

REPORT ON THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL VOTER REGISTRATION SURVEY

Spring 2018, League of Women Voters of Texas

Introduction

The League of Women Voters of Texas appreciates the hard work of educators who use many different methods and tools to provide voter registration opportunities for high school students. These efforts to empower student voters aren't always visible in reported counts of specific voter registration forms. This survey provides some insight into the many ways Texas schools, rural and urban, small and large, provide voter registration opportunities for their students. The League completed this survey to acknowledge and support the important work of educators who are creating a culture of voting in Texas. We appreciate the high schools in Texas that collaborate with local Leagues to register student voters. The League envisions a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate.

Background

Since 1985, Texas high schools have been required to offer voter registration opportunities to eligible students at least twice annually. The law states "each principal of a public or private high school or the principal's designee shall serve as a deputy registrar for the county."¹ The law also requires "an officially prescribed registration application form" be offered to each student twice a year along with a notice explaining how the students may deliver the applications. This law was an attempt to increase voter registration and turnout among young voters. The Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP) recently found that 28% of public high schools in Texas with 20 or more seniors requested voter registration forms from the Secretary of State in 2016.²

The League of Women Voters of Texas recognizes that the formal request of voter registration forms through the Secretary's office is just one mechanism for registering students, and we believe that many schools are encouraging students to vote through other means. For example, a number of League chapters work with local high schools to offer voter registration drives and voter registration forms at various points throughout the school year. In such instances, the school would be offering voter registration opportunities without procuring their forms through the state mechanism. To better understand high school voter registration efforts across the state, the League of Women Voters of Texas (LWVTX) surveyed public high school principals in the spring of 2018.

¹ Texas Election Code - ELEC § 13.046. High School Deputy Registrars <https://codes.findlaw.com/tx/election-code/elec-sect-13-046.html>

² High School Student Voter Registration: JAMES SLATTERY Senior Staff Attorney, Texas Civil Rights Project JULY 2018 How Texas still fails to engage the next generation of voters
<https://texascivilrightsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018-HSVR-Compliance-Report.pdf>

Through our efforts, we found that principals and schools are indeed offering a variety of voter registration opportunities. A number of schools reported their best practices, and we received calls for streamlined methods and increased emphasis on the importance of voting.

Data and Methods

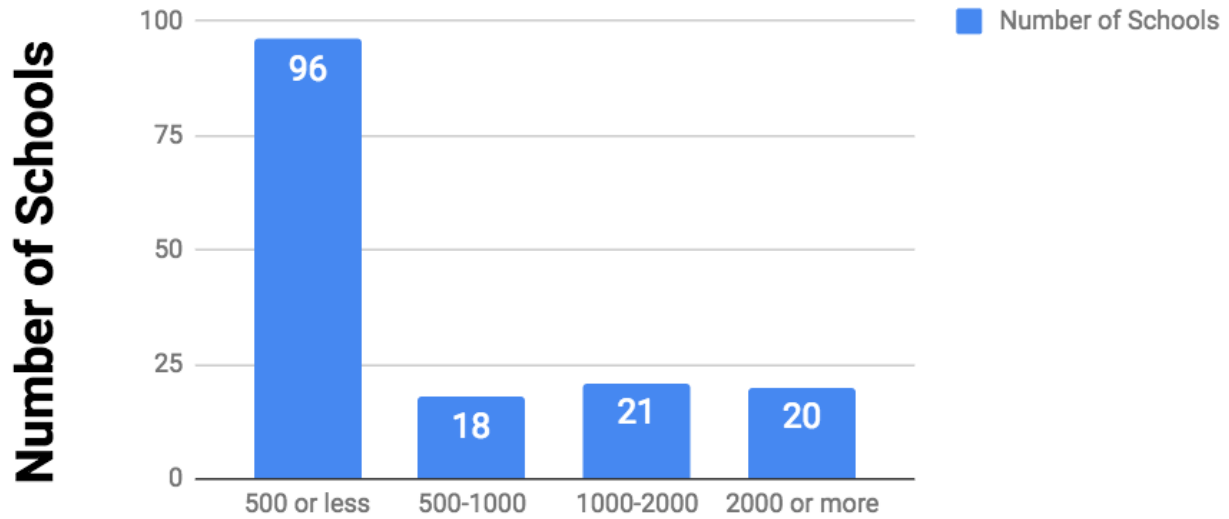
There are more than 1600 high schools in the state, and we used Texas Education Agency (TEA) reports to select schools for the sample. TEA reports provided enrollment figures by race and ethnicity as well as administrator information where possible, and we used this information to develop the sample. Some schools did not provide enrollment or administrator data to TEA, so they were not included in the sample. Additionally, we used school and district websites, where applicable, to confirm administrator contact information and school details. Once the administrator and enrollment figures were compiled, we reviewed the remaining schools to ensure that included schools were likely to serve students approaching 18. We removed ninth grade only institutions, ninth and tenth grade only schools, and adult education institutions. We also removed schools that reported fewer than ten students, because the demographic figures of these schools were largely reliant on estimates in line with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requirements.

The final sample consisted of 1411 public high schools. Surveys were emailed to school administrators over the course of March and April, and eventually schools received phone call reminders as well. The League of Women Voters of Texas partnered with the Children's Defense Fund of Texas to reach out to principals who had not replied as of mid-April. We received responses from 192 schools over the course of the project.

The size of the schools varied from 96 schools with fewer than 500 students to 20 with more than 2000 students. The high schools were located in 96 of the 254 counties in Texas. Twenty four schools were located in the major urban/suburban centers. They included counties in the greater Austin, Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio areas plus Corpus Christi. The only major urban center not included, due to lack of response to the survey, was El Paso. The remaining schools are spread around the state. Most of the schools that responded to the survey were in smaller cities or rural areas.

The project is centered around voter registration practices in schools. Our objective is to understand the factors that contribute to accomplishing voter registration of eligible high school students.

Number of Schools vs. Number of Students



Number of Students

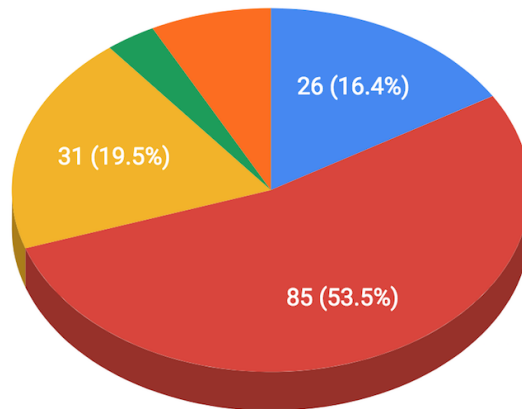
Results

1. Does your high school provide voter registration opportunities to students who are 18 or who will soon turn 18?

- 73% of the schools responding to the survey reported that they offered voter registration opportunities twice a year. *[Sec. 13.046 of Texas Election Code](#) requires high schools to offer voter registration to eligible students twice a year.
- 89.4% of schools offer voter registration opportunities at least once a year.
- 3.2% reported offering no voter registration opportunities to students

Voter Registration Opportunities Offered to High School Students

● Once a year ● Twice a year ● More than twice a year ● No voter registration opportunities provided ● Other

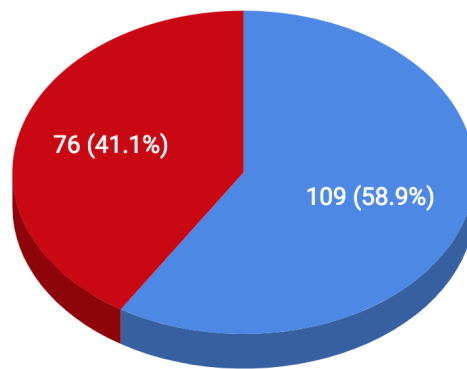


3. Does your high school use a "High School Deputy Registrar" (HSDR) to offer voter registration opportunities to students?

- 58.9% schools use a HSDR to offer voter registration opportunities to students.
- Schools with a higher student population use a HSDR more often than schools with lower student populations.

