

Get Out the Vote

By Sharon Blake

My most memorable experience engaging my students in a service-learning activity dealt with the most recent Mayoral Primary Election in Baltimore City. This service activity engaged students in a "Get Out The Vote" effort two weeks before and the day of the Primary Election.

Students were prepared for this activity by having the mayoral candidates visit the school and address issues relative to how they intended to serve the people of Baltimore City while dealing with such issues as homelessness, poverty, education, and crime. Students then worked in groups to come up with a way they could get involved and serve the community prior to the Primary. Each student conducted a survey of twenty-five people in their neighborhood and/or community to identify what would help them be assured that they would vote on Primary Election Day.

After tallying their surveys, the number two response from the community was encouragement to "Get Out The Vote". Students wrote letters to the top three Democratic and Republican candidates offering to become a part of their campaign dealing with "Getting Out The Vote". The candidates that responded, worked closely with me in preparing students to help run a phone bank and "Flush" team on election day. To take part in the phone banking efforts, students did a role play to prepare to make telephone calls and read a script. A simulation was used to prepare the students to knock on the doors of citizens and remind them to go to the polls and vote in a very friendly but informative manner. This activity included having students inform citizens of car pools that would deliver citizens to and from their polling place. This was considered the "Flush" team and/or "Getting Out The Vote."

As a result of student involvement in "Get Out The Vote" students were able to establish a respectful relationship with their neighborhood and community leaders. Community groups and leaders have called and written to the school to engage students in additional advocacy projects. Equally as important, students have come to me to ask to do more activities within the community to earn service-learning hours above and beyond those required for graduation. Throughout the entire service-learning activity students were asked to reflect daily on their experiences. Students completed reflection sheets, participation in group sharing sessions, journalized, and maintained learning logs.