



CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER

Early and Absentee Voting Procedures in Illinois

LESSON PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

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Early and Absentee Voting Procedures in Illinois

Lesson Plan and Activities

Grade Level: 6, 7, 8

Subject(s):

- Social Studies: United States Government, State Government, Local Government, Civics; and
- Language Arts: Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, Research.

Duration: 2 class sessions

Description: This lesson explains who can vote early and who is permitted to vote by absentee ballot, as well as the procedures for early and absentee voting in the state of Illinois.

Goals:

Illinois Learning Standards

A. Social Science: 14A, 14C; and

B. English/Language Arts: 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D; 3A, 3B, 3C; 4A; 5B.

Objectives:

1. Understand why early and absentee voting procedures exist.
2. Learn the procedures for early and absentee voting in Illinois.
3. Participate in a mock election to solidify understanding of early and absentee voting procedures.
4. Reflect on the effectiveness of early and absentee voting procedures.
5. Demonstrate knowledge in a post-activity writing assignment.

Materials:

1. Pen/pencil and paper
2. Blackboard or whiteboard and chalk or marker
3. A small box with a lid for holding student ballots in the mock election activity
4. Overhead projector, if desired

Pre-lesson Teacher Preparation

The topic for the mock election can be chosen prior to the lesson, so that ballots may be prepared in advance (see “Instructions for Main Activity” below). Also, student scenarios for the mock election, handouts or overheads with simplified procedural steps for voting, and the ballot collection box may also be prepared before the day of instruction. Additionally, teachers may wish to develop an absentee ballot application form, basically including designated spaces for students to fill in their names, home addresses, and descriptions of where in the classroom their desks or seats are located.

Instruction and Activities

Day 1: Simple Activity

Begin with a simple activity to engage students and to ensure that they will be able to relate to the content of the lesson.

- Ask students if they know when people will vote for the next President in the United States. (Election Day occurs on the first Tuesday following the first Monday of November; presidential elections occur every four years i.e. 2012, 2016, 2020 etc.)
- Next, ask students whether they know of someone who is a United States citizen who is currently overseas, either living in a different country, or perhaps serving in the United States military. Have several students share stories about people they know who are living overseas.
- Explain to the students that the people they know who are overseas may want to vote on Election Day but may still be overseas on that day. Going to a local polling place to cast a vote for President will not be possible for those people living overseas on Election Day.
- Next, explain that other people may wish to vote on Election Day but may not be able to do so. Provide examples, such as: someone may be observing a religious holiday on that day; someone may be sick or injured and in the hospital on that day; or someone may even be in jail on Election Day but still wish to cast his or her vote. See if students can suggest some other examples.
- Explain to the students that all the people in these hypothetical situations are United Citizens who deserve to have their voices heard and their votes counted. For those people who cannot vote at their polling place on Election Day and even for those who do not want to vote on the actual Election Day, procedures have been developed to allow participation in the electoral process.

Lecture

Absentee Voting in Illinois

A. Absentee Voters

Illinois voters may vote by absentee ballot. An Illinois voter may apply for an absentee ballot if he or she is expecting to be unable to vote on Election Day. Since August 17, 2009, it is not required for a voter to specify a reason for absence from the polling place on Election Day in order to obtain an absentee ballot. Registered voters may wish to vote by absentee ballot if they are:

- Expecting to be out of the county in which they reside on Election Day, such as due to a scheduled business trip or planned vacation;
- Unable to be present at the polls due to a physical incapacity, such as due to hospitalization or physical disability;
- Unable to be present at the polls due to observance of a religious holiday or practice;
- Serving on active duty in the United States military (spouses and dependents of active duty service members may also apply for absentee ballots);
- Temporarily living overseas; or
- Confined in jail pending acquittal or conviction of a crime.