3. All students: Does your high school use a "High School Deputy Registrar" (HSDR) to offer voter registration opportunities to students?

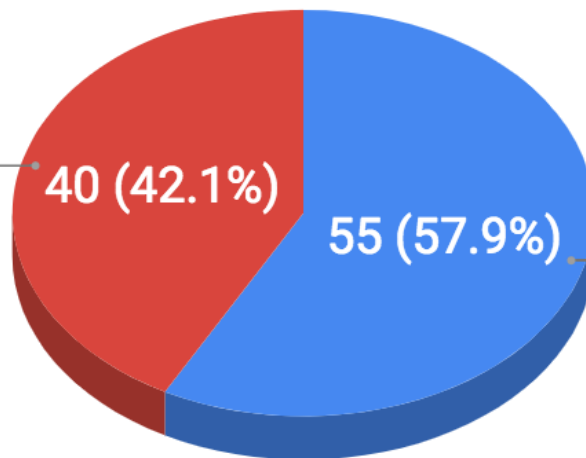
• Yes • No



500 students or less: Does your high school use a "High School Deputy Registrar" (HSDR) to offer voter registration o...

No

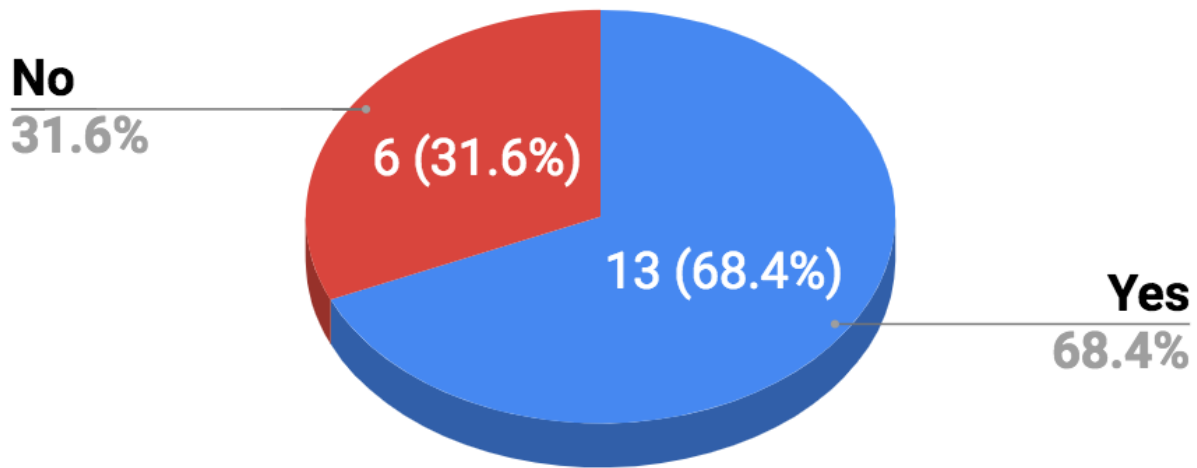
42.1%



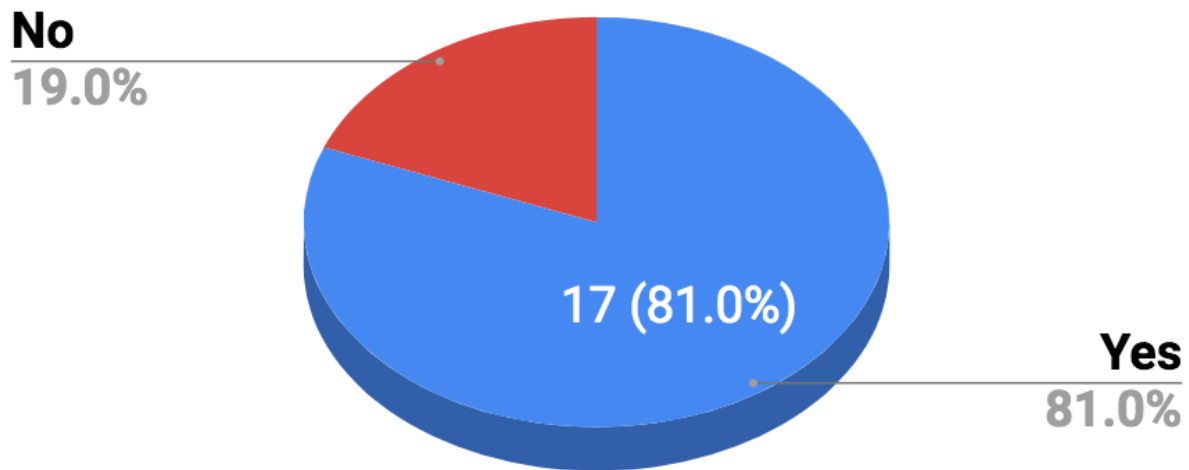
Yes

57.9%

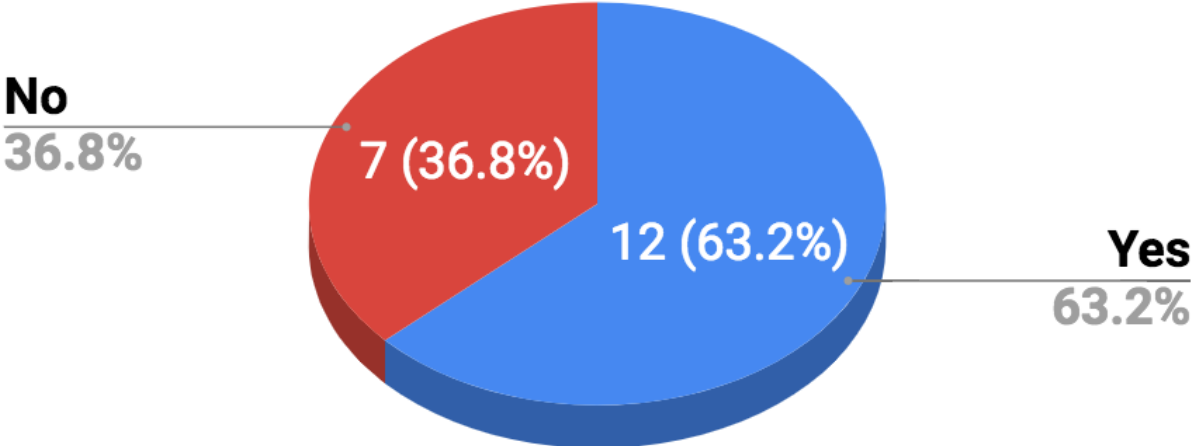
500-1000 students: Does your high school use a "High School Deputy Registrar" (HSDR)



1000-2000 students: Does your high school use a "High School Deputy Registrar" (HSDR)



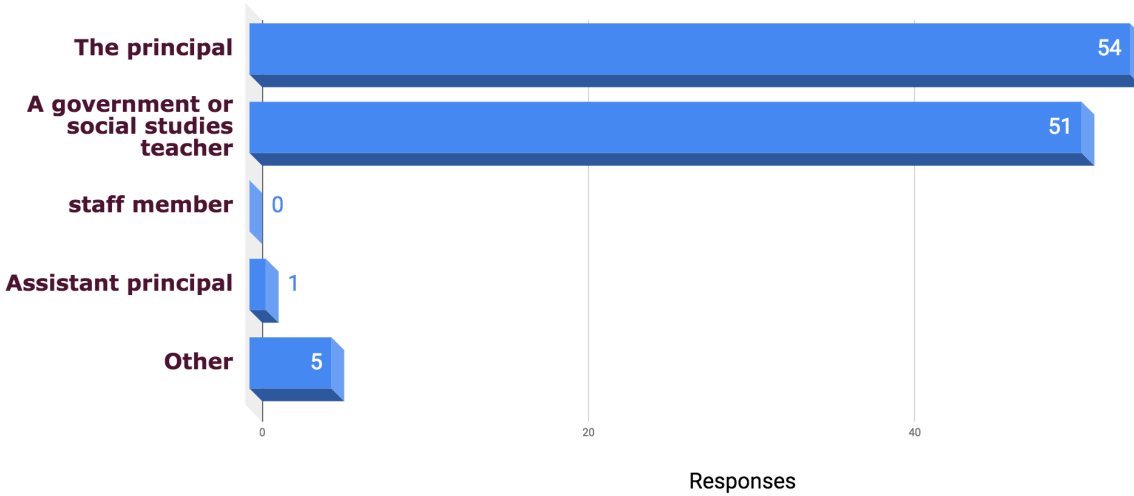
2000 and over students: Does your high school use a "High School Deputy Registrar" (HSDR)



4. Who is the assigned High School Deputy Registrar (HSDR)

- The principal and the government/social studies teacher are the assigned HSDR in nearly all schools.

