



# NEWS

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## **NYC PARENTS MAKE HISTORY BY VOTING IN FIRST PUBLIC INTERNET ELECTION IN U.S.**

*Grassroots Initiative, the NYC Department of Education and Election-America Team Up to Revitalize Participation with Landmark Community & Citywide Education Council Elections*

In a bold step forward to increase access and to encourage parent participation in this year's Community and Citywide Education Council (CEC) elections, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) has moved voting entirely online. The change is not just a reinvention of the CEC elections, it is history in the making. The state-of-the-art elections, which begin with an advisory or "straw" vote from April 6-22 at the new website [powertotheparents.org](http://powertotheparents.org), will be the first public elections in U.S. history to be held exclusively on the Web.

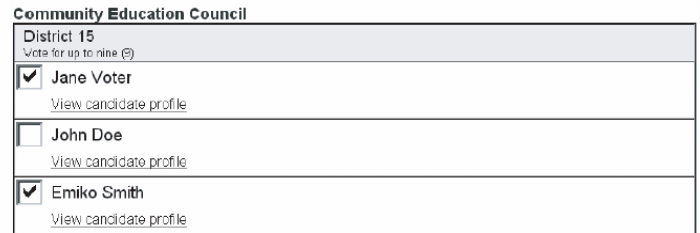
"These elections are the future of democracy in America," said Chris Backert of Election-America, the technology company running the CEC's online voting process. "Internet voting ensures that hard-working families, who don't have the time to make it to the polls, aren't shut out of some of the most important decisions affecting their lives."

The CECs are parental advisory boards that advise the DOE on how to better serve the City's roughly 1.1 million public school children and their communities. The upcoming CEC vote will encompass 34 separate elections, one for each of the City's 32 Community School Districts, as well as for the Citywide Council on High Schools and Citywide Council on Special Education.

This year, more than 500 candidates applied for seats on these Councils. The winners will be determined over two rounds of voting. From April 6-22, 2009, each household with a public school child may cast a single "straw" or advisory vote for the candidates running for either their local CEC or for a Citywide Council. After the results of this "straw vote" are tabulated and posted online, the President, Secretary, and Treasurer of the PA/PTA of each of the City's over 1,400 schools - collectively referred to as "Parent Selectors" - will cast their votes from

May 12-14, 2009 to decide the official winners of the elections. Combined, the two rounds of elections will produce one of the largest public Internet voting projects in history.

This year's CEC elections are also the most accessible elections ever held in the United States. The online voting site, *powertotheparents.org*, is available in nine languages (English, Haitian Creole, Russian, Spanish, Chinese, Urdu, Bengali, Korean and Arabic), compliant with accessibility standards (Section 508 and WCAG), and available from any Internet enabled computer.



*A screenshot of the online voting site at powertotheparents.org*

Online voting will be available 24 hours a day for the entire duration of both rounds of voting. More than 200 public libraries and learning centers across New York's five boroughs have made computers available for individuals who may not have internet access at home. In addition, a number of schools have also made computers available for parents to use. Staff will provide assistance to individuals who may not be computer-literate.

A toll-free election hotline (1-877-NYC-VOTE) is currently operating to assist any individuals who have difficulty voting and/or need to identify a location where they can access a computer. Google maps are used to identify free internet sites within a short distance of addresses anywhere in New York City.

Information about the elections was sent home with all children in New York City public schools. Outreach is also being distributed through more than 1,000 community-based organizations, 500 churches and houses of faith, 220 public libraries and learning centers, 150 community centers, and more than 100 elected officials. A new public service announcement (available online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Dgfnf0uTXPQ>) is being broadcast on local television and former Mayor Ed Koch has also recorded a reminder message that will go out to via automated calls to all student households.

"Our goal is to make voting as simple and easy as possible," said Jeff S. Merritt, the President and Founder of Grassroots Initiative, the non-profit organization coordinating candidate and voter assistance for the CEC election. "We're here to help every public school family in the City vote in this election. The more parents who vote, the better our students will be served."

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## **Quick History of Internet Voting**

### **Public elections**

- In 2000, an Internet voting pilot run by the federal government had 91 votes in the presidential election.
- In 2008, Okaloosa County in Florida ran a pilot program collecting 93 votes using Internet enabled kiosks in the presidential election.

### **Non-public elections**

- In 2000, the Alaska Republican Party offered mail and internet voting in the presidential primary: 35 votes were cast over the Internet
- In 2000, the Arizona Democratic Party offered on-site, mail and internet voting in the presidential primary: 35,678 votes were cast over the Internet
- In 2004, the Michigan Democratic Party offered on-site, mail and internet voting in the presidential primary: 46,543 votes were cast over the Internet

### ***Progress in Paving the Way for Online Elections beyond NYC***

- Legislation on Internet voting has been introduced in AL, FL, WA and MO.
- Legislation for research and Internet voting trials have been introduced in CO, HI, MI, MN, NM, OR, and TX.
- Three states have authorized online voter registration (CA, WA, AZ).