Further information is available in the Illinois State Board of Elections pamphlet on Absentee Voting in Illinois which can be found at:

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<http://www.elections.state.il.us/Downloads/ElectionInformation/PDF/absevote.pdf> or
<http://www.elections.state.il.us/docDisplay.aspx?Doc=Downloads/ElectionInformation/PDF/absevote.pdf&Title=Absentee%20Voting>

To vote via absentee ballot, you must first contact your local election authority and request an application for an absentee ballot, which can be picked up in person or mailed; the application is not available electronically at the time of this writing. Once you have received and completed the application, it must then be turned in either:

- By mail, not more than 40 days nor less than 5 days prior to the election in question; or
- In person, not more than 40 days nor less than 1 day prior to the election.

B. Absentee Voting Process in Illinois

1. Obtain the proper application for an absentee ballot, either by mail or in person, from your local election authority (i.e., your county clerk or board of election commissioners). You can find the name and contact information of your election authority by entering your jurisdiction (county of residence) at the following website:
<http://www.elections.il.gov/ElectionAuthorities/ElecAuthorityList.aspx> (Demonstrate this for the students).
2. Fill out the application for an absentee ballot, including your name, home address, the address where you want the absentee ballot to be mailed, party affiliation if the election is a primary election, and your signature. Your signature attests to the accuracy of the information provided on the application.
3. Your completed application can be delivered to the election authority either by mail or in person. If you deliver the application in person to the election authority and the application is deemed complete, you may vote via absentee ballot in the election authority's office. If you mail the application, the election authority will send your absentee ballot by mail to the address specified on your application.
4. You must vote your absentee ballot in secret, sealing the ballot in a provided envelope once you have completed it. You must sign a certification on the back attesting that you cast your vote in secret. If you are unable to complete the ballot without assistance, you may receive assistance from your spouse, parent, child or sibling, and the person who assists you must sign and provide their address on the ballot certification envelope. [Note: If someone helps you fill out your absentee ballot, they are not permitted to try to convince you or to intimidate you to vote a certain way. They are not permitted to mark or tamper with your absentee ballot in such a way that is inconsistent with your intent. They are also not permitted to give, lend, or promise to give or lend any money or other valuable consideration to you in an attempt to influence your vote. Any of these acts are considered **felonies**, and anyone convicted of these acts may be imprisoned and/or required to pay a fine.]
5. Next, you must either personally deliver or mail the ballot to your election authority. If you are unable to deliver the ballot, e.g. due to hospitalization or other incapacitation, you may authorize, in writing, a spouse, parent, child, sibling, or licensed motor carrier to deliver your completed and sealed absentee ballot to the election authority.

Early Voting in Illinois

A. Early Voters

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Illinois voters are permitted to vote prior to Election Day without having to provide a specific reason or excuse. Quite a few people vote early. In the 2006 General Election, nearly 9% of the votes in Illinois were cast prior to Election Day, including both early voting and absentee voting. Provisions for early voting were approved by the 2005-2006 Illinois General Assembly in Public Act 94-0492, amending the Illinois Compiled Statutes by the addition of 10 ILCS 5/Article 19A - Early Voting By Personal Appearance. Some 37 states currently allow early voting in some form. Note that legislatures are active in changing voting rules.

People may wish to vote early for a variety of reasons. For instance, people may wish to avoid the crowds or they may have busy work days scheduled on Election Day. For whatever reason, people may wish to vote early so they can be sure to cast ballots and have their voices heard in the election even though they would be unable to vote on the actual Election Day.

Early voting in Illinois is held during the 22nd day through the 5th day preceding an election. However, the votes cast by early voters are not counted until Election Day itself, at which time those votes are counted along with the votes cast on actual Election Day. Voters who cast ballots during the early voting period for a given election may not vote again on Election Day in that election.

In order to vote early, you must personally appear at a designated early voting center. If you are unable to appear in person at a voting center, you may make application for an absentee ballot, with no need to provide a reason or excuse. The locations of early voting centers are announced by election authorities across the state. When you appear to vote at an early voting center, you must fill out an application and display a valid identification card which is issued by a government agency and includes a photograph. The requirement to present valid identification is intended to prevent voter fraud. Without this requirement, someone could go to an early voting center pretending to be you, vote in your name, and prevent you from being allowed to vote on Election Day since “your” ballot would have already been cast.

