



Southeast Pennsylvania

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TESTIMONY TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE OF THE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES REGARDING HB 520

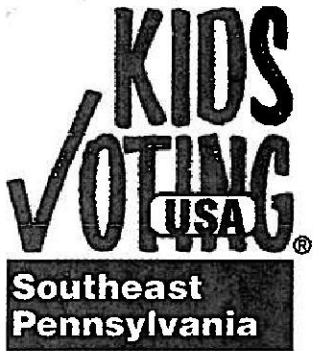
March 14, 2008, Constitution Center, Philadelphia

My name is Richard Coe. I am the executive director of Kids Voting Southeast Pennsylvania. I recently retired after 39 years as a public school educator. Prior to my retirement in June I was executive director of the Bucks County Schools Intermediate Unit #22.

Kids Voting Southeast Pennsylvania is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that gets students involved and ready to be educated, engaged citizens. Students from kindergarten through high school learn about democracy through a combination of classroom activities, an authentic voting experience and family dialogue. Students also explore the right to vote, the political process, and active citizenship. The culminating activity and highlight of Kids Voting in our region is the opportunity for young people to accompany their parent to an actual official polling location and cast their own ballot for the same candidates that appear on the adult slate on an authentic ballot form. The results are scanned, tabulated, and published the following day in the Intelligencer and Bucks County Courier Times, daily newspapers in our region.

Kids Voting Southeast Pennsylvania is an affiliate of Kids Voting USA and includes Bucks and Montgomery Counties. We are one of 52 affiliates in 29 states nationwide. There are two affiliates in Pennsylvania: Kids Voting Southeast Pennsylvania and Kids Voting Chester County. Kids Voting USA touches 4.3 million students in 10,600 schools across the country. Kids Voting reaches across all boundaries - geographic, ethnic, cultural, and demographic - to encourage everyone to participate in the political process. In the 2004 presidential election year 1.5 million students cast a ballot at an official polling location or with an online voting system. Over 39,000 students voted in Kids Voting Bucks/Montgomery elections.

The idea of Kids Voting began in 1988 when three Arizona businessmen traveled to Costa Rica on a fishing trip. During their visit they learned that the country's voter turnout was typically around 90 percent. The high turnout was attributed to a tradition of children accompanying their parents to the polls. The men were intrigued by the idea, but also recognized a missing link to education. They launched a school-based project in a Phoenix suburb that has since grown into the national Kids Voting USA network.



Kids Voting now has its headquarters in Silver Springs, Maryland. The program is delivered to communities across the country through a network of state and local affiliates. These community-based, independent organizations bring together committed individuals including school administrators and teachers, election officials, business leaders, parents, the media, and community volunteers. Volunteers at every level and in every aspect of the program are the life blood of Kids Voting.

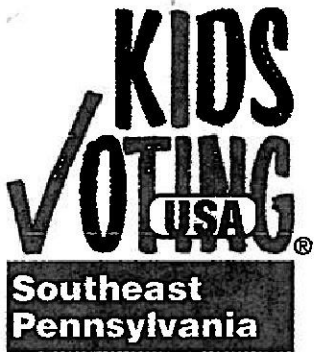
Kids Voting Southeast Pennsylvania is managed by a volunteer board that includes newspaper publishers, county election officials, an attorney, a member of the League of Women Voters, business leaders, the CEO of the United Way of Bucks County, school administrators, and teachers. I am the sole part time employee.

Similar to the national organization Kids Voting Southeast Pennsylvania had modest beginnings. In 2000 it started as a pilot program in the Central Bucks School District. Its early success led to neighboring school districts adopting the program in succeeding years. By the year 2006 Kids Voting had expanded to six school districts. It is our goal in 2008 to expand Kids Voting to all 13 school districts in Bucks County and three school districts in Eastern Montgomery County. It has been our experience that once a school district and community adopt Kids Voting it continues in following years.

The challenge in establishing a Kids Voting presence in a community is finding an enthusiastic volunteer who is able to effectively network with school staff, parents, and volunteers. Kids Voting USA provides technical assistance and curricular materials to support the program. The funding for Kids Voting comes from contributions from local businesses and community organizations. We accept no funding from political parties or candidates for political office.

The positive results of Kids Voting emerge in several ways. Research conducted by the University of Colorado and the University of Kansas has confirmed the impact of the Kids Voting program on voting patterns and civic participation. As students learn about the political process and participate in real-life voting experiences, they gain the skills and confidence to be active citizens as adults. Kids Voting encourages students to become involved in the democratic process and especially to realize the importance of voting when they turn 18 years old. In communities with a Kids Voting program, the voting rate for registered 18-year olds is 14 percentage points higher than that of their non-participating peers, according to a study in Kansas.

