

# Some ABCs

## in education

BY RON INOUE

[Editor's Note: Thanks for your letters and phone calls regarding this column. If you have any questions about the column or suggestions for subjects to discuss, let me know by writing to me at the Center for Cross-Cultural Studies (CXCS), University of Alaska-Fairbanks, Alaska 99701, or by calling (907) 479-7185.]

Helping students learn how to critically observe a political cam-

paign is one of the more valuable skills a teacher can pass on to his students. The good teacher would not urge his or her students to support a particular candidate, but rather to learn how to distinguish a good candidate from a poor one.

Depending on the teaching area of the instructor, many basic educational skills can be used in studying the political campaigns. Among them are:

(1) reading the newspapers and campaign literature, (2) developing the ability to *listen critically* to the media ads and speeches to determine what is really being said, and (3) learning to *identify* and *evaluate* the techniques candidates use to solicit voter support.

Students in civics, government and political science courses could study the procedures local candidates use for filing for office. Composition, psychology, and sociology classes could analyze media ads and listen to speeches to learn how candidates use literary, psychological and sociological techniques to win votes. Journalism students could assess the amount and quality of coverage a candidate receives through the various media mix, and the general kind of public identity being projected. Students in mathematics and social studies could design and sample the community opinion of the community prior to the actual election using sampling and statistical techniques. An actual election day straw poll of student sentiment could be compared with that of the general voting public.

Students could learn how to study the voting records of those candidates who have held public

office before. Selecting significant issues and comparing the voting records of the candidates on those issues could yield important information.

It is very important to check with your school board for local policies regarding political activity occurring within the schools. Similarly it is important to emphasize the fairness to all candidates for a particular office and to provide them with equal time for presenting their views on issues.

As part of a school- and community-wide election activity, the students could arrange an "election fair" to which all the local and regional candidates could be invited. Students could arrange debates between the candidates, and introduce the candidates to people in the com-

munity through ice cream socials, pot luck dinners, etc. (Pictures of the candidates could be placed on bulletin boards around the school and in the community so the candidates would be recognizable.) Sample ballots could be distributed to every registered voter with a reminder from the students to vote on election day. The "election fair" would provide an excellent opportunity to discuss the issues important to the community.

After the elections are completed, the students should continue to closely observe the political processes at work. Field trips to visit the city council, the state legislature, or the national Congress would be highly educational; and the students would have sufficient background to understand the workings of those elected bodies.

Particularly good resources for teachers and students on the topics of local and state governments is the *Alaska Blue Book*. It provides detailed information about local and state government organizations and processes as well as the names and addresses of municipal leaders and offices, state offices, state legislators, and much more. Copies of the *Blue Book* should be available in your school and public libraries or through the State Division of Libraries in Juneau.

Election day is quickly approaching. That day provides a great opportunity for all of us to learn more about the candidates and the political process.