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## OAKLAND COUNTY

# Birmingham students to face off as candidates

November 5, 2006

**BY EMILIA ASKARI**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

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Ten-year-old Caity Dolan says the weirdest thing about this year's election season is there are days she feels like she actually is Gov. Jennifer Granholm.



**zoom**  
Mallory Mareski, left, 11, playing U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg, listens as Lizzie Davidson, 11, as gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos, expresses her views. The girls are students at Birmingham Covington School. (HUGH GRANNUM/Detroit Free Press)

"I've spent so much time reading about her and watching her, I actually think like her," says Caity of Beverly Hills, who is playing Granholm in a mock debate at school on Tuesday. "It feels pretty good."

In the run-up to Election Day, children across the country are getting a close look at how democracy works. At Birmingham Covington School, where Caity is a student, teachers chose fifth- and sixth-grade students to play Granholm and challenger Dick DeVos, U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow and challenger Mike Bouchard, and Rep. Joe Knollenberg and challenger Nancy Skinner.

Other students were assigned to play campaign managers, lobbyists and reporters.

Last week, both Skinner and Knollenberg visited the school to meet with their student alter egos.

"I think it's great. This is where it needs to start," Skinner said later. "You would be amazed at what these kids already knew. These kids are smart. They really get it."

It was the third time that Knollenberg has participated in Covington's election exercise. "It's amazing how this particular grouping of students really get revved up," he said.

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On Thursday in Elizabeth Cook's classroom, students honed their presentations for a final debate before school ballots are cast on Tuesday.

Emily Bice, 10, of Beverly Hills played Skinner. During a rebuttal to a question about Canadian trash, Emily admitted, "I might not have stated what I was going to do, but neither did Joe, mainly Joe didn't!"

She went on to assert her desire to protect the Great Lakes environment. "The Great Lakes hold 20% of the world's fresh water," Emily said. "If we get trash in them they're not going to be fresh any more."

Mallory Mareski, 11, of Bloomfield Township played Knollenberg. She focused on economic issues. "Small businesses are very, very important because there are many more small businesses than big businesses and we have to be careful to support them," she said.

Lizzie Davidson, 11, of Beverly Hills summed up what she's learned playing DeVos.

"We're not the ones voting in the real election, but the election is going to affect us because we all live in Michigan," she said.

Cook seized the opportunity to make a point with her students. "When it does come time for you to vote -- in about seven years -- if you remember nothing else from fifth and sixth grade, we hope you'll remember to vote."

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