

Japan's largest television station to feature MP-sponsored Kids Voting Minnesota program

Reporter and camera-man Yasuo Taguchi of Tokyo, Japan, has gone on assignment in Baghdad to cover the Iraq war, and in the United States to report on Hurricane Katrina and Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. On Thursday, his challenge was facing enormously excited fifth-graders at Duluth's Homecroft Elementary school who participate in the MP-sponsored Kids Voting Minnesota curriculum.

Minnesota Power is the founding sponsor of Kids Voting Minnesota, a grassroots, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to educating Minnesota youth about voting rights and responsibilities.

Kids Voting has caught the attention of Japan's largest, most influential television and radio network—Nippon Hoso Kyokai (NHK). NHK sent Taguchi and Producer Nami Kodaka of NHK's Washington, D.C. bureau to Duluth to film students in teacher Carol Holm's class. They also interviewed Lars Sandstrom, Kids Voting Minnesota's executive director. They're producing a program for NHK's flagship morning show—"Good Morning, Japan."

NHK's goal is to increase voter turnout. Japan's voting rate is decreasing and it's not rare for the country to experience an election turnout of 30 percent, even in large urban areas.

"We want to motivate Japanese voters with this story," Kodaka said, noting that when she contacted officials of the national Kids Voting USA organization, they recommended a

focus on Kids Voting Minnesota. "As we look at the American presidential election, or any political campaign, it looks very active and different from Japanese elections. It is probably because regular folks—citizens—are enthusiastically supporting candidates and their policies.

Reporter Yasuo Taguchi films Homecroft Elementary fifth-graders participating in the MP-sponsored Kids Voting Minnesota curriculum for a program to be broadcast on "Good Morning, Japan."

"On the other hand, when we take a look at Japanese elections, they're much 'colder' than the election heat in the U.S.," Kodaka said. "We want to take a look at American education to find out where this difference between U.S. and Japan elections comes from."

"The interest demonstrated by Japan's largest broadcasting company shows that Kids Voting has attracted international attention," Sandstrom told Powergram. "And having the Duluth program chosen by NHK says a lot about the quality of the Kids Voting curriculum—and the teachers who teach it"

MP hosted a Kids Voting briefing for local media at the General Office Building Thursday. TV reporters interviewed Kodaka and Taguchi, as well as the children of Company employees Lynn Carlson of Human Resources (son Jacob) and ITS Systems' Bruce Toland (Barry and Aimee), all Homecroft students. The Japanese film crew also interviewed



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the Carlson and Toland families in their homes Thursday evening.

"We are so fortunate to have Kids Voting in our schools," Carlson said. "Our children have learned that they can make a difference by staying informed, asking questions, talking to others and eventually voting in the future."

Toland agreed. "I think it's great that the teachers at Homecroft are involving the kids in the election process," he said. "It's good for my kids to see the political process. It's preparing them to be good citizens by exercising their right to vote."

"It was an incredible experience," teacher Carol Holm told Powergram,

"and I'm so proud of my class. We told the reporters we also wanted to know about Japan, so they spent time telling my students about the country and Tokyo. The students made commercials for Duluth mayoral candidates Charlie Bell and Don Ness and performed them for the news crew."

Aimee, Barry and Jacob told Powergram they and their classmates are very excited about being featured by Japan's biggest broadcasting company. And they have a message for adults who don't vote: Every vote counts. They also quoted Abraham Lincoln: "The ballot is stronger than the bullet."