

Metro Extra

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DEMOCRACY IN ACTION



GERRY MELFONDEZ/THE STATE

Nursery Road Elementary student Shaeley McMahon, left, laughs with Irmo High School students, from left, Courtney Ward, Sallie McKenzie and Rebecca Band during a voter registration drive Monday at the high school. Nursery Road students helped register the new voters as part of a First Amendment project.

Young students conduct voter registration drive

Program run by Nursery Road Elementary pupils targets Irmo teens

By BILL ROBINSON
Staff Writer

Somewhere, the founding fathers are smiling.

How could they not be, with the civics lesson that Nursery Road Elementary School students taught 168 older counterparts Monday at Irmo High School?

For the third consecutive year, children from the Lexington-Richland 5 elementary school conducted a voter registration drive targeting Irmo High teens.

It was difficult to tell who was having more fun putting a basic democratic principle into practice.

"The Irmo kids really seemed to enjoy themselves," said Sarah Shealy, Nursery Road's librarian. "They did a good job of making our students feel what they were doing is important."

As they entered the school library, converted into a Yankee Doodle Dandy of a locale to take another step into adulthood, the Irmo High students were

greeted by third-graders and instructed to sign in on computers with monitors painted red, white and blue.

Students who are 18, or who will reach that age in the next several months, were encouraged to participate.

"I think it's great they are getting interested in voting at a really young age," Irmo High senior Rebecca Band said. "They seem really excited. It's cute."

The next stop was a table where the prospective voters declared where they live and were handed an envelope addressed to the appropriate voter registration office where their application should be mailed — courtesy of a free stamp provided by the Nursery Road crew.

Vlad Steere, an ROTC cadet who immigrated to the United States from Russia at age 9, said he took the registration seriously.

"I see it, eventually, as a chance to get out there and say what I feel about who runs the government," the senior said.

At a third table, fifth-graders guided the high schoolers through the process of filling out a registration form. Irmo students displayed their driver's licenses to prove their age eligibility.

Caroline Garris, 11, said she told Irmo students that registering to vote is important "because you are exercising

your rights as an American."

"If you don't vote, then you should not complain," Caroline said, adding that she thinks some people don't register when they turn 18 "because they don't want to grow up."

The registration drive is among dozens of citizenship lessons children are learning at Nursery Road, one of four elementary schools in the country designated as a "First Amendment Project School" by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the First Amendment Center.

The organizations sponsored a grant program targeting curriculum changes "designed to transform how schools teach and practice the rights and responsibilities of citizenship that frame civic life in our democracy."

Principal Mary Kennerly saw the First Amendment project as a way to build community in a school with a diverse population.

Kennerly said she believes her students have gained an appreciation of "the extreme importance of voting. They understand there is a procedure that must be followed in order to exercise that right. I think you will see they will be voters as adults."

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