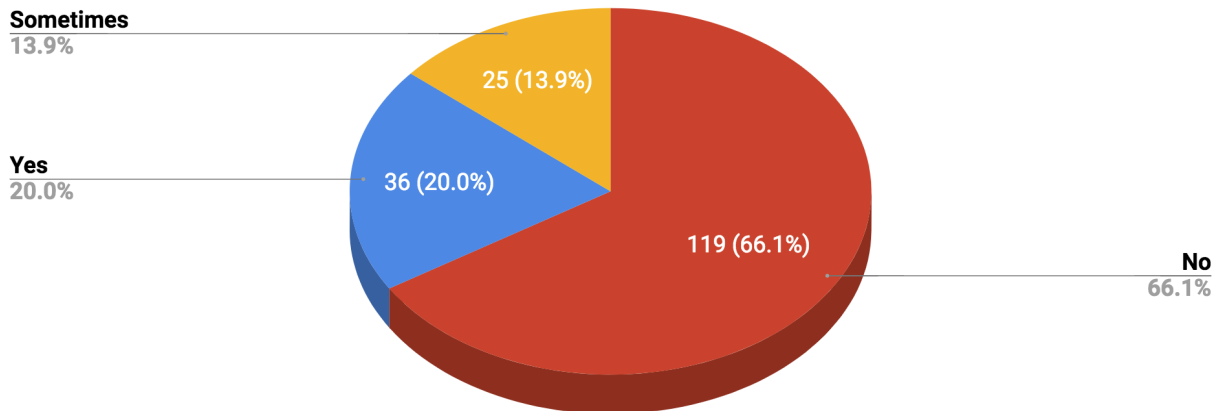
If yes, who is the assigned "High School Deputy Registrar" (HSDR) for the school?



5. Do other teachers or staff who are certified by the county as Volunteer Deputy Registrars (VDRs) help with voter registration?

- 33.9% of schools use staff as Volunteer Deputy Registrars (VDRs)

All Schools: Use of staff as volunteer deputy registrars (VDRs)

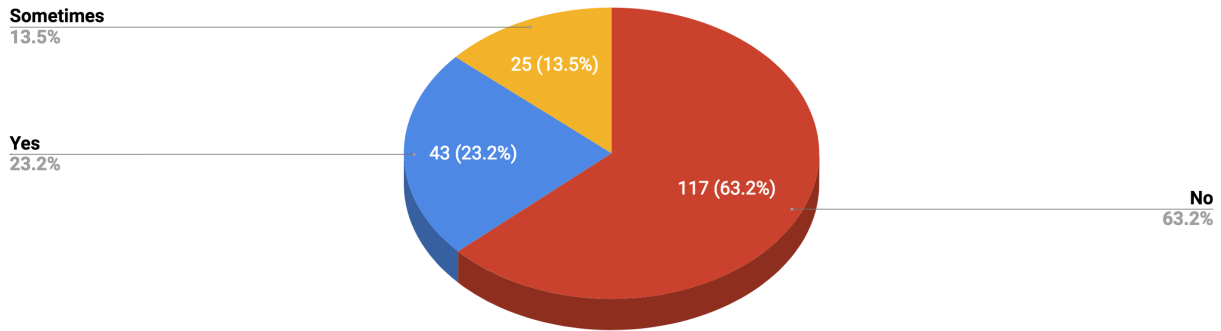


6. Do other organizations help the high school with voter registration?

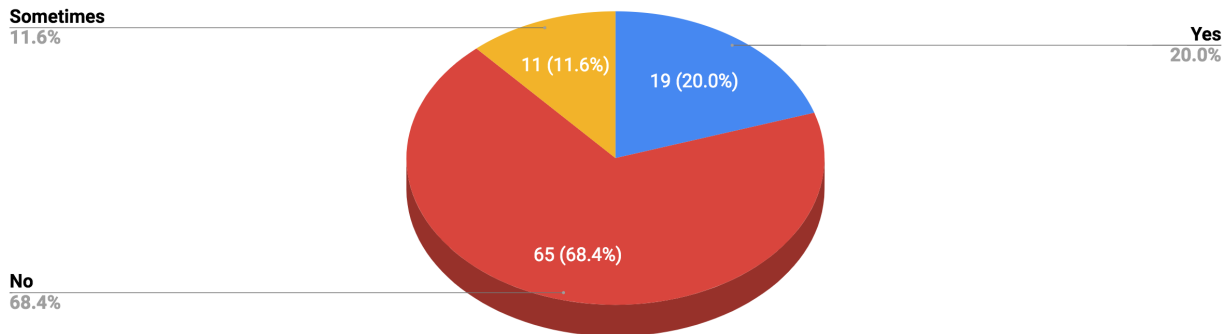
Larger schools more often report use of outside organizations to register student voters.

- 36% of all schools report using outside organizations to register students.
- 31.6% of schools with 500 or less students report using outside organizations.
- 57.9% of schools with 2000 or more students report using outside organizations

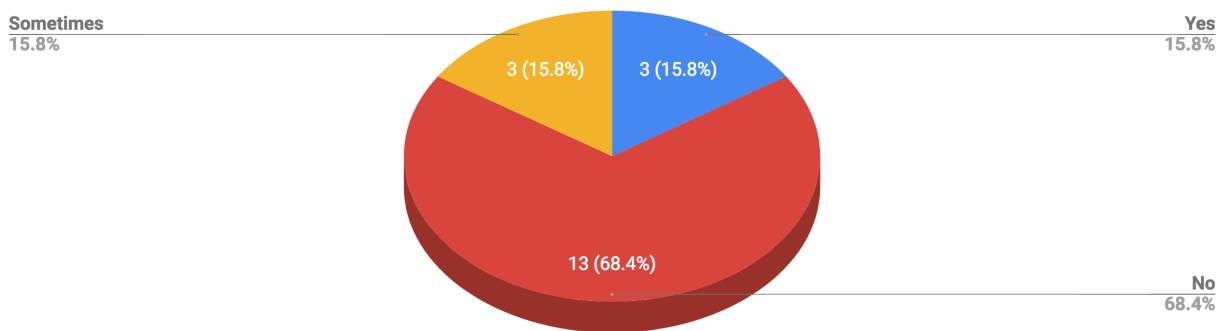
All schools: Use of organizations for voter registration



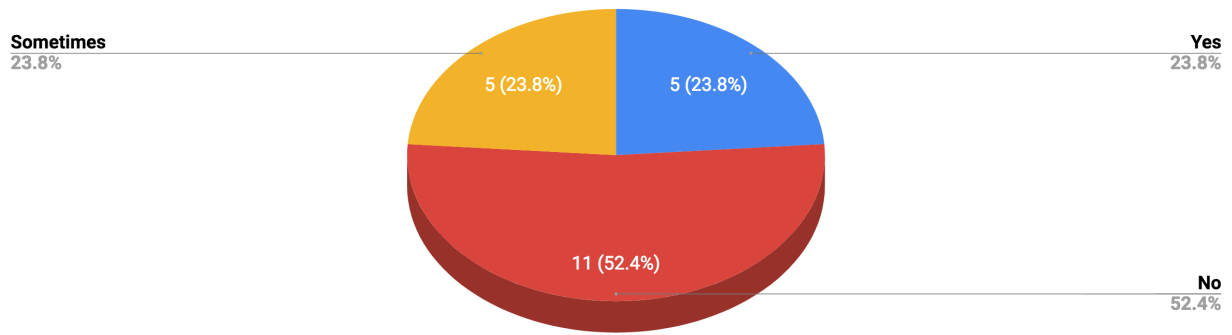
Schools with 500 students or less: use of organizations



