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Mary Tarashuk, Fourth-grade Teacher,
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, Westfield, NJ



Voters Ed helps New Jersey fourth-graders navigate the presidential election

Although Americans are not able to vote until they are 18 years old, it's critical for students to begin building citizenship skills at an early age. For elementary school educators, teaching civic topics such as the presidential election can be challenging when students aren't mature enough to fully understand the complexity and personal beliefs tied to elections.

To ensure that students are learning political issues at grade-appropriate levels, teachers need the right tools. Mary Tarashuk, a fourth-grade teacher at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Westfield, NJ, and writer for MiddleWeb, recognized the importance of her students having the appropriate resources to discuss the 2016 presidential election.

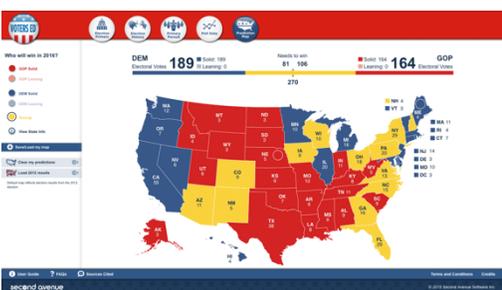
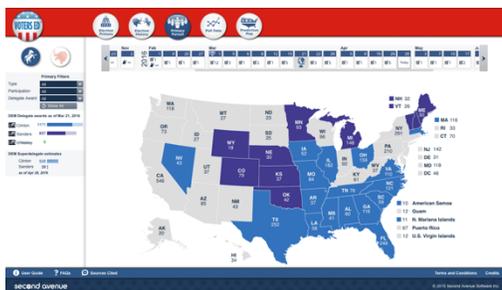
"Since I started working at Wilson Elementary, I have been helping to run our school-wide elections," Tarashuk said. "At the beginning of this school year, with the opportunity for kids to see a national election unfold in front of them, I was researching in an effort to plan fresh civics lessons, which included our mock election. That's when I came across Voters Ed and decided it would work well with young students."

By implementing Voters Ed in her instruction, Tarashuk was able to begin conversations with her students about the election process. The web-based platform enables students to interact with poll data and election history, while learning the basics of presidential elections.

acing the Electoral College

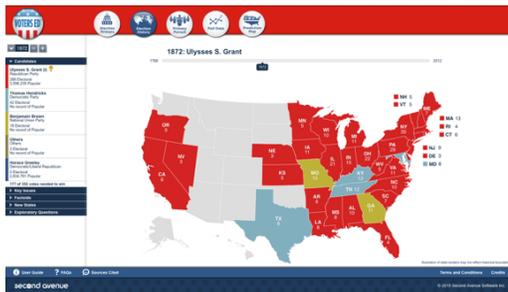
Students of all ages often struggle with the concept of the Electoral College. By reviewing the maps and data in Voters Ed, Tarashuk could easily show her students the difference between popular votes and electoral votes.

"Once my students understood how the Electoral College works, we had meaningful discussions about the current system, how it works in our country today, and the pros and cons of it all," Tarashuk said.



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Wilson Elementary's mock election breaks classrooms down into states by student population in an attempt to mimic the Electoral College. Tarashuk noted that the students' heightened understanding of the Electoral College was helpful to their comprehension of the school's election results.

exploring history

In addition to current elections, Voters Ed provides historical data for each election in the United States. Tarashuk used this feature in multiple ways with her fourth-grade students.

"We used the election history component to check out the elections of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and a few lesser known presidents," Tarashuk said. "The interactive map was a great tool to illustrate how our country evolved and grew over time."

Tarashuk also found that the historical data aligned with planned social studies units for the remainder of the school year.

"The maps give a visual representation of what was going on in America during different moments in history," Tarashuk said. "Reviewing the historical information provided great preparation for upcoming social studies units on Colonial America, the Revolutionary War and Westward expansion."

building student voice

Tarashuk tries to keep political controversy out of the classroom by focusing on the process and history behind politics. Voters Ed helps Tarashuk accomplish that goal by having no spin and focusing on the basics.

"Voters Ed has played a significant role in my students' development and understanding of citizenship," Tarashuk said. "When teaching civics, I want students to realize that they have a voice... and my hope is that they learn to use it well." Beyond the election, Tarashuk plans to continue using Voters Ed to give students a framework of political happenings in U.S. history.