B. Early Voting Process in Illinois

1. Determine the location of the nearest early voting center by contacting your local election authority. Visit the website <http://www.elections.il.gov/ElectionAuthorities/ElecAuthorityList.aspx> where you can enter your county of residence and retrieve the name and contact information of your local election authority.
2. Appear personally at the early voting center between the 22nd and the 5th day preceding Election Day for the election in which you are voting.
3. Fill out the application to vote early and present a valid identification card with photograph.
4. Receive your ballot and cast your vote, either by paper ballot or by electronic touch screen ballot, depending on the equipment provided at the particular early voting center.
5. Your vote will remain uncounted and secret until Election Day, at which time it will be counted together with all the votes cast on Election Day itself.

Instructions for Main Activity

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Students will participate in a mock election to affirm their understanding of the early and absentee voting procedures.

- Choose an issue for the mock election; for example, the election could be a mock political election between a Democrat and a Republican, an election for what type of food should be served at a class party, an election for class president or for a class mascot, or an election for a movie to be played in class one day.
- Once you have decided on the topic of the mock election, prepare ballots accordingly, making enough ballots such that every student will receive one. The ballots should be simple in design, with a sentence of instruction, e.g. “Fill in the circle next to the candidate/food/mascot/movie for which you wish to vote,” followed by a list of the candidates, including a space to place the vote, e.g. a small circle to fill in.
- Set a date for Election Day. If the Simple Activity and Lecture are done on a Monday, for example, perhaps set the class Election Day on Friday of that same week, at which time the activities of Day 2 of this lesson will take place. Separating the days of the lesson will give students enough time to complete their voting procedures prior to Election Day if they are going to vote early or by absentee ballot.

Roles:

The teacher will serve as the local election authority during this election.

Each student will receive a slip of paper with a voter scenario that they will be role-playing for the activity. Since the purpose of this activity is for students to understand early and absentee voting procedures, about half to three-quarters of the class should have scenarios that will require them to vote early or by absentee voting. Examples of scenarios to distribute to students include:

- You are a soldier fighting in the United States military. You want to vote in the election, but you will be overseas on Election Day and you have no way of getting to an early voting center prior to Election Day.
- You and your family are celebrating a religious holiday that falls on Election Day this year, and as a result you will be unable to vote on Election Day itself. You are not sure if you’ll be able to find a ride to an early voting center, so you’d like to be able to vote by filling out a ballot you receive through the mail.
- You have been living in Europe for the past couple of months with your grandmother. You want to vote in the election, but you have no way of getting to an early voting center and you will not be back in the United States on Election Day.
- You recently broke your leg and are hobbling around on crutches. You do not want to maneuver among the crowds that will be at the polls on Election Day; you would prefer to vote before Election Day, when there will not be so many people at the voting center.
- You are very busy at your job and you know that you have important meetings and conferences to attend on Election Day. You would like to vote before Election Day, but you do not like the idea of filling out an application for an absentee ballot and waiting for a ballot in the mail.
- Your family is planning an overseas vacation and you will be traveling on Election Day. Your parents are planning on voting early and you figure it would be a good idea for you to do the same.

Be creative when designing scenarios! Scenarios may be repeated among different students; some students should receive a scenario in which they are role-playing regular voters who will vote in person on Election Day. Help students to figure out which voting procedure (i.e. early

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voting, absentee voting, or regular voting) they will need to follow to make sure they cast a ballot in the election. Review the various voting procedures with the students. Use an overhead projector, a chalkboard or a handout to go over the following simplified steps:

Absentee voting -- when you cannot vote on actual Election Day and also cannot make it to an early voting center:

1. Obtain an application for an absentee ballot from the teacher. (Teacher has prepared applications in advance.)
2. Fill out the application form with your name, home address, the address at which you wish to receive the absentee ballot (use your seat number or a description of the location of your seat in the classroom), and your signature. If a parent or sibling assists you in filling out the application, have them sign the application form, too.
3. Deliver the completed application to your teacher, who will either approve the application right away and hand you your absentee ballot or deliver the absentee ballot to you at a later time.
4. Cast your vote on the absentee ballot, fold the ballot in half, sign the outside of the ballot in the designated spot to indicate that you kept your promise to vote in secret. Put your completed ballot in the designated box on the teacher's desk. The deadline for submitting your absentee ballot is the day before Election Day. The ballot box will not be opened until Election Day.