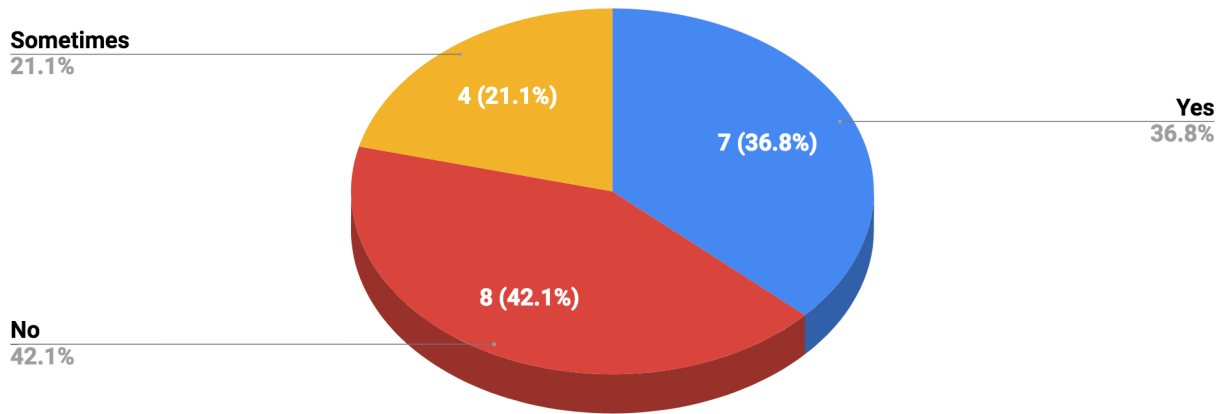
Schools with 500-1000 students: use of organizations



Schools with 1000-2000 students or less: use of organizations



Schools with 2000 or more students: use of organizations



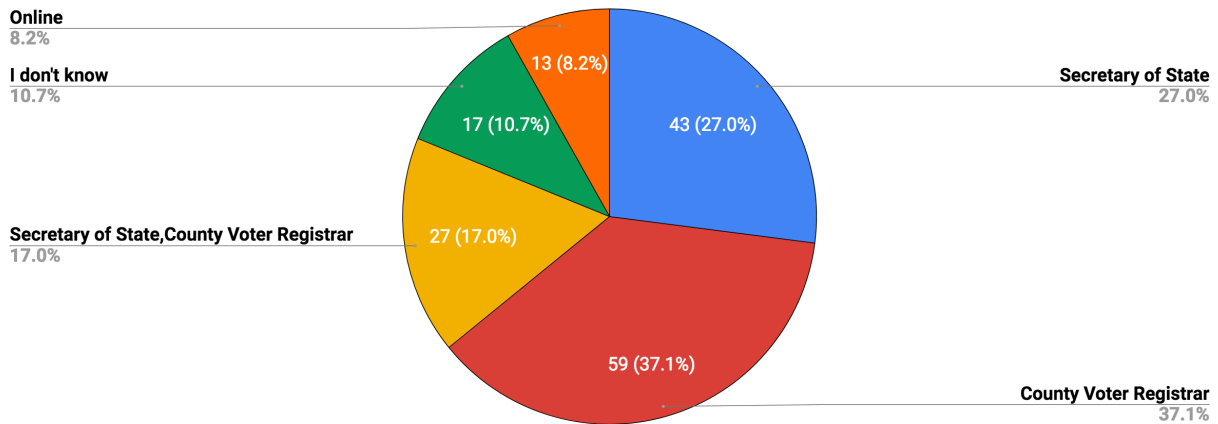
7. Organizations that help the high school with voter registration.

- **Government:** County
- **Teachers:** Government & Economic, counselors, social studies
- **Outside Organizations:** League of Women Voters (LWV), Parties Republican & Democratic, Mi Familia Vota, Texas Organizing Project (TOPS), National Organization of Women (NOW), KYAC, Cal Farley's Boys Ranch, Familias Inmigrantes y Estudiantes en la Lucha (FIEL), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Rotary Club, The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Communities in Schools, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority
- **Student organizations:** Student Council, National Honor Society
- **Parent Organizations:** Parent Involvement Center, Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

8. Where does the high school obtain the voter registration forms used to register students?

- 37 % of schools obtain voter registration forms from their County Voter Registrar, 27% from the Secretary of State’s office and 17% report obtaining their forms from both.

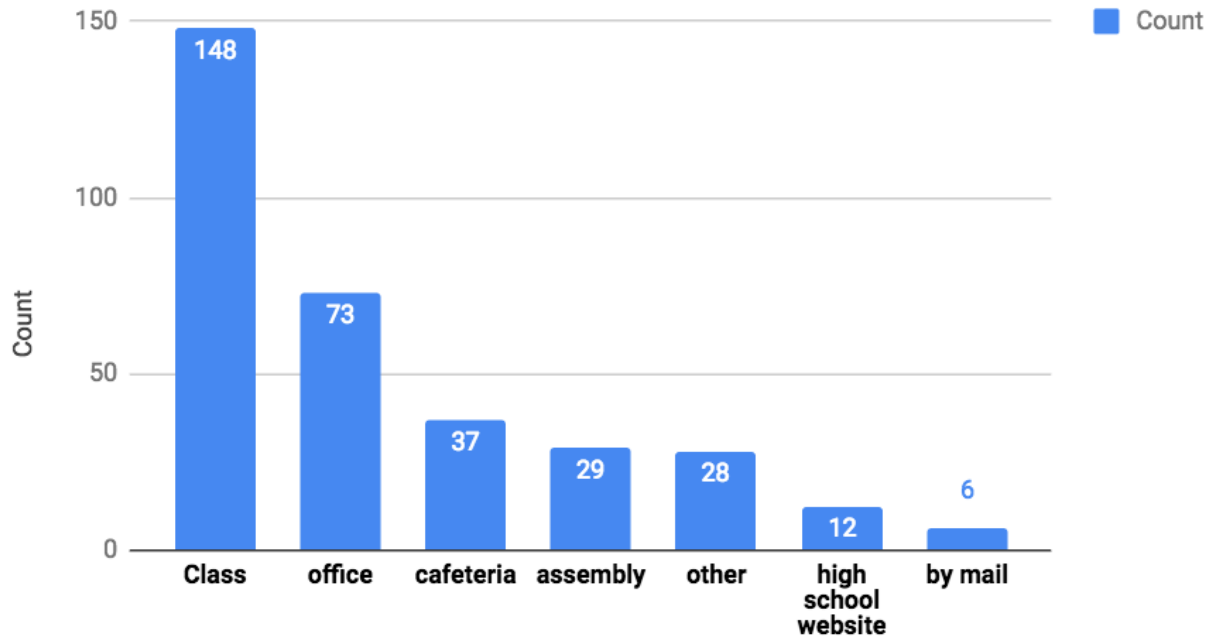
All Schools: Where does the high school obtain the voter registration forms used to register students?



10. Where does the high school offer voter registration opportunities for their students?

- 148 schools offer voter registration opportunities in the classroom & 73 in the school office. Other schools also have voter registration in the cafeteria and at assemblies

Where is high school registration offered?



