



A Teacher's Guide to Effective
**SCHOOL ELECTION
CAMPAIGNS**



A Teacher's Guide to Effective School Election Campaigns

For teachers who guide student organizations, it's never too early to prepare their students who are considering running for an elected position for a club or grade level/school-wide student council. The principles are the same at any level. For this discussion, let's concentrate on preparing for campaigns for student council at the grade or school-wide level.

As with everything else, preparation is vital when it comes to running a successful campaign. We'll divide this whole election process into three sections: pre-campaign period, actual campaign period, and post-election period. There may be instances in your school where the pre-campaign and campaign periods overlap; nevertheless, the steps are still the same, regardless.

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Attention is Key to Successful Student Participation

In order to achieve a successful school election campaign, the key objective is to keep most of the students' attention (all throughout the campaign), including before and after the campaign period. This is imperative because you'd want not only to capture their interest, but also get their buy-in: you want them to be on board, to stay engaged and to participate in the whole process from beginning to end.



At the same time, obtaining the buy-in and support from fellow teachers, coaches, principals, vice principals, superintendents, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, and guardians is equally important. Their support to promote school elections can be shown in many ways, from grand gestures such as a principal performing during a school assembly and incorporating school elections as part of class discussions/activities, to the parents, administrative staff and cafeteria staff wearing pins or stickers encouraging students to vote.

Simply put, having the whole school support school elections demonstrates their significance to students - a teaching activity for civics class and what a voter's choice means in a democratic government - in a student's overall education.

PRE-CAMPAIGN PERIOD

Teacher/Adviser Solidifies Student Candidacy and Reviews Election Rules

During this period, the teacher/adviser confirms with the student candidates their intentions to run for office and walks them through the election process and rules, like whether each candidate may or may not spend x amount of dollars for campaign materials or whether the campaign team can raise funds through bake sales, car washes, and other fundraising drives, if the candidate's campaign team can create and disseminate short videos, GIFs, memes, SnapChat-like messages, to name some examples.

Candidates create their team

Also during this period, student candidates will build their campaign teams composed of their close friends and sometimes the candidate's own parents and his/her friends' parents. This is a good time for candidates to brainstorm with their team for campaign strategies and ideas such as campaign slogan, posters, color theme, and short video teasers.

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Teacher/Adviser set up online poll and voting ballot

By now, the teacher/adviser has access to the voting software and has set up and run a dummy election just to make sure everything works as intended. The teacher/adviser configures the style of voting ballot, makes sure they have access to the most current list of enrolled students and uploaded the list into the voting database. The teacher/adviser or designated software administrator, also determines who else has access to software in order to preserve data integrity and security.

[Voting 4 Schools](#) is an online software designed to make online elections for your school a breeze. It has the ability to not only include the usual candidate information like first name, last name, grade level, etc., but the software can also accept photos of the candidates, a brief video, and even a short bio. The teacher/adviser or software administrator has the option of adding any or all of these elements into the voting ballot.



During this time, setting up an online poll is another great use for the voting software as well as to help determine student issues, what they care about, what needs to be changed for the better so candidates know what topics are in student peers' minds and focus their campaign addressing student issues and coming up with proposed solutions. As with the ballot form, test the online poll first before the actual implementation. The teacher/adviser, in collaboration with the student candidates may decide to have fun with the online poll, not just have serious topics but include humorous ones, as a way to inject enthusiasm with their student peers.

Set the stage by creating a buzz to generate excitement throughout the school

It's usually a very good sign when your school's administration gets on board in the school's election process because they believe it's a big deal, that it's important and it matters to everyone to get involved and participate. That said, the Principal/Superintendent or a high ranking member of the school administration can help set the tone. He/she can do that during school assemblies, pep rallies, school spirit day, home games, and other school-wide or grade-wide gatherings. He/She can even write about the elections during his/her weekly update to parents and students.

Your fellow teachers can definitely help and show support. For example, during homeroom, study hall, social studies/history/civics class, teachers have made mention, even have short discussions during class, lab time, club meetings, or even during downtime at sports practices.

Teaser videos can be distributed throughout the school at this juncture, or screened in the morning announcements, reminding everyone of the upcoming elections and getting out to vote. The teacher/adviser could also coordinate these video snippets with the school's audiovisual department so that they can be displayed on hallway TV monitors, at cafeterias, and other common areas. These teaser videos can segue into introducing the student candidates and alternating with "get out and vote" videos.



Another cool idea to generate buzz around the elections is for student candidates to enlist the help of clubs. They can ask friends or friends of friends from members of various clubs - chorus,

jazz band, marching band, a *capella* group, dance troupe - and sports teams - football, soccer, basketball, baseball, the cheerleading team, the pep squad, and even the school's mascot. Perhaps some of the members can do an impromptu performance during lunch breaks, on the way to class, or something a bit more rehearsed and performed during school gatherings like school assemblies.

Campaign period

Now the bulk of the work begins for each of the student candidates. As teachers/advisers know fully well, there's only so much that student candidates can accomplish by using technology, and that real campaigning means boots-on-the-ground face-to-face interactions and meetings with student voters. This is the heart of campaigning because it boils down to which candidate can reach out and connect with voters and thereby convince them to elect him/her.

