A TEACHABLE MOMENT

The Minimum Wage and the Youth Vote

A Teacher’s Guide

by Youth Voices

c/o The United Labor Agency 3328 Carnegie Avenue Cleveland, Ohio 44115

and by the Columbus Annenberg Civic Education Model
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Students from Columbus East High and their teachers Martha McFerran and Michael Hicks meet with Pat Frost Brooks, OEA Vice-president, Pierette Talley, Ohio AFL-CIO leader, and Senator Minority Leader CJ Prentiss before they present their petitions at the steps of the capitol as they “described the ways in which government has been shaped by the influence of political parties and interest groups with emphasis on labor legislation” (Benchmark A)

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Over 100 high school students from across Ohio presented their petitions on the capitol steps to Ohio political, religious, and labor leaders. Over 300 students collected minimum wage signatures as they “analyze ways people achieve governmental change including political action, social protest, and revolution” (Benchmark A: Citizen Rights and Responsibilities)
Fellow teacher:

We have produced this teacher’s guide to encourage Ohio teachers to engage their students in a short teachable moment. On November 7, Ohio voters will decide whether to support or oppose a state constitutional amendment to raise Ohio’s minimum wage from the federal minimum of $5.15/hr. to $6.85/hr, indexed to inflation.

From January through May, 2006, students across Ohio researched the history of the minimum wage, explored reasons for support and opposition, and made up their own minds about a petition drive to put the issue on the ballot this fall. Those students who chose to support the petition initiative found it an exciting issue which captured their academic attention, and helped them become engaged in the larger society. Some students formed their own organizations, steering committees, and speakers’ bureaus. Others created petition strategies, wrote editorials and even performed poetry.

The minimum wage issue:

- Can be used in Ohio’s classrooms to teach basic social studies, math, and English concepts,
- Can engage high school students, who are not yet eligible to vote but who are in the workforce, to increase the vote of their voter-eligible peers, and
- Can increase opportunities for young people’s voices to be heard.

However, the window of opportunity will close right after Election Day.

The centerpiece of the teacher’s guide is an Interview Project which poses the question: “What would government do if young people voted at the same rate as older citizens?”

The students will interview at least 10 voter-eligible young people about past and present voting behavior and whether the minimum wage amendment in Ohio will make them more or less likely to vote.

Following the interviews, leadership conferences for students will be held so they can analyze their findings and release them to the media. High school students who do interviews will also have the opportunity to form telephone and email “trees” to remind their interviewees to vote.

If 50 high school teachers motivate 50 students to each interview 10 voter-eligible young people, 25,000 interviews will take place. This is more than enough for significant media interest with the students’ work.

Most important, high school students will acquire skills which create highly effective citizens:

- The ability to gather research on an issue from a variety of sources,
- The ability to speak and communicate effectively,
- The ability to analyze data and present findings, and
- The ability to create and hold press conferences.

There are also opportunities for creative expressions such as poetry slams and a poetry contest. We hope to capture the incredible creative talent of high school students so that the adult community can learn and be inspired from their energy and insights.

We have also arranged a variety of factual research material in order for teachers to explore the issue in their own way — FAQs, a chronology, political cartoons, and exact ballot language.

We present essays which both support and oppose the minimum wage amendment — one from the Buckeye Institute, an Ohio-based libertarian think tank — and one from Policy Matters Ohio, a research organization focusing on issues of wages, work and the economy. In addition, there are statements on the issue from the Democratic and Republican candidates for governor and U.S. senator.

For math teachers and others, there is a lesson comparing the rate of inflation to growth in the minimum wage.

No teacher’s guide in Ohio can be complete without connecting the Ohio Academic Content Standards, the Benchmarks, and Grade-Level Indicators to the minimum wage issue. The relevant standards in the Social Studies content areas, grades 9-12, are included. For further research, websites, which support and oppose the issue, are included.

Though we can send a representative to your class to help teach one of the lessons, the hope is that teachers across Ohio will see the importance and immediate relevance of engaging their students in this teachable moment, offering them an opportunity to engage in authentic citizenship skills.

Feel free to contact either of us.

Michael Charney
Youth Voices for Economic Justice
Doreen Uhas Sauer
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In 2004 the percentage of young people voting jumped significantly after three decades of decline. Over 50% of people aged 18-24 voted during that presidential year, compared to over 66% of older voters.