11. Rate methods to register high schools voters.

Most successful: classroom presentations,

Least successful: Assemblies, after school events, table in cafeteria, form sent in mail, link on high school website

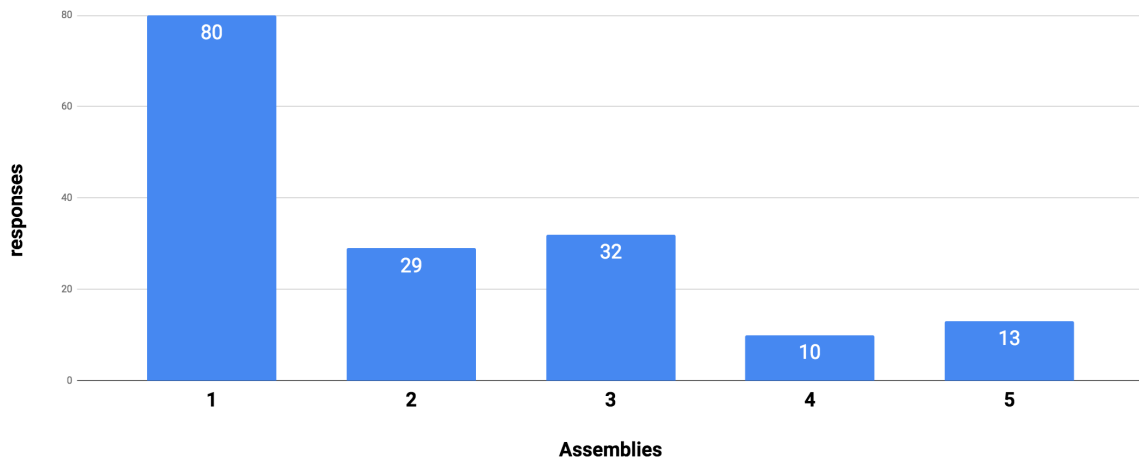
Neutral: Forms available in the office

Note:

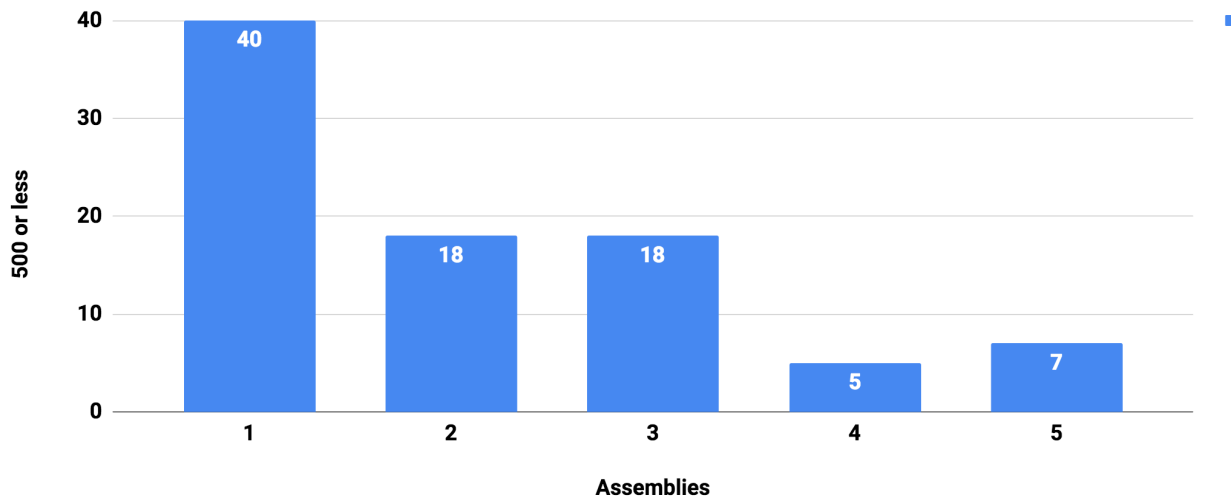
- Larger schools found assemblies more successful than smaller schools
- All schools in general found classroom presentations most successful

a. Assemblies:

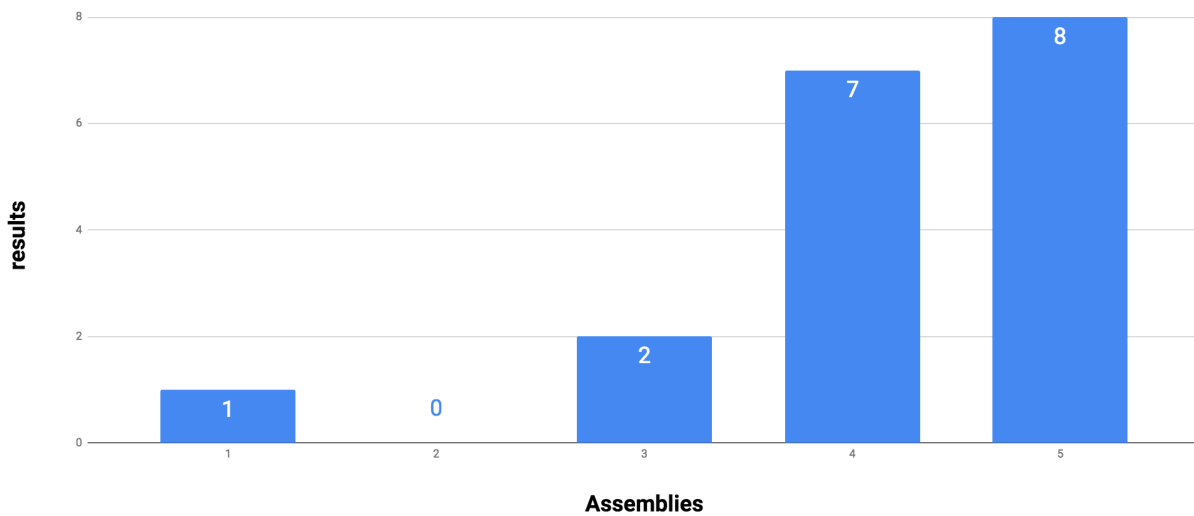
All Schools: Assemblies 1= least successful 5=most successful



Schools with 500 or less students: Assemblies 1= least successful 5=most successful

