

Student Voices – Pittsburgh – Civics Fair

- FEMALE DEBATER:** Our students are our future; we need to invest in them.
- MALE DEBATER:** Oversaturating schools with money is not the way to do that.
- FEMALE PANELIST:** Obviously we're in a war right now and we have no money.
- WOMAN AT TRI-FOLD:** I think if Edwards were to run for president and Obama for vice president, I think that would really be a nice team.
- REPORTER:** Those were just a few of the many student voices at Pittsburgh's third annual civics fair.
- More than 80 students -- mostly from suburban public high schools -- showed off their political savvy in exhibits and presentations at the Heinz History Center.
- Social science teachers selected the participants based on their interest in politics and government.
- Topics ranged from the demographics of Pittsburgh...
- THOMAS COOK, Student:** Are the youth coming? Are the youth staying?
- REPORTER:** ...to campaign advertising.
- Rick Yao and Rishi Sethi from suburban Fox Chapel, Pa., analyzed the competing commercials of the two candidates for governor of Pennsylvania.
- RICK YAO, Student:** I like how he throws in at the end, "And I'll lower your taxes" just like every politician always says.
- REPORTER:** The high school seniors said they respected positive and humorous political advertising, but not when it crossed the line and turned negative.

RICK YAO:

I think it's sort of what they call dirty politics. I think a man ... or a man or a woman should win on their own merits and not have to go thru all the sleazy methods of politics.

REPORTER:

Many of the students' projects related to last November's general elections.

Katelynn Falleroni registered 20 18-year-old students who were eligible to vote for the first time.

At her high school's fall open house, she also taught first time voters and parents how to use new voting machines.

**KATELYNN FALLERONI,
Student:**

My parents never used it before, so they found it very useful. Many of the teachers got to try it.

We also made a video of how to use the voting machine and we showed that to eligible students on Election Day so after school they could go to the polls.

REPORTER:

Katelynn said she hoped her project had a positive impact on the youth vote.

KATELYNN FALLERONI:

If [the vote percentage] gets so low – it's basically going to be 20 percent of our country is voting what our government should be -- that's not saying democracy to me.

REPORTER:

After making their presentations to the judges, students were invited to participate in the "hip hop senate."

It's an exercise in which "pretend-senators" must persuade undecided fellow lawmakers to make up their minds. The vote was on legislation to give additional funds to secondary public education.

One side argued for more spending.

**ANNA HOFRICHTER,
Student:**

About 40 years ago, Brown vs. Board of Education decided that separate but equal was not equal. We are still segregated between lower class and higher class students. The students in the lower classes are separated but not equal. All students of all cultures and all socioeconomic levels deserve the same opportunity. Money is the way to get them there.

REPORTER:

The other team took the taxpayers' side.

PETER NIGRA, Student:

Ninety-four percent of funding comes from local taxes; about 86 per cent of that money comes from real estate taxes, which means it's just not people involved with the schools.

It's a lot of elderly people and families without children. So people are paying for education that aren't directly involved with schools. By supplying more money those taxes are gonna have to go up.

REPORTER:

The "pro" side convinced four of the five fence-sitters to vote for greater spending on secondary education. But a "swing senator" explained how they'd missed the point...

ANGELA BARNEY, Student:

I don't agree with the idea of taking money from higher income areas and giving it to lower areas. I think funding needs to come from federal sources; that's what I'm voting yes for.

REPORTER:

As the students headed for home, they took with them a recurring message from the judges, teachers, and civics fair organizers. The older generation would be counting on them to be responsible citizens.

JOHN FORD, Heinz History Center:

One day, we'll all be depending on you to give us direction as we continue to age. You'll have to give us the type of leadership we're going to need to vote.

JON DELANO, Journalist:

As I get closer to 60 I would much rather know that those under 30 are really helping to run the show.