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MOCK the VOTE

Howard Dean delivered a classic campaign speech to voters at New Searles Elementary School on Wednesday morning, with his signature aggressive and animated style.

Well, sort of.

On Wednesday, Dean was not quite his old self. He was a lot shorter, thinner, and younger than the image most voters have seen on television. That's because Dean was not Dean. He was being played by sixth-grade student Mike Morrissey.

"George Bush over there is like a teenager with a credit card," Morrissey said, pointing at classmate Mallory Mulligan, who was posing as the 43rd president of the United States. "He wants to spend, spend, spend."

Morrissey hung his sports coat on the front of the podium, a la Dean in Iowa Monday night. He asked members of the crowd to stand up and used them as examples of children who deserve a good education and guaranteed health care. He put cornstarch in his hair to give it a more realistic gray tint and ended his speech with a perfect Deanism.

Students gear up for a primary of their own

JONATHON VAN FLEET

The Learning Curve

"It's not enough to change presidents," Morrissey said, his voice rising. "It's time to change the way Washington works. A vote for me is a vote for America."

Dean's impersonator was a hit with the crowd.

"He made very good points about what he wanted to do and why," said 11-year-old Demetri Venetos.

"He made it more real," said 12-year-old Keith Jackson.

But that doesn't mean mini-Dean won Jackson's support.

"I heard rumors that he doesn't want Saddam Hussein in jail," Jackson said. Therefore, Jackson won't vote for him, he said, and not just because Jackson is below the legal voting age. Jackson, along with the rest of the students at New Searles, does have a vote. Today students at the school will cast votes for their favorite candidates as part of the statewide New Hampshire Primary Mock Election.

In Nashua, students at Nashua High School, all three junior high schools, as well as Birch Hill, Sunset Heights, New Searles, Dr. Crisp and Amherst Street elementary schools, are participating in the mock election. The election is designed to teach students about the presidential primary in New Hampshire and, perhaps more importantly, the value of voting.

Throughout the state, 131 schools and nearly 50,000 students from kindergarten through 12th grade are expected to participate.

They have done everything from campaigning as the candidates to attending real-life campaign events. They've researched the candidates, learned about the issues and tried to make informed votes.

At 7 p.m. Friday night, the results will be announced during a special event for participating schools at New Hampshire Public Television.

A day before going to the polls, 12-year-old Andrew Normandy said he didn't know who would get his vote. A lot of the candidates have good ideas. He said he plans to sleep on it one more night and make his decision in the morning.

He's like a lot of New Hampshire voters. While most voters have aligned themselves with candidates, by some estimates one out of every five votes is still up for grabs.

That's why young Morrissey wanted to do his best Dean interpretation to capture those undecided votes.

"He did a fabulous job," said 11-year-old Danielle Gaudette, who plans to vote for Dean. "I believe in all of his issues."

At New Searles, students were assigned candidates to research. Gaudette had Dean. She said she's not worried about the real Dean's reputation for having a bad temper.

"Yeah, he has some anger problems," Gaudette said, "but I don't think they will affect his issues."

The experience of campaigning in front of the school was an eye-opener for the young candidates.

"It takes a lot of confidence," said Molly LePine, who campaigned as Carol Moseley Braun and plans to vote for Dean because Moseley Braun withdrew from the race. "It takes a lot of energy."

"I didn't like being the candidate," said Jamie Henning, who posed as John Edwards. "It's a big stage-fright issue."

As a result, Henning's version of Edwards lacked some of the fist-pumping the actual candidate is known to do.

"They have the hardest job around," said Rachel Leuci, who campaigned as Dennis Kucinich. "Basically you have to run a whole country if you get elected."

As for mini-Dean, he didn't have any problem wowing the crowd.

"Towards the end, I started to get more aggressive, like he does," Morrissey said. "I felt like I was actually him."



Staff photo by **DON HIMSEL**. Mike Morrissey, 12, plays the part of Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean on Wednesday at a mock debate at the New Searles Elementary School in Nashua. With him on stage, playing Wesley Clark, is Meghan Conlon, 11.

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