Candidate Forums

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Our service-learning project informed Harford County voters, especially younger voters, about the 2002 election's local candidates. To accomplish this goal, the students created a website to hold two candidates' forums, one for local candidates and one for federal and state candidates.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? We wanted to educate the voters, both young and older. During the 1998 state election, there was no readily available information in our area about all the candidates running for federal, state, and local offices. Voters need accurate information in order to make their decisions, and to motivate them to vote. Our project helped all the registered and potential voters in Harford County, and all the students in Harford County Public School.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? The service-learning project tied very intentionally and closely to the core learning goals in ninth grade government and eleventh grade US History classes.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? Students evaluated the project before we decided to do it. They made adjustments and corrections to the project as it took form. Most importantly, at the conclusion of the project, students assessed their effectiveness and made suggestions for the next website and candidate's night for 2006.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? Students were involved during the entire process. They took responsibility for writing the questions for the questionnaire used to create the website and wrote questions and helped to write the script for the candidate's nights. On the evenings of the candidates' nights, students acted as hosts and hostesses, questioners, timers, and as the master of ceremonies.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? Students worked with local and state government leaders, and potential leaders. Through this process, many students developed a rapport with the candidates elected to public office. They certainly will feel more comfortable contacting these office holders in the future as a result of the work that they did on this project.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? Work on this project actually began with the completion of our last candidate's night in October of 1998. At that time, students suggested that we increase the number of candidate's nights and that we change to a website rather than printed flyers. Question making began in earnest in the spring of 2002 with the graduating seniors of 2002.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? All students improved their questioning skills and writings skills, and some improved their public speaking skills. Students learned about the powers and duties of the various state and local officials who were running for office. Most importantly, students learned that anyone can participate in politics and that everyone should vote.