Early voting -- when you cannot or do not wish to vote on actual Election Day and wish to vote early at an early voting center in person:

1. Ask your teacher where the early voting center is located and when you can vote there. (Example: Early voting may be allowed in the hallway during a homeroom period on certain days before Election Day).
2. Go to the designated early voting center during one of the designated times. Bring an ID with your picture on it. Your teacher will give you an application form for early voting after checking your ID.
3. Fill out the application form and return it to your teacher who will look it over and then give you a ballot.
4. Cast your vote on the early voter ballot, fold the ballot in half, and return the ballot to your teacher who will place the ballot in the designated ballot collection box.

Note: The deadline for early voting should be several days prior to Election Day. In Illinois, all early votes must be cast at least five days in advance of the actual Election Day.

Regular voting -- for voters voting in person on Election Day:

On Election Day, pick up a ballot from your teacher at the designated time.

Cast your vote, fold the ballot in half, and place the ballot in the designated ballot collection box.

Instruction and Activities

Day 2: Election Day

Once all regular voters have finished casting their votes on Election Day, the teacher will tally all the votes from absentee, early, and regular voters and will then announce the winning candidate.

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In order to represent election results to students an alternative, graphical format, the teacher may wish to prepare a bar graph showing the number of votes cast for each candidate for display on the overhead projector. A second simple bar graph could be prepared showing the percentage of votes cast for each candidate.

Follow-up Activity

Follow up on the mock election activity with either verbal or written reflections and reactions of the students. Possible questions include:

- Did you know about early and absentee voting before this lesson?
- Do you think your parents know about early and absentee voting?
- Were the early and absentee voting procedures easy, difficult, fun, frustrating?
- Do you think it is a good idea for people to be able to vote early or by absentee ballot?
- Do you think your voice was heard as a regular voter? early voter? absentee voter?
- Do you feel as if the different voting procedures are fair, or are there some ways in which the procedures are not fair or could be improved upon?

Review various aspects of the early and absentee voting procedures, such as why early voters must present a valid photo ID to receive a ballot, how voters can determine where an early voting center is located, and from whom absentee voters can receive help when filling out their application for an absentee ballot or the ballot itself. Encourage students to go through the procedures for early and absentee voting with their parents and siblings. It is useful to be aware of these voting procedures which ensure that voters who are unable to vote on Election Day still get to have their voices heard.

Optional Final Assignment

Direct students to write a letter to a hypothetical person who is not planning to vote in the next election because she or he will be busy on Election Day. Students may share their knowledge of early and absentee voting procedures with this person, while cultivating persuasive writing skills in an effort to convince the person to vote even though not on the actual Election Day. Papers may be graded for understanding of the lesson material as well as for proper grammar.

Resources:

- IICLE Guide on Election Law
- Illinois State Board of Elections <http://www.elections.il.gov>
Info on absentee voting: <http://www.elections.il.gov/Votinginformation/AbsenteeVoting.aspx>
and <http://www.elections.state.il.us/Downloads/ElectionInformation/PDF/absevote.pdf>
Info on early voting:
<http://www.elections.il.gov/Downloads/ElectionInformation/PDF/EarlyVoting.pdf>
- Another website providing information about long-distance voting in Illinois:
<http://www.longdistancevoter.org/illinois>
- Another website providing general information about voting in Illinois:
<http://www.vote411.org/bystateresult.php?state=IL>