Parents are re-energized in the political process as their kids urge them to talk about issues and to be involved. For parents, having a student in the Kids Voting program not only increases the likelihood they will vote, it also increases their competence as voters as well. Many communities with Kids Voting affiliates see adult turnout increase by 3 percent to 5 percent.



The Kids Voting program promotes political involvement for students from all socioeconomic levels, but the program is especially effective for students from low-income households. These students, many of whom are not regularly exposed to current events, become actively and enthusiastically engaged in political discussions and civic learning.

Kids Voting facilitates the civic bonding of school and family through the “boomerang effect.” Students initiate political discussions at home, which influences parents to pay more attention to politics and then parents, in turn, encourage their children to participate more in civic learning at school.

By participating in Kids Voting students learn the process and mechanics of voting; however, the learning experiences go much deeper. The Civics Alive curriculum is the heart of the Kids Voting program. It is a comprehensive series of K-12 civics education classroom activities that teach students about the concepts of citizenship, civic responsibility, democracy, and the importance of political participation. The classroom activities make learning about politics and voting relevant and fun for students, and are designed to supplement other social studies curriculum currently in use. The curriculum supports and is consistent with Pennsylvania social studies standards. Classroom activities model democratic processes through cooperative learning structures, group problem solving, and active student-centered experiences. Activities are designed for use across all grade levels. Typical activities for younger students include role-playing, craft activities, and classroom elections. Older students may be involved in constructing policy options or holding formal debates.

The experience of Kids Voting locally and nationally has implications for your deliberations about House Bill 520. We currently establish age criteria for rights and privileges such as voting, driving a car, drinking alcohol, obtaining a marriage license, etc. As we know, people young and old, make good and bad choices about matters of vital importance to their lives. Through Kids Voting we have learned that young people can make informed and reasoned decisions when they are given the learning experiences and opportunities to practice skills that are critical to the issue facing them. Most parents and educators dedicate their lives to prepare young people for increased responsibility and independence. As students grow older they certainly are more likely to think and act responsibly and independently and make choices that do not simply mimic the opinions of parents and teachers. Voters are influenced by personal values, family voting patterns, friends, economic considerations, the personality of candidates, campaign material, and the media when they enter the voting booth. Regardless of the age when a person casts their first ballot, these same sources of influence will be present. It is the vision of Kids Voting that one day all citizens will be educated, engaged voters.

FAST FACTS

Kids Voting of Southeast Pennsylvania is **NON-PARTISAN**

Kids Voting of Southeast Pennsylvania is part of the Kids Voting USA network of 57 affiliates



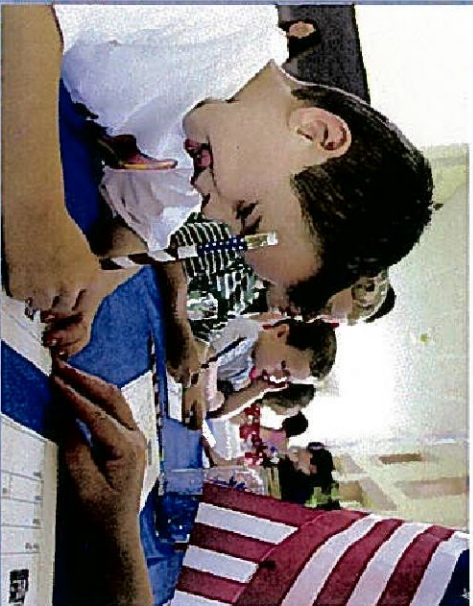
Nationally, Kids Voting USA reaches:

- over 4 million students
- 200,000 teachers
- nearly 11,000 schools

Kids Voting is the only program of its kind that enables students (Kindergarten -12) to visit official polling sites on Election Day, accompanied by a parent or guardian, to cast a ballot similar to the official ballot.

For More Information visit:

www.KIDSVOTINGSOUTHEASTPA.ORG



PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Public Schools	New Hope/Solebury	Private/Parochial
Bucks County	Palisades	Plumstead Christian
Bensalem	Pennridge	St. Jude
Bristol Boro	Quakertown	
Bristol Township		
Centennial		
Central Bucks	Montgomery County	
Council Rock	North Penn	
Morrisville	Souderton	
Neshaminy		

Freedom Sponsors (\$10,000 and over) (as of 10/31/2008)



Techni-Forms, Inc.

