



The following students were honored as "Most Caring" during Colonial Heights Elementary School's Character Counts program: (top row, left to right) first-graders Aniya Luke, Sierra Stoker, Cassandra Campos-Martinez, Elisabeth Reynolds, Jayden Perez, Megan Williamson, Jeviah Ramirez, (front row) kindergarten students Heaven Mendez, Orlando Trevino, Logan Fernandez, David Martinez, Yessenia Trejo and Rayleigh Perry. Not pictured is Anna Havard.

GOP eyes new election laws

STEVE PEOPLES, AP
BOSTON (AP) — From Wisconsin to Pennsylvania, GOP officials who control legislatures in states that supported President Barack Obama are considering changing state laws that give the winner of a state's popular vote all of its Electoral College votes, too. Instead, these officials want Electoral College votes to be divided proportionally, a move that could transform the way the country elects its president.

Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus endorsed the idea this week, and other Republican leaders support it, too, suggesting that the effort may be gaining momentum. There are other signs that Republican state legislators, governors and veteran political strategists are seriously considering making the shift as the GOP looks to rebound from presidential candidate Mitt Romney's Electoral College shellacking and the demographic changes that threaten the party's long-term political prospects.

"It's something that a lot of states that have been consistently blue that are fully controlled red ought to be looking at," Priebus told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, emphasizing that each state must decide for itself.

Democrats are outraged at the potential change. Obama won the popular vote

with 65.9 million votes, or 51.1 percent, to Romney's 60.9 million, or 47.2 percent, and won the Electoral College by a wide margin, 332-206 electoral votes. It's unclear whether he would have been re-elected under the new system, depending upon how many states adopted the change.

While some Republican officials warn of a political backlash, GOP lawmakers in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania are already lining up behind proposals that would allocate electoral votes by congressional district or something similar.

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder told The Associated Press on Tuesday that he "could go either way" on the change and doesn't plan to push it. But he said it's a reasonable issue to debate and that he prefers that leaders discuss it well before the next presidential election.

"It could be done in a thoughtful (way) over the next couple years and people can have a thoughtful discussion," Snyder said.

Republican leaders in the Michigan Statehouse have yet to decide whether to embrace the change there. But state Rep. Peter Lund, a Republican who introduced a bill to change the allocation system two years ago, said some Republicans might be more receptive to his bill this year

following the election.

"We never really pushed it before," he said, adding that the bill wasn't designed to help one party more than the other.

Democrats aren't convinced. And they warned of political consequences for Republicans who back the shift — particularly those governors up for re-election in 2014, who include the governors of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, among others.

"This is nothing more than election-rigging," said Michigan Democratic Chairman Mark Brewer.

Each state has the authority to shape its own election law. And in at least seven states — Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Florida and North Carolina — Republicans control both chambers of the state legislature and the governor's office.

Already, Maine and Nebraska have moved away from a winner-take-all system to one that allocates electoral votes based on congressional district.

"This is a concept that's got a lot of possibility and a lot of potential," said Washington-based Republican strategist Phil Musser, acknowledging that the debate would "incite different levels of partisan acrimony." Musser also predicted that more pressing economic issues would likely take priority in most Republican-led statehouses.

In Pennsylvania, Senate Republican leader Dominic Pileggi this week renewed his call for the Republican-controlled Legislature to revamp the way it awards electoral votes by using a method based on the popular vote that would have given Romney eight of the state's 20 votes.

Democrats quickly criticized it as partisan scheme.

"It is difficult to find the words to describe just how evil this plan is," said Pennsylvania state Sen. Daylin Leach, a Democrat. "It is an obscene scheme to cheat by rigging the elections."

Gov. Tom Corbett, who supported a related proposal from Pileggi last year, had not seen the new plan and could not say whether he supports the new version, the Republican governor's spokesman Kevin Harley said.

In Wisconsin, Republican Gov. Scott Walker has said that changing how electoral votes are allocated was an "interesting idea" but that it's not one of his priorities, nor has he de-

ecided whether he supports such a change.

It's gotten a lukewarm reception in the Republican-controlled Legislature as well. No proposal has been introduced yet and no lawmaker has announced any plans to do so, but the state Assembly speaker, Robin Vos, first proposed the change back in 2007.

"I am open to that idea," Vos said in December as lawmakers prepared for the start of their session. "But I would have to hear all the arguments."

All 10 of the state's Electoral College votes went to Obama last fall under the current system. If they were awarded based on the new system, the votes would have been evenly split between Obama and Romney.

Democratic Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett sent an email plea urging people to sign a petition against the change: "We can't sit silently by as they try to manipulate the democratic process for political advantage," Barrett

wrote. "We can't let them attack the very democratic institutions and rights that others have sacrificed so much to gain — just because they don't believe they can win in a fair election fight."

So far, Republicans have only advocated for the change in states that have supported Democrats in recent elections. The view is predictably different in states where the Republican nominee is a cinch to win.

"The Electoral College has served the country quite well," said Louisiana GOP Chairman Roger Villere, who doubles as a national party vice chairman.

He continued: "This is coming from states where it might be an advantage, but I'm worried about what it means down the road. This is a system that has worked. That doesn't mean we can't talk about changes, but we have to be very careful about any actions we might take."

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