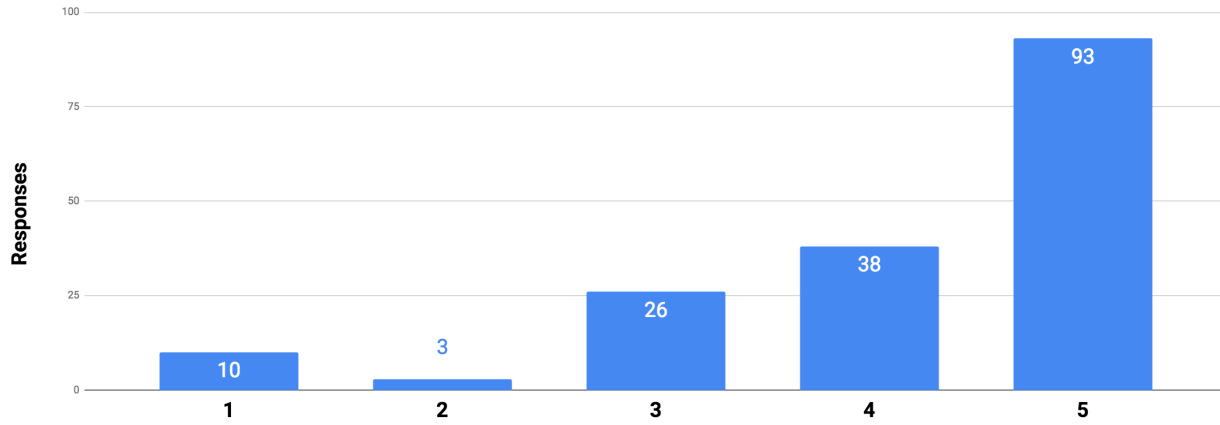


Assemblies 2000 and over 1= least successful 5=most successful



b. Classroom presentations

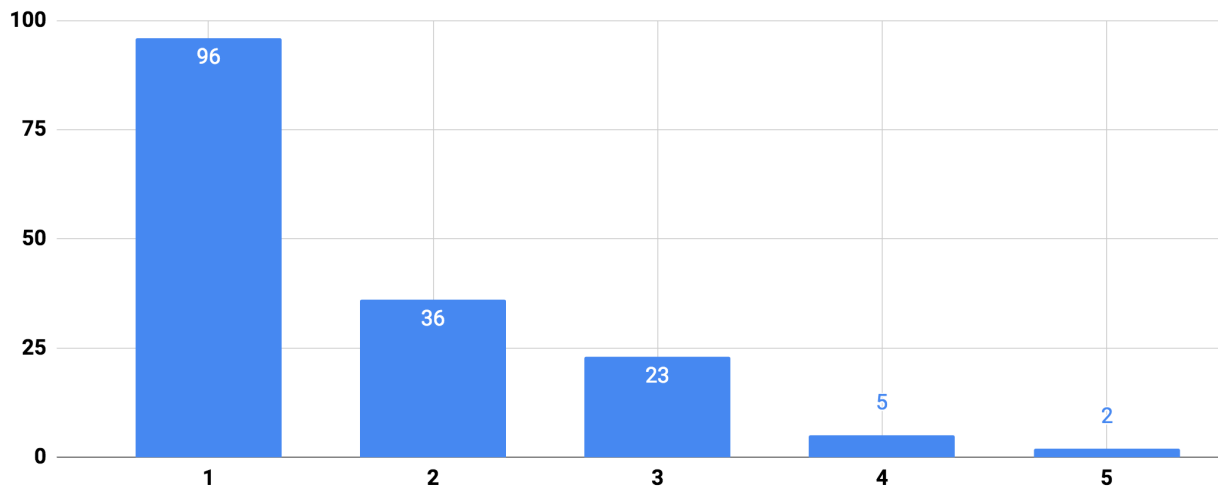
Classroom presentations 1= least successful 5=most successful



b. Classroom presentations

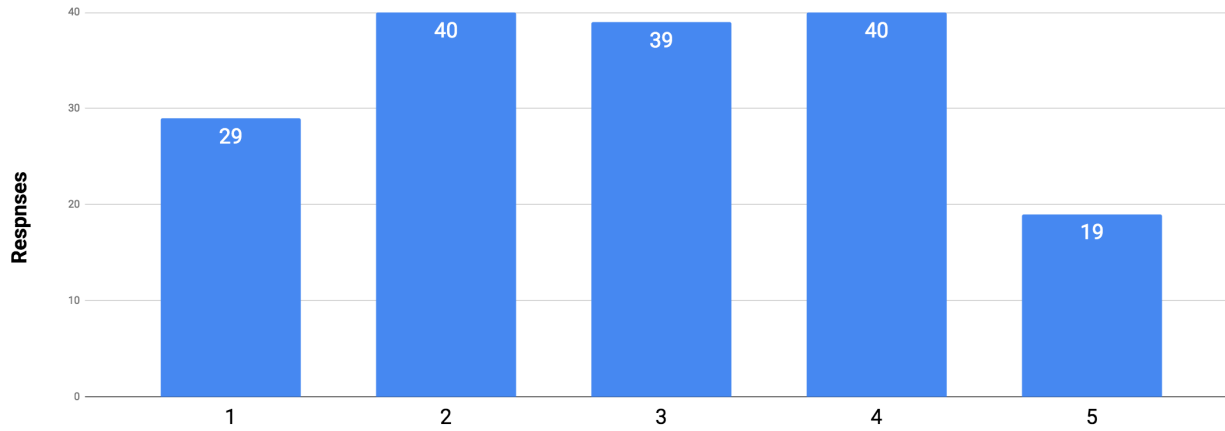
c. After school events

All Schools: After School Events 1=least successful 5=most successful



d. Registration forms available In the office

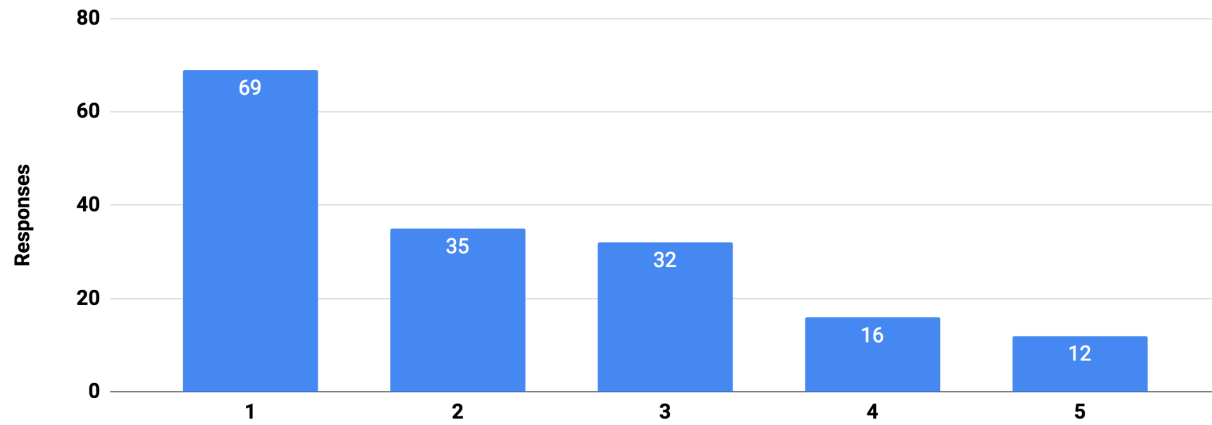
All Schools: In the office 1=least successful 5=most successful



d. Registration forms available In the office

e. Registration forms available at a table In the cafeteria

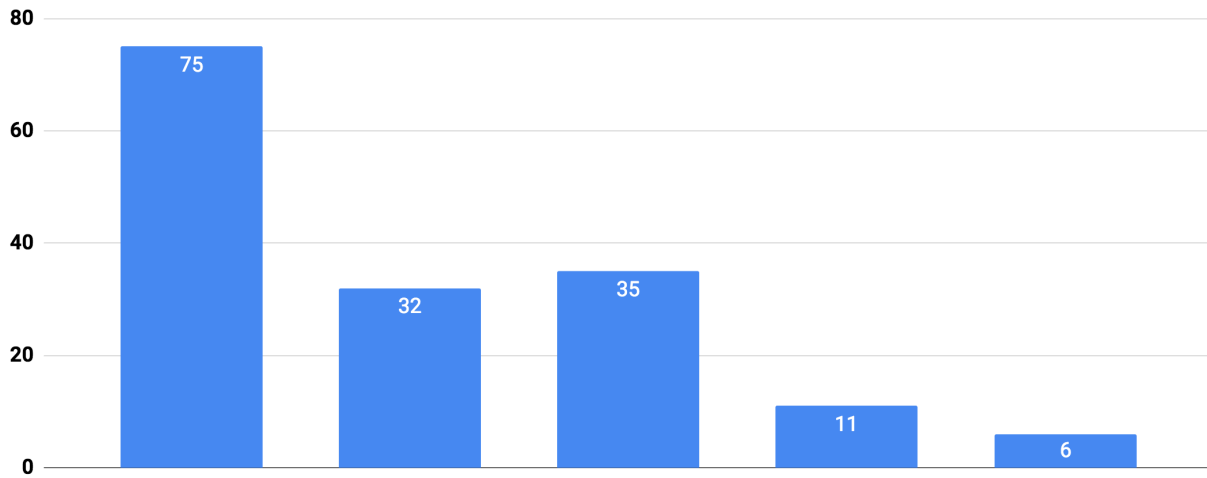
All Schools: Table In the cafeteria 1=least successful 5=most successful



