

# Civics 101: Student council votes tabulated with voting machines

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Some Cleveland high schools are choosing their student council leaders this week with electronic voting machines — and learning a valuable civics lesson in the process.

The Voting Awareness Project is being tried on a pilot basis at John F. Kennedy, Glenville and two of the three clusters within the John Hay High School campus. It's believed to be the first time the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections has run student government elections.

The idea is to use the selection of student leaders as an opportunity to teach students how the electoral process works. In addition to using real electronic voting machines or real paper ballots, the students themselves serve as poll workers at the school sites.

The idea came from the Mental Health Advocacy Coalition's elections committee, which was looking for a project to work on this year.

Partners in the project, along with the elections board, are the Cuyahoga County Bar Association, the League of Women Voters, the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union.

The timing of the project was not an accident: This is the first year that all Cleveland high schools are required to hold student council elections.

Students in some of the schools also had issues on their ballots. At John Hay, for instance, some students voted whether to establish a peer mediation program at the school. Glenville students, who vote today, will choose their homecoming king and queen.

Students at John F. Kennedy

were the first group to use the electronic machines Monday.

"It went very well," said Lorri Stewart, government affairs manager at the Center for Families and Children and volunteer chairwoman for the coalition's election committee. "The kids were very excited to learn about the machines and to use them."

The elections board also hopes the project creates interest in its student poll worker program. The program pays high school students 17 or older to work actual polling places on Election Day and learn from veteran poll workers.

"Just to see that mix of people from different generations coming together is an amazing thing," said Dennis Anderson of the elections board.

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