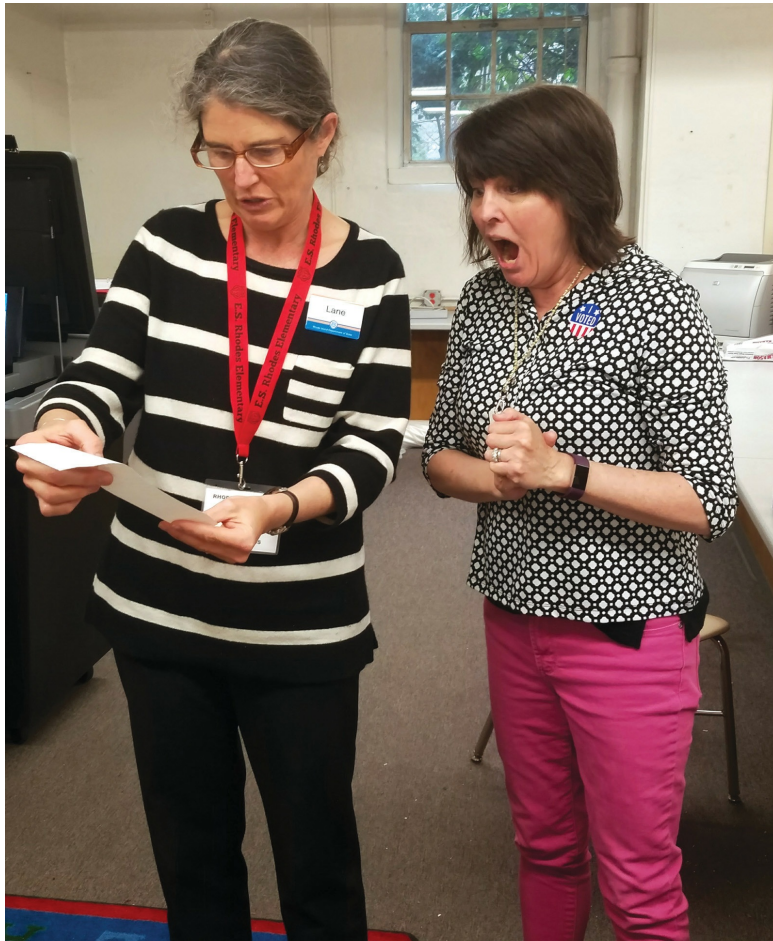


The votes are in: Horseshoe crab prevails as Rhodes mascot

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THE VOTES ARE IN: Lane Sparkman, representing the office of the Secretary of State, gives fourth-grade teacher, Susan Weber, the results of the school-wide election. The horseshoe crabs took the win by a landslide, 169 to 40 votes.

By Jen Cowart

For months, the fourth grade students at E.S. Rhodes Elementary School in Susan Weber's and Stephanie Pearson's classes have been working hard researching, educating and lobbying their school community for a change in the traditional school mascot, the tiger, for a more meaningful mascot, the horseshoe crab.

On Wednesday, April 26, the fourth-graders were on the edge of their seats during the final phase of their project: voting day.

A representative from the office of the Secretary of State, Lane Sparkman, brought an authentic voting machine and real ballots, created for the Rhodes voting event, to the school and each student and staff member was given the opportunity to place their vote, as well as the opportunity to proudly show that they had voted, by wearing the red, white and blue "I voted" sticker afterwards.

Much like during a real government election, at the end of the morning, as the votes were tallied, Weber and

Pearson were both nervous, awaiting the final count, hopeful that all their students' hard work, time and effort would pay off for them, hoping the vote would go their way.

In what was deemed a landslide victory, the horseshoe crabs won with a resounding 169 votes for the change, and 40 votes from those who preferred the idea of keeping with tradition, for a total of 209 votes.

"Kudos to you for doing this with your students," said Sparkman, who was impressed with such an impactful, real-life lesson on government processes and students affecting change both locally and in their wider community. "This is such a good lesson for them."

Now that the vote has taken place, the school will take steps in the coming months to transition spirit-wear and other items that depict the mascot on them, over to the horseshoe crab. An upcoming trip has been planned down the road from the school, to Stillhouse Cove, a local spot where horseshoe crabs come to lay their eggs, so that the students can see one reason why the fourth-graders fought for the change in mascots. It is their hope that the new focus on educating the local community about the importance of protecting the horseshoe crab, will ultimately help to affect changes in environmental legislation which would help to increase their declining numbers.