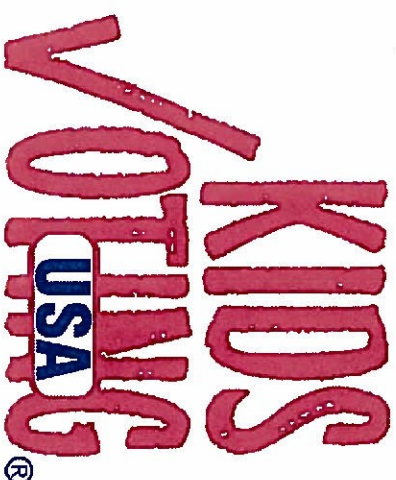
Patriot Sponsors (\$5,000-\$9,999) (as of 10/31/2008)
The Intelligencer, Bucks County Courier Times, Eastburn & Gray, Comcast, Inc.

This initial printing of Kids Voting brochures is limited in order to accommodate new sponsors. Visit www.kidsvotingsoutheastpa.org to learn more about sponsorship opportunities.

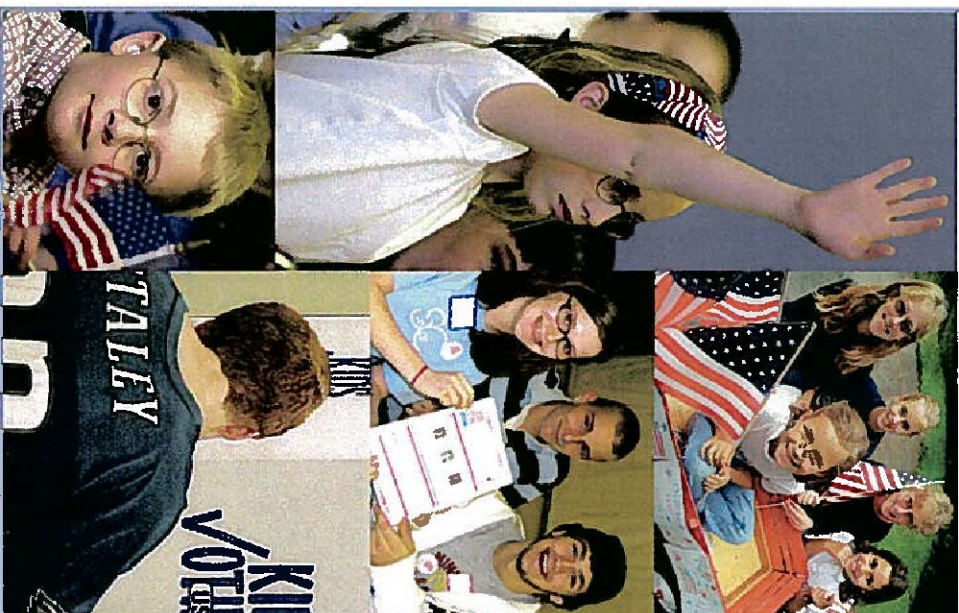
Kids Voting of Southeast Pennsylvania is a partnership among the Bucks & Montgomery County Boards of Elections, the League of Women's Voters, the County of Bucks, The Intelligencer and the Bucks County Courier Times.

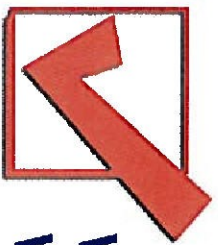


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When Kids Vote. We All Win.

- 50% of all eligible citizens do not vote in U.S. Presidential elections
- Less than 50% of 18-24 year olds are registered to vote; and only 1 in 5 will actually vote by the age of 21
- More than 50% of all children in the U.S. live in a home where no adult votes



Dr. Richard O. Coe
Executive Director
Kids Voting
Southeast Pennsylvania

around them, and reaching effects.

Having recently retired leading the Bucks County Intermediate Unit, I am pleased to join an outstanding cadre of volunteers on this vital program.

As an educator, I know first hand how Kids Voting makes a difference. It is important to connect children with the world Kids Voting does that with far

Kids Voting

of Southeast Pennsylvania gets students involved and ready to be educated, engaged citizens. Students from kindergarten through high school learn about democracy through a combination of classroom activities, an authentic voting experience and family dialogue. In addition to classroom activities about voting and elections, students also explore the right to vote, democracy and active citizenship. It's all made possible by a strong partnership between schools, elected officials, business and community leaders, and volunteers.

- *Makes democracy come alive and lays the foundation to develop civic responsibility*
- *Provides a hands-on, realistic voting experience.*
- *Is proven to increase adult voter participation. Families report increased dialog at home about civic affairs*
- *Students go to official polling sites on election day and experience voting just as the adults do*
- *Joins classroom curriculum & activities with real world experiences*
- *In the 2004 Presidential election over 39,000 students "voted" in KV Bucks/Mont elections*



KIDS VOTING USA[®]

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