In Ohio in 2002 (the last election for governor) only 19% of young people voted, compared to 36% of the population at large. The rate is even lower for those who never attend college.

What can be done to change this? The research is clear: 1. Contact by another young person is the best strategy to motivate other young people to vote. 2. Face-to-face contact is the best form of contact. 3. Young people need an issue to motivate them.

The Interview Project is aimed at developing the interview ability and leadership skills of your students — as well as increasing the number of young people who vote in November.

**First Step:**
**What Do Your Students Think About Voting?**

Lead a discussion about young people and voting: why do young people vote at such a lower rate than older people? (see Thought Questions below)

**Second Step:**
**Doing the Interviews**

Use the questionnaire on the next page. Subjects must be voter-eligible and aged 18 and 29. A subject can only be interviewed once.

Contact information is important so that students can get back in touch with interviewees before the election. Most questions are yes-or-no, so that data can be analyzed and presented to the media in a student-led press conference.

Please make three copies of each interview forms — one for yourself, one for the student who did the interview, and one to be sent to Youth Voices, c/o The United Labor Agency, 3328 Carnegie Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115.

**Third Step:**
**Identifying a Few Students for a Youth Conference**

Before the interviews have been completed, please identify a few students who will tabulate the results. We will hold leadership conferences for these students in mid to late September where they will learn to interpret results and how to develop press releases and summaries for the media. Wherever students follow through, we will hold student-led press conferences to announce the results. We will get back to you with locations of the leadership conferences.

We have included a copy of a voter registration form in this guide. This form can be photocopied. Teachers are exempt from the new rules of Ohio House Bill 3 that require the forms to be returned within 10 days. High school students may hand the form to someone who is not registered — but it will be up to that person to follow through. NOTE: Due to all the new Ohio rules, please err on the side of getting voter interviews, not voter registrations. The labyrinth of rules for voter registration may present an ongoing obstacle.

**Fourth Step:**
**Follow-up**

After the press conferences (early October), we will ask every student (in late October) to personally call or talk to the interviewee to remind that person to vote.

By pointing out the minimum wage ballot amendment, making face-to-face voter contact, and then following up with a personal communication, we hope to increase the youth vote. Students will also be able to learn about the media when they hold their press conference.

**Thought Questions for students as they prepare to interview**

1. Why are young people less likely to vote compared to older people?
2. Why did the youth vote increase in 2004 after decades of decline?
3. Why are college educated young people more likely to vote than young people without college?
4. Why is face-to-face contact by another young person considered the most effective motivator of young people to vote?
5. How might elected lawmakers and the governor act differently if the youth vote increased a great deal?
6. List ten people, ages 18-29, who you may consider interviewing.
Hello, I am part of a statewide project to interview young people about their voting behavior. The interview will take only five minutes. We are interested in finding out about your views on voting — not about whom you may vote for.

May I ask you some questions?

I need to find out some information about you first. (Complete the contact information or ask them as questions.)

Name ______________________________________________________________ (print)
Age_______ Address ________________________________________________________
City _____________________________________________________ Zip_____________
Phone________________________Email _______________________________________

1. Did you vote in the 2004 presidential election? ................. Yes  No  Too young
2. Did you vote four years ago in the governor’s election? .......... Yes  No  Too young
3. Are you presently registered to vote? .................. Yes  No
4. If you are not registered to vote, would you like to register? (If yes, please hand them a registration form and indicate that they can complete it and return it on their own.)
5. Did you vote in the May, 2006, primary this spring? ................. Yes  No
6. Do you plan to vote in the November, 2006, election? ................. Yes  No  Not sure
7. Do you know the names of the Republican and Democratic candidates for governor? No  Only Blackwell  Only Strickland  Knew both names
8. Did you know there is a constitutional amendment on the November ballot to raise Ohio’s minimum wage from $5.15/hr. to $6.85/hr and then index the wage to inflation? If passed, the increase would take effect in January, 2007. ................. Yes  No
9. Will the minimum wage issue make you less likely to vote, more likely to vote, or have no influence? More likely  Less likely  No influence
10. Thank you for your time. I may be getting in touch with you in a few weeks to remind you to vote. Do you have any comments you would like to make about the upcoming election?