



Texas Association of Community Schools

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Texas Educators Vote Update

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Kudos to those of you who have already registered your district to participate in the “create a culture of voting” program. The number is rising every day. For those of you who haven’t registered yet, it is not too late! The primary election is just over 12 weeks away, so there is still time. Did you know that 90% of the Texas legislature is chosen in the primary election? If you wait until the general election, you will have missed an important window. Click here (and scroll down) to register your district! { HYPERLINK "<http://texaseducatorsvote.com/participating-districts/>" \t "_blank" }

Today, we want to focus on some of the information that is outlined in the “Care Enough to Vote” practical voting guide. You will find this document on the website here: { HYPERLINK "http://texaseducatorsvote.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/voters-guide-9_30_15.pdf" \t "_blank" } under the heading “What Texas Educators Can/Can’t Legally Do.”

Here are a handful of Do’s and Don’ts

- Public resources, no matter how small, cannot be used to advocate for or against an issue or candidate.
- Do not use a school district’s email to advocate for or against an issue or candidate. **School email may be used to inform staff and patrons of elections, dates, and times for voting early and on Election Day, and to encourage a culture of participation.** You may certainly use your personal email account to advocate, but **be sure you don’t access your personal account from a school computer or device.**
- Do not use a school district’s social networks to advocate for or against an issue or candidate. **School social networks may be used to inform staff and patrons of elections, dates and times for voting and to encourage a culture of civic participation.** You may certainly use your personal social network accounts to advocate, but again, **be sure not to access your social network account on a school device.**
- Do not use a school district’s computers, photocopiers, telephones, facsimile, electronic printer or any other machine to advocate for or against an issue or candidate. You may use your personal equipment for this use.
- Do not use state or local government time or state or local government equipment to work on an individual’s political campaign. You may advocate for or against an issue or candidate before or after work hours.

- Do not use public funds in connection with a political campaign.
- Officers and employees should not use their official authority to interfere with or attempt to influence the outcome of any election.
- Do not be demanding or discourteous. By local board policy, many school districts mandate that an employee's participation in community, political, or employee organization activities shall be entirely voluntary and shall not: (1) interfere with the employee's performance of assigned duties and responsibilities; (2) result in any political or social pressure being placed on students, parents, or staff; or (3) involve treading on the employee's position or title with the district.

Observations about Voting Patterns

- In recent years, many elections for state representatives have been won or lost by 100 votes or less. **Every individual's vote does matter.** In 2010, State Representative Donna Howard (D-Austin) won re-election by only four votes out of about 52,000 votes cast.
- **Texas ranks dead last in voter turnout** according to a study done by the Annette Strauss Institute at The University of Texas at Austin. **This means that a small minority of citizens are making decisions about our representation.** This is especially true in the primary elections.
- The lack of awareness of election dates is a greater issue for the primary election than the general election. **Voters who are questioned at the polls said that information about early voting dates and locations could enhance turnout.**
- The U.S. Constitution places the power to govern in the hands of our elected officials. This power is temporarily returned to citizens at regular intervals – especially on Election Day. **Ignoring our responsibility to vote is, by default, giving up the maintenance of our freedom.**
- **About 90% of the time, the legislative candidate who wins the Early Vote wins the election. Promote voting early, especially the first week when the lines are short.**
- Teachers often find it difficult to get to polling places on Election Day. **Early voting provides an easy opportunity to vote at a convenient time.**
- **There is a difference between encouraging civic participation and advocacy. Discussing or celebrating our democracy, right to vote, freedoms of expression and association is not prohibited. Public employees do not shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.**

There are organizations that do much of what you (and we) can't do! For example, Texas Parent PAC(<http://www.txparentpac.com/>) is a Pro-Public School Political Action Committee. They endorse and help elect candidates who "reflect traditional mainstream American values that honor and support children and families, quality public education, strong communities, unlimited opportunities, and maximum civic participation in our democracy." Our site links to them and other groups that provide information about specific candidates and their views on specific issues relevant to

public education.

Thank you again for your commitment to creating a culture of voting in your communities!

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