stick with Anthony for Prez” with a piece of bubble gum attached to the paper)?
- Do campaign materials have to be pre-approved before distribution?

■ **Electronic campaigning:** Traditional posters, handouts,

stickers, and fliers are still popular in school elections, but advances in technology are making themselves felt in the way students campaign for office. Will candidates in your election be allowed to use electronic tools for campaigning such as Web sites, e-mails, IMs, text messages, and social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook? Consider equity issues when deciding this issue—will all candidates have access to these tools? If not, they should be limited, or find a way to make them accessible to everyone.

■ **Campaign speeches:** An important part of an all-school election procedure is an opportunity for candidates to present themselves in person and deliver a speech to voters. Some schools have adopted a lunchtime speech format, which presents special challenges for the speakers who must compete with meals and friends for the attention of the voters. A candidates' forum held before or after school is another alternative, but candidates will not reach all voters in this format. If your school has a closed circuit television system, speeches could be pre-recorded and televised to classrooms as part of the morning announcements during the week preceding the election.

The method most frequently used is grade level assemblies

where candidates for that grade's offices speak to their peers. Candidates for all-school offices travel from assembly to assembly to present their speeches. Candidates for each office can be introduced by the previous officer or by a faculty moderator. A time limit should be established for each speech, as well as guidelines for appropriate content that include consequences for violating the guidelines. Some schools have the speeches previewed by a faculty member or the adviser. This gives the teacher an

opportunity to help the student develop an effective speech and heads off possible problems with content. A moderator during the class meeting should time the speeches to make sure that no candidate uses more than the allotted time.

Establishing equitable election policies and consistently enforcing them will help open the field to all candidates who are interested in running for office and will help ensure that at the end of election day, all parties involved will be satisfied that the process was fair.

## Meet the Candidates

For various reasons—not wanting to take time out of class and inappropriate audience behavior to name two—many schools no longer conduct election assemblies. If your school has moved away from having election assemblies, consider one of the following alternatives:

- Create a page on the school's Web site that features all candidates. Include a photo of each candidate along with a statement by each of them about why they are running, what they hope to accomplish if elected, and what qualifications they bring to the office. If a Web page is not available, create a bulletin board display in a prominent place with the photos and the biography information on each candidate, or publish a voter's guide with the information and distribute it to all students.
- Videotape each of the candidates giving a short speech and answering questions by an impartial panel of students, perhaps from the journalism class. Encourage homeroom teachers or social studies teachers to show the video to their classes.
- Devise a plan where one candidate per day gives a quick speech in the morning announcements or on the video announcements. Draw numbers to determine the order, and don't have any speeches on the day of the election.
- Create an informative video of the candidates and the issues and play it in the cafeteria during lunch periods.
- Develop a sign-up sheet with a schedule for teachers to register for candidates to visit their classrooms to give their speech and answer questions.