e. Registration forms available at a table In the cafeteria

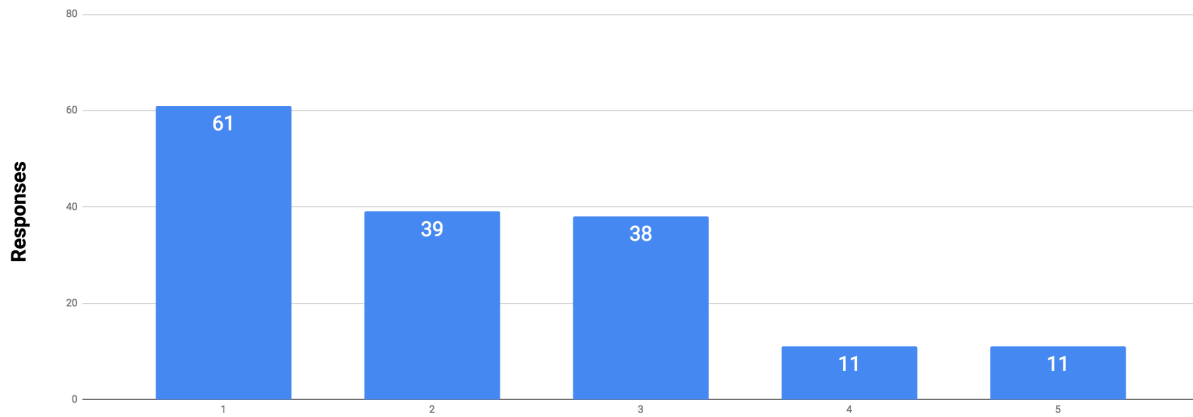
f. Registration forms sent by mail

All schools: Sent by mail 1=least successful 5=most successful



g. A link to information about voter registration offered on the high school website

All Schools: link provided on the high school website 1=least successful 5=most successful



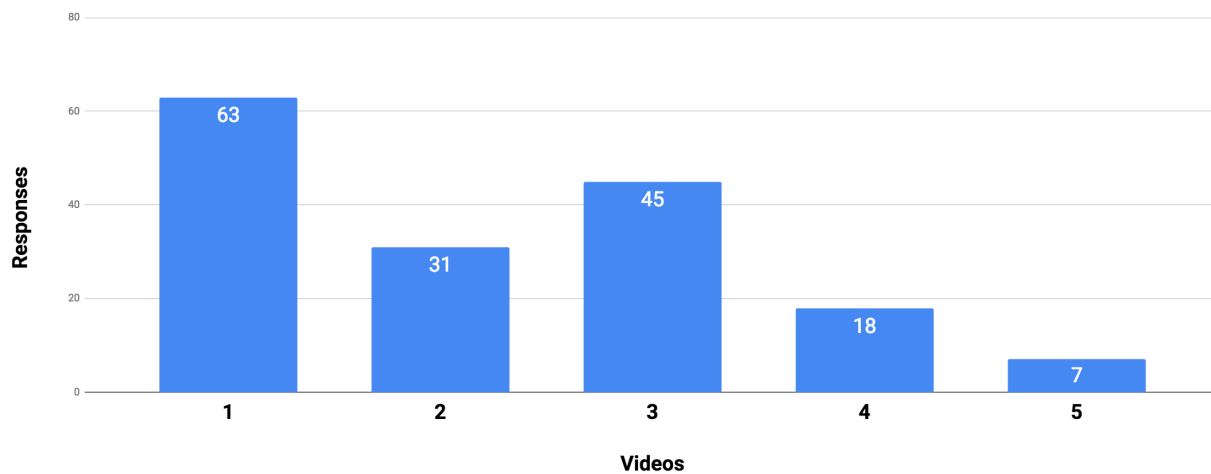
g. A link to information about voter registration offered on the high school website

12. Rate tools high schools use to register students.

- **Most successful:** Curriculum, online voter registration tool (not available by law currently), Voter Registration forms automatically provided to high schools (also not offered currently).
- **Least successful:** outside organization
(Note: Larger schools use outside organizations more often to register students and rated them more successful. There are much fewer larger schools represented in this survey)
- **Neutral:** videos, handouts, posters, powerpoints,

