

Kids Convention offers hands-on civics lessons

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Hundreds of children and their families gathered in uptown Charlotte Saturday to learn how to cast a ballot on a voting machine, test their knowledge of civics and design mock campaign posters and buttons.

The event, dubbed the Kids Convention, was designed to help give students a hands-on lesson in how the political process works while also generating buzz before the Democratic National Convention coming to Charlotte in September.

The event was put on by the Charlotte in 2012 host committee, civics organization GenerationNation and the EpiCentre, which provided space for the program. About 1,000 children and their families were expected to attend the four-hour event.

Activity stations were set up to appeal to children and families. At one station, students competed against their parents in a quiz show to see who knew the most about the political process. At another, Trinity Metcalf got a red-white-and-blue butterfly painted on her face.

Students also drew signs that will be included in welcome packages for convention delegates.

While the DNC host committee was an event organizer and had information and merchandise about the convention, officials stressed the activities were nonpartisan. Suzi Emmerling, a spokeswoman with the host committee, said Kids Convention was meant to help share more education about the democratic system and not promote one political ideology.

The Kids Convention was part of a series of events DNC organizers held in the past week to kick off so-called legacy programs on issues like healthy children and families and building a sustainable society.

Courtney Counts, who is leading volunteer efforts during the convention, said the host committee had been

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working with GenerationNation and other groups to come up with civic-themed programs for youth when the EpiCentre offered to host an event at their site. Saturday's event drew about 150 volunteers, the bulk of them 16- to 18-year-olds.

Aidan McConnell, 18, a volunteer with GenerationNation, said he thinks the Kids Convention and DNC will give students a chance to "exercise" the civics lessons they get in school.

Ten-year-old Autumn Chapman, for example, says she's learned about voting machines but had never seen one in person. On Saturday, the fourth-grader and other children got to use an actual voting booth to pick a design that may be used in some marketing leading up to the DNC.

Her older brother, Marcus, said he liked having an event focused on children, saying "our generation" will one day be in control.

"We'll have the future in our hands," he said.

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