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Sharp students see through the election rhetoric

BY GREG KOWALSKI
STAFF WRITER

All those politicians paying big bucks for TV ads slamming their opponents should take note: The kids at the Birmingham Covington School aren't buying them.

"They lie," said Prapti Shah.

"I don't like the attack ads," said Lizzie Davidson.

"You can't tell which are real and which aren't," said Hannah Sheppard.

The three are among the more than 200 students taking part in an election program designed to give them an understanding of the political process and take an interest in the issues.

Each of the students represents one of the major candidates: Gov. Jennifer Granholm, Dick DeVos, Joe Knollenberg, Nancy Skinner, John Cherry, Ruth Johnson, Mike Bouchard and Debbie Stabenow.

The students asked to be assigned a candidate based on their own personal preferences -- with some surprising results. These 11- and 12-year-olds have a range of political preferences that aren't necessarily a reflection of their parents.

"My mom is a straight-ticket Democrat. My dad is a Republican. I get both sides," said Iris Johnson. And by visiting candidate Web sites and doing research, she decided she wanted to be Lt. Gov. John Cherry.

(Gender did not play a part in a selection of candidate personalities. There are at least three Granholms -- one of them a boy -- among the students.)

"I feel John is better," Iris said. "I like the Democrat better."

[Zoom Photo](#)



They may look like students at the Covington School, but actually there are three Jennifer Granholms, a couple of Dick DeVoses and a few Joe Knollenbergs sitting on the floor. The kids adopted those roles to learn about the election process.

[Zoom Photo](#)



Kim Lakocy relates to Gov. Jennifer Granholm best.

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The students also watched the debates between DeVos and Granholm. The general consensus was that Granholm won, two debates to one.

Kim Lakocy adopted Granholm as her candidate after visiting the governor's Web site. "I thought her points were better." She likes the governor's stance on creating jobs and the environment.

Mallory Mareski, however, was drawn to the Republican side of the ticket.

"I wanted to be a Republican," she said, and chose to represent U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg. "I'm very happy with what I am."


"I agree with him," said Cooper Antett, about Knollenberg, the candidate he adopted. He likes Knollenberg's stance on the economy and environment.

"I did research," said Natalie Kozak, who adopted Bouchard. "I agree with the Republican side more. I agree with how they are helping business. I feel the Democrats are more in favor of government control."

The kids are participating in debates, and adding to the flavor of a real campaign, some kids are taking the roles of reporters and lobbyists.

"It's important because kids are the future," said Erin Haenni. "I got a lot out of this."

Originally published November 2, 2006

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