

# Students carry on N.H. tradition of political savvy

*Leaving Iowa and the caucus behind, Democratic candidates set their sights on New Hampshire, where the nation's first presidential primary takes place Tuesday. Former O-D intern Kate Brennan is a Syracuse University senior who is reporting on young voters and their impact on the 2004 presidential race. Brennan is in New Hampshire with a class from SU for the week leading up to the state's primary.*

**By KATE BRENNAN**

Observer-Dispatch

CONCORD, N.H. — Like

many other political addicts here, Amelia Greenberg was busy Friday checking in voters and proudly pitching the virtues of her candidate, Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Ohio.

Never mind that Amelia Greenberg is 10 years old. She is already part of a deeply ingrained New Hampshire tradition of voting for presidents.

"I voted for Kucinich because he's against the war in Iraq and he wants to clean up the environment," said Greenberg, a fourth-grader at Walker School.

## ELECTIONS ★ 2004

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Dean predicts rebound.

"He's also a vegetarian, and I'm sort of a vegetarian."

She is one of more than 51,000 students from 138 schools across New Hampshire who voted in primary

mock elections between Jan. 12 and 23. Students in grades kindergarten through 12 registered as Republican or Democrat and voted for the candidate they would nominate, if they legally could.

As part of a national civic education effort, New Hampshire schools have sponsored mock general and mid-term elections for the last eight years. This year is the first time that New Hampshire schools have focused on the state's homegrown specialty: the primary.

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By JAMIE COHEN, special to the Observer-Dispatch

**Melanie Carrier, 9, collects ballots from voters Friday at Walker School's mock election in Concord, N.H.**

# Students in N.H. learn about politics

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“The primary plays an incredibly important role in our culture. New Hampshire has a unique position in terms of access to the candidates,” said Susan Adams, education coordinator at New Hampshire Public Television.

New Hampshire Public Television organized the grassroots effort for the primary mock elections and tallied the election results on Friday before airing them to enthusiastic students at 10 p.m.

Kristin Cerami, a fourth-grade teacher at Walker School, teaches her students about New Hampshire government as part of the required curriculum. “We are really excited to see the results of our students’ votes,” said Cerami, who helped students pick up their ballots, which displayed pictures of each candidate running in the presidential race.

Shana Crosby, 9, sported a visor she made in class that displayed a picture of Sen. John Kerry and a slogan that read “A true American person.”

“I believe that about him,” said Crosby, also a fourth-grader. “If they allowed children to vote right now, I definitely would.”

Mock elections are just one of

the many opportunities young people have to partake in the political fervor of their state. At Concord High School, students formed the Presidential Candidates Forum Committee, a group dedicated to bringing in the Democratic candidates.

Since October, seven candidates responded to the students’ requests with visits to Concord High - a place where most of the students are too young to vote. Retired Gen. Wesley Clark even came twice.

“Our committee got these visits because we’re very tenacious,” said Joanne McGlynn, assistant principal of the capital’s only public high school. It is 1, 850 students strong. “The students are hugely excited about politics.”

Concord High students are so excited about politics that the town clerk set up a voters’ registration table on the request of students that contributed to 60 students to register. And about 10 percent are volunteering on campaigns and actively supporting candidates.

One of the student volunteers is 16-year-old Alex Dymont. He is campaigning for Clark.

“We’re part of something really huge,” said Dymont, a junior. “Our school is so politically involved and

it’s cool to be. Everyone gets involved.”

It’s hard to avoid getting involved if you have been born and raised in Concord, said Dymont. He has spent five hours a week for the last month making phone calls, entering new poll results into databases and holding up campaign signs in the bitter cold in support of Clark.

“Politics is a common conversation in my family and a lot of my friends are political activists,” Dymont said. “So, I am always surrounded by it, even in social settings.”

That unavoidable submersion into politics in New Hampshire comes from its distinctive role in holding the nation’s first primary, said Michael Dupre, professor of sociology at Saint Anselm College in Manchester and research fellow at the New Hampshire Institute of Politics. It’s part, he said, of what makes the state and its people unique.

“Young adults get exposure. They see what goes on behind the scenes, the scrutiny, the 600 reporters that were at the Democratic presidential debate on Thursday,” Dupre said.

While some young people enjoy what they see, others don’t.

“People call my apartment and ask to discuss candidates’ issues with me. It’s overwhelming,” said Julie

Tierney, 22, a graduate student at the University of New Hampshire. “I’m overloaded with information.”

Kelly Dowding, a junior at the University of New Hampshire, is even less interested. “I’m not going to vote in the primary,” Dowding said. “I’m too busy with everything else in my life to vote. Maybe when I’m older or maybe when I graduate I’ll vote.”

Elizabeth Ossoff, professor of psychology at Saint Anselm College, has surveyed 14- to 18-year olds in Bedford, N.H., about their civic interests.

“I found that young people in New Hampshire are not all that much different from young people in the rest of the country,” Ossoff said. “We do see that the more their parents are involved in the political process, the more it extends to them.”

New Hampshire ranks above the national average in terms of voter turnout among voters over the age of 25. But young voter turnout in the state remains in the bottom 25 percent of the national level, according to the November 2000 Current Population Survey.

With young voters, Ossoff said. “If you cannot get them when they’re young, you’re fighting a losing battle.”