

At Chocachatti Elementary, young candidates have their say on election day

By Paulette Lash Ritchie, Times Correspondent
Thursday, September 17, 2009

BROOKSVILLE

The room was quiet, the computers in rows, separated by white cardboard privacy panels supplied by the Hernando County Supervisor of Elections Office.

The candidates were in the Chocachatti Elementary School cafeteria, attempting to convince their fellow students why they should vote for them.

Fifth-grader Allison Selg, 10, running for Student Government president, said she would like to see "more ice cream choices" and more colors for uniform shirts. She pledged to be a good listener. Her two opponents were Lia Panzner, 9, and Hailey Hatten, 8.

More ice cream flavors is a tough act to follow, but fourth-grader Lia was hoping her presidency would bring about a pajama day. She also suggested the fourth grade put on a dance at the end of the year for the fifth-graders.

She also would like to move lap-running from after lunch to before lunch. "We don't even have time to digest," she exclaimed.

Third-grader Hailey, new to the school, said, "I want to work hard for you." She would like to see more field days, more casual dress days and healthier students.

Her goal, she told the electorate, was to make Chocachatti the "best school in the United States."

The other morning speakers included vice presidential candidates fifth-grader Cami Lenart, 10, fourth-grader Noel Couto, 8, and third-grader Kailey Rybka, 8.

Students running for secretary were fifth-grader Emily Carr, 10, fourth-grader Jordyn Ranfone, 9, and third-grader Kailie Connelly, 8. There were two candidates for treasurer, fourth-grader Savannah Calhoun, 10, and third-grader Camila Majia, 8.

After about 45 minutes of speeches, students were directed to return to classes, while some of the school's youngest students began the daylong stream of voting in the media center computer lab.

Elizabeth Townsend, the Supervisor of Elections Office community relations coordinator, was at the school to oversee the election and hand out "I have voted" stickers.

This election is the first time a Hernando County school has used the elections office's option of an online vote. Students were given identification numbers as they arrived, which they entered into the computers. This revealed photos and names of the candidates and a box by each to make a selection. Voters were then directed to confirm the selections and cast their votes.

Chocachatti Elementary School has a microsociety coordinated by Kathryn Burrell, 44. Math lab teacher Matthew Goldrick, 38, is the facilitator of the student government. In the microsociety, Goldrick



Chocachatti Elementary fifth-grader Hannah Bocker, 11, casts her vote for using a new online system from the county's Supervisor of Elections Office.

explained, students experience a miniature society, which illustrates the world of jobs, economics, government and human interaction in a safe environment.

Students meet for 50-minute periods every Tuesday and Thursday. Those winning the election will act in their governing positions as their first micro-society jobs. Joining them will be representatives chosen from each class, the Chocachatti equivalent of a House of Representatives.

Townsend said the elections office, when there is no scheduling conflict, is willing to visit and help any requesting school with its elections. It can be online or she can bring voting machines and paper ballots.

There seemed to be a spirit of America at the school on this recent election day. It was Sept. 11.