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Prepping Candidates

To give each student candidate an equal chance to achieve a positive experience during this election process, it is highly recommended that the teacher/adviser provide coaching and give pointers to individual student candidates. Of course, this form of coaching is optional and it is up to the student candidate to take advantage of this opportunity to improve him/herself in order to become better candidates. If the candidate is open to coaching, evaluate each candidate's strengths and aspects that he/she needs to improve on. Some candidates may already be a natural and feel comfortable speaking in public. Others may be better writers who can more easily and quickly compose a paragraph. Whatever the case, win or lose, these student candidates end up being better versions of themselves after this election process -- a plus for everyone.

Candidates should listen, be seen, and be heard

Student candidates should take a two-pronged approach to campaigning, that is, tackle both the offline and the online avenues so that they can be more effective in reaching out to voters. Online, they should continue running their video ads and “get out and vote” videos, host brief live chat sessions, and send out instant messages at a constant pace (but not too much so as to turn off voters). Offline, candidates should interact and talk to student voters at every opportunity like during recess/lunch, in-between periods/classes, study hall/free time. They should seek out their supporters and even better, try to get their commitment to vote by getting their signatures. If there’s time to do so and if everyone agrees, the teacher/adviser together with all candidates and their campaign teams can get together, sort of like a townhall setting. This is a great way for undecided student voters to get to know the candidates and interact with them.

Campaign materials such as campaign posters should be displayed by now and campaign stickers distributed to as many people as possible. These should not only showcase the candidates but also get the word out to vote on election day.

Campaign speech

The campaign speech, in most cases, is the be all and end all for student candidates to win over their peer student voters especially when the campaign period is condensed over a brief period during the school year. At the core of every election, it still comes down to the personal connection and the impression developed between the candidate(s) and the voters that will determine an election’s outcome and win for the deserving candidate(s).



For student candidates, this presents the final opportunity on the eve of election day to solidify his/her support from those decided voters he/she can count on, and make the final push to convince those undecided ones. Moreover, campaign speeches can be some sort of equalizer, especially between a popular candidate versus an up-and-comer and/or a newbie candidate, so that he/she can showcase why to vote for him/her and what difference he/she can make to make the school better.

So a few pointers for candidates: first and foremost, be yourself. Don’t pretend to be someone you’re not because your peers can see that. Let your personality shine and share a bit of yourself to your peers. So your speech should reflect who you are as a person and as a representative of the students who voted for you. Second, practice your speech often until it becomes almost like speaking naturally. Ask your friends, family, and your teacher/advisor for constructive input. Practice in front of the mirror and with the people who you trust. Third, keep calm and meditate as often as possible to help center and focus yourself and your thoughts. Finally, deliver the speech as best you’re able to, knowing that you’ve accomplished everything possible to win.

During this period, the teacher/adviser also checks into the voting program to see whether students are having login problems and identify what these might be. Voting software, such as [Voting 4 Schools](#), has this capability to detect if a student is unable to vote because of a few errant typing strokes with their username or password. Whatever the reason, the teacher/adviser can look into these issues and if they are a bit more complicated, they can easily reach our customer support to resolve these issues promptly.

Post-election

After the election period is over, on the teacher/adviser or software administrator's side, the work begins in the tallying of all the votes, verifying the results, generating reports in Excel or csv format, and communicating the election results to the student body and the school as a whole. [Voting 4 Schools](#) also has the ability to provide a visual summary pie chart quickly, without having to generate reports that are exported in Excel or csv format (and then create the charts out of the exported data), and shows the breakdown of voting statistics such as total number of voters and how many votes each candidate got to name a few.

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After the elections and the winners are announced, student elect officers should, formally or informally, give a brief acceptance speech thanking his/her campaign team for all of their help and efforts to get him/her elected and of course thanking the student body who had voted for him/her. Perhaps later, the student elect officers (they all can pool resources, too) can extend a small gesture of thanks to your campaign team, maybe pizza on you, ice cream treats, gift cards, gift certificates, or eCards to Starbucks, Target, etc. - part thank you and part celebration for a job well-done!

Summary

If there's one word that best sums up having a successful and effective school election campaign, it would be preparation, that is preparation in all phases of the election process. The student candidates organize their respective campaign teams and execute their campaign strategies -- such as in the frequency of digital video and messaging output, placement of campaign posters all over school -- throughout the campaign period leading up to election day.

The candidates themselves prepare their speeches and practicing them until they feel very comfortable speaking almost normally or conversation-like. The teacher/adviser coaches the candidates if asked, reminds them of the election rules and candidate etiquette. The teacher/adviser, in partnership with the school's IT or Technology department, also ensures that the voting software is up and running smoothly on election day and he/she has the most current distribution list Admissions.

Overall, the support of everyone in school from the administration, the teachers, students, and parents, to the non-teaching staff will ultimately decide on the success of any school event and one such event is school elections. If everyone is onboard, then there's every chance of obtaining close to 100 percent participation from the student body and achieving a successful school election.

Having a reliable online voting system software like [Voting 4 Schools](#) is also indispensable. This will ensure integrity of the election process and credibility of the results. Additionally, using a voting software will save stakeholders time, energy, and effort that could better be used developing strategies to reach out to students and advance each candidate's advocacies.

Based in Orange County, CA, **Software 4 Schools** was founded in 2008 by Ben Star and Michael Buss who were teaching at that time and who wanted to make the school's dance ticketing run efficiently and record sales and attendance accurately. They developed their own software and have since branched out to address other tasks that their fellow teachers and school administrators find tedious and time consuming. [Click here](#) for more information.



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