Like many kids, the students in teacher Linda Monkoski’s fifth-grade class had never thought too much about the U.S. Constitution. But last fall, Monkoski asked them what they thought the Constitution needed to change.

“I was really excited to get to work on such a big project and for our voices to be heard,” says 11-year-old Cami Martin.

The students at Buckingham Elementary School spent weeks brainstorming. They researched existing amendments and debated new proposals.

For Cami and her classmates, all that hard work was about to pay off.

New Ideas

America’s Founders wrote the Constitution in 1787. It laid out a plan for how the national government would be run. That system is still in place today. The Founders also outlined a process for making changes to the Constitution. Over time, 27 amendments have been added, the most recent in 1992.

The students’ job was to come up with ideas for a 28th amendment. They focused on making elections fairer. For one thing, they believe that members of Congress should be limited to two terms, like the president. Congress is the lawmaking branch of the U.S. government. It is made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Members of the House currently serve two-year terms. Members of the Senate serve six-year terms. But all members of Congress can be reelected over and over. Some have held their positions for more than 40 years. The kids think more new people should be able to serve.

“We need fresh ideas,” says 11-year-old Colin Williamson.

A Team Effort

The kids worked together to write an essay outlining their proposal. The class was among 10 finalists chosen to present their ideas to three judges at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.

“It was pretty scary up there,” says Colin.

This past January, the students found out that they had won first place!

Learning About Laws

The class used its prize money to take a field trip to Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania. They met with a state senator and learned how laws are passed.

The victory doesn’t mean the amendment will actually be added to the Constitution. But Izzy Murray, 11, says the project taught her a lot about our government.

“I’ve been really into politics and the Constitution,” she explains. “It definitely made me more passionate.”

—by Rebecca Zissou

CONSTITUTION DAY

Constitution Day is SEPTEMBER 17.

On that day in 1787, our nation’s Founders signed the Constitution. It had taken them nearly four months to write.

Fifth-graders from Buckingham Elementary School present their ideas.