Children's Votes Count!

Young children who vote on meaningful issues in a classroom learn to participate in decision making in their society.

Why include voting in your classroom?

- Children learn to be responsible for making and abiding by decisions.
- Voting can be used for resolving conflicts.
- Children begin to understand the idea of the rule of the majority, while learning to consider the rights of the minority. They see that each person's opinion counts.
- Voting encourages children to practice verbal skills as they explain their ideas and counting skills as they count votes.

What are some appropriate issues for voting?

- Issues should be real. They should involve the children's interests and affect the group. First voting experiences should involve issues where there are no losers and each child gets his choice. For example, children can vote on apple juice or orange juice for snack time.
- Problems that arise that affect the whole group can become voting experiences. For example, if a ball is being left outside after playtime, should the child who took it out bring it in, or should the last child to play with it do so?
- Some issues can introduce the idea of majority rule. Children can vote on which book to read or game to play.

When does voting not work?

- Voting on national candidates or issues is not age appropriate.
- Voting is not useful when the children's decision is likely to be unacceptable, when everyone agrees, or when determining fact, such as where polar bears live.
- Voting should be avoided if any children would be unfairly affected.

How is voting done?

- The teacher leads the class in stating the issue. Children then have time to discuss the issue and the pros and cons of alternatives.
- The teacher then asks the children to vote by calling each child's name. Young children may not understand voting if the method used is raising hands. Recording each vote by name helps children see that their votes are heard. If a more private vote is needed, simple ballots can be used.
- The teacher can count the votes with the children. The children can say which number is larger.

What about tie votes or minority choices?

- Deciding a tied vote can result in more discussion. Can a compromise be worked out, or do some children want to change their votes?
- Help the class to empathize with those who preferred the less popular choice and to find ways to respect their preferences.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.

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