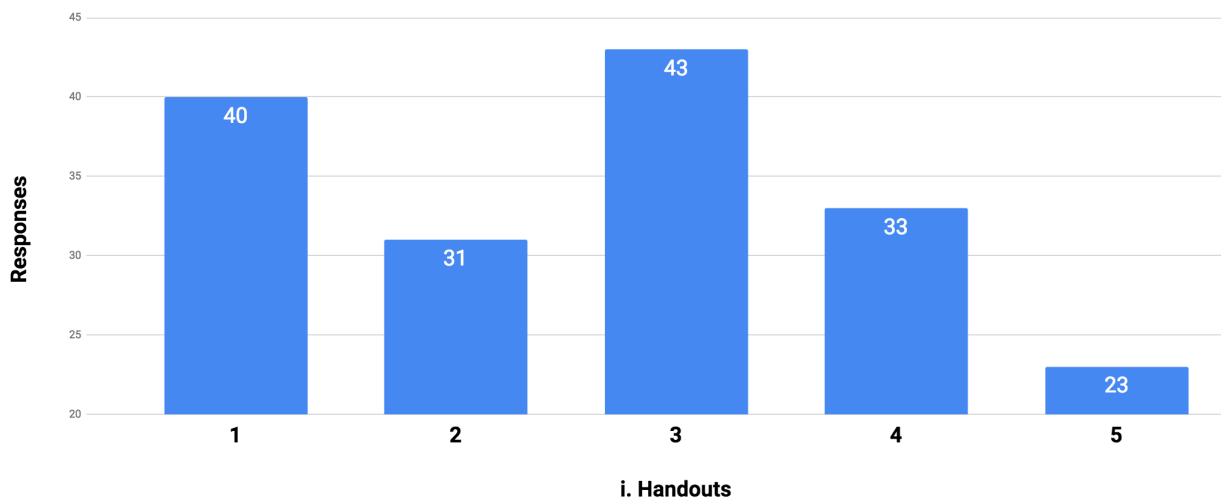
a. Videos

All schools: Videos 1=least successful 5=most successful



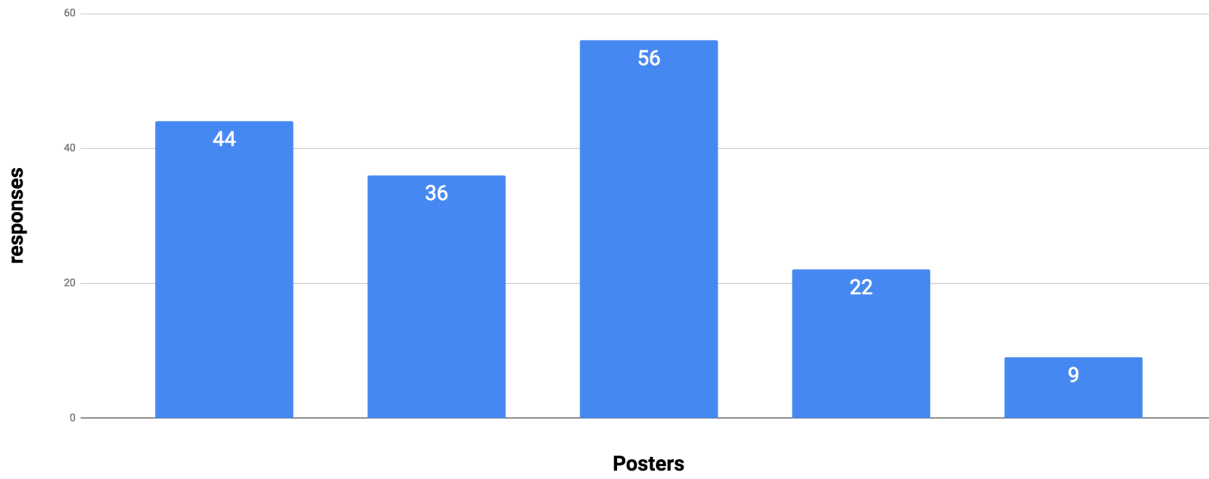
1b. Handouts

All schools: Handouts 1=least successful 5=most successful



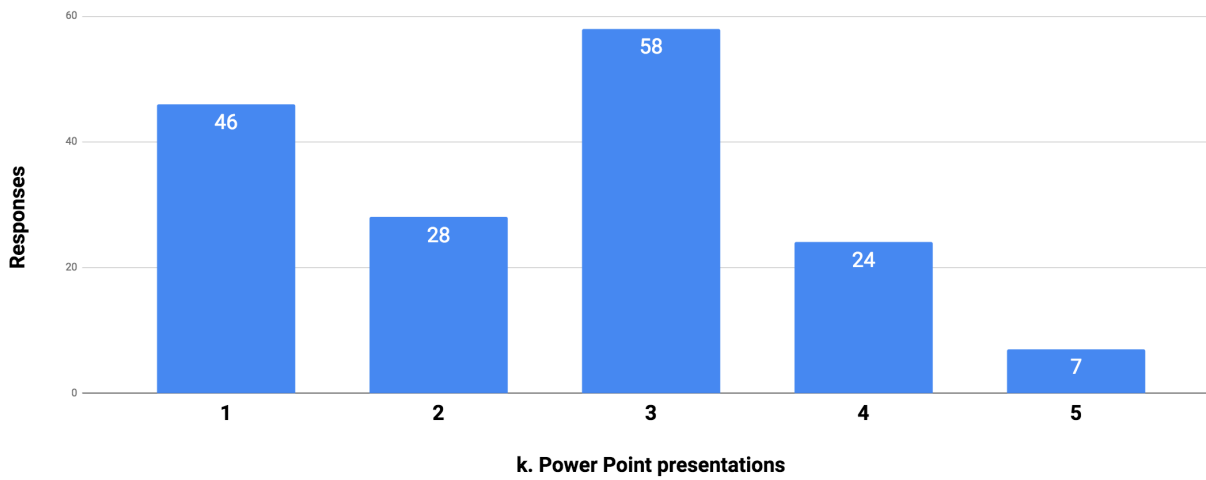
c. Posters

All schools: Posters 1=least successful 5=most successful



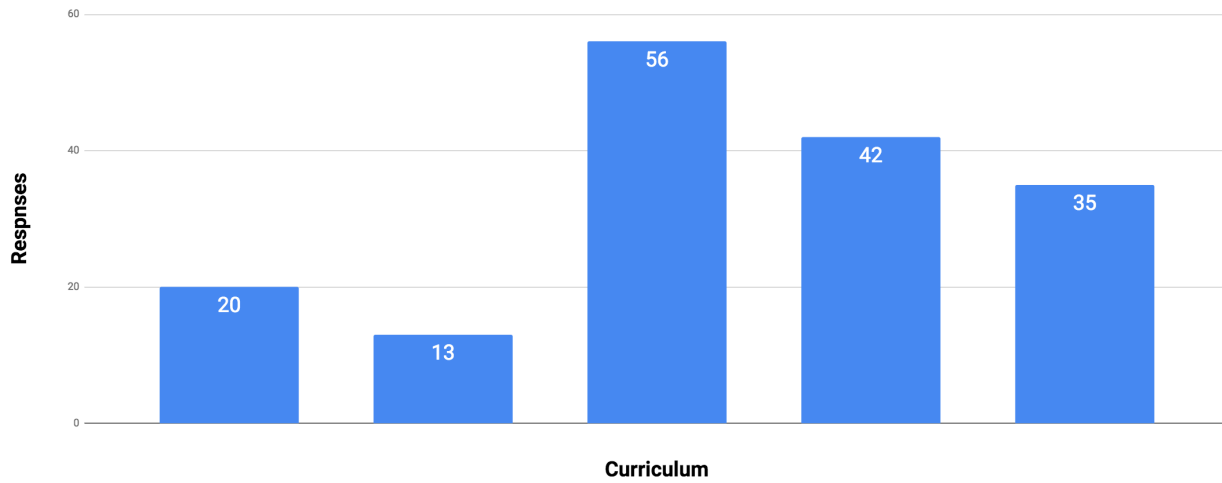
d. Powerpoint presentations

All schools: Power Point presentations 1=least successful 5=most successful



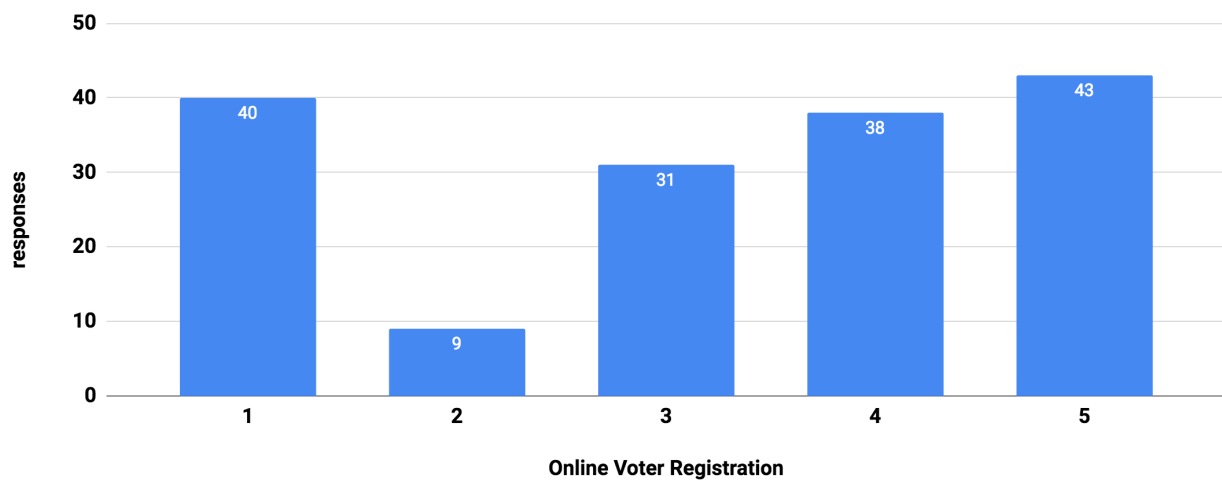
e. Curriculum

All schools: Curriculum 1=least successful 5=most successful



f. An Online Voter Registration (OVR) tool whereby voter registration could be completed online. Online Voter Registration (not currently available in Texas)

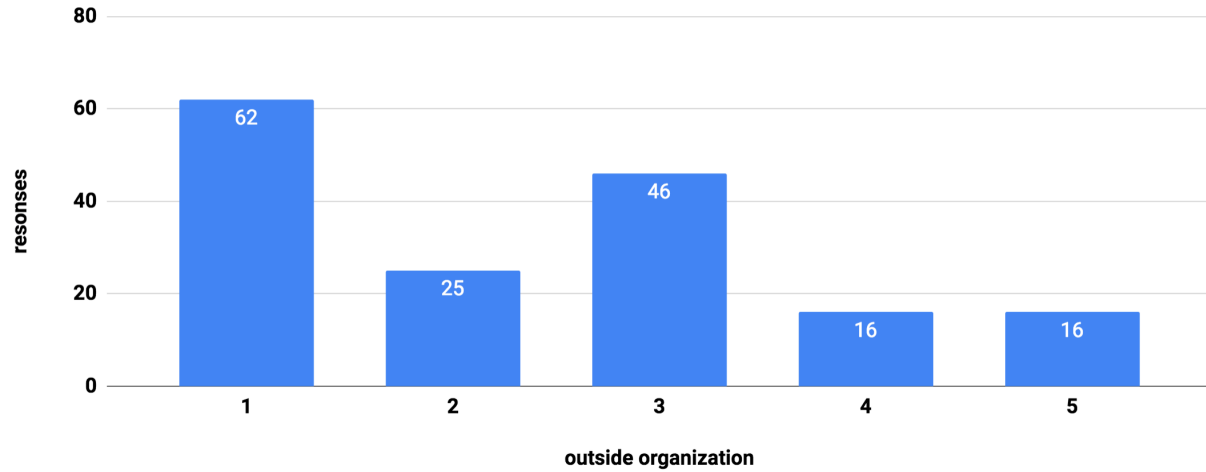
f. An Online Voter Registration (OVR) 1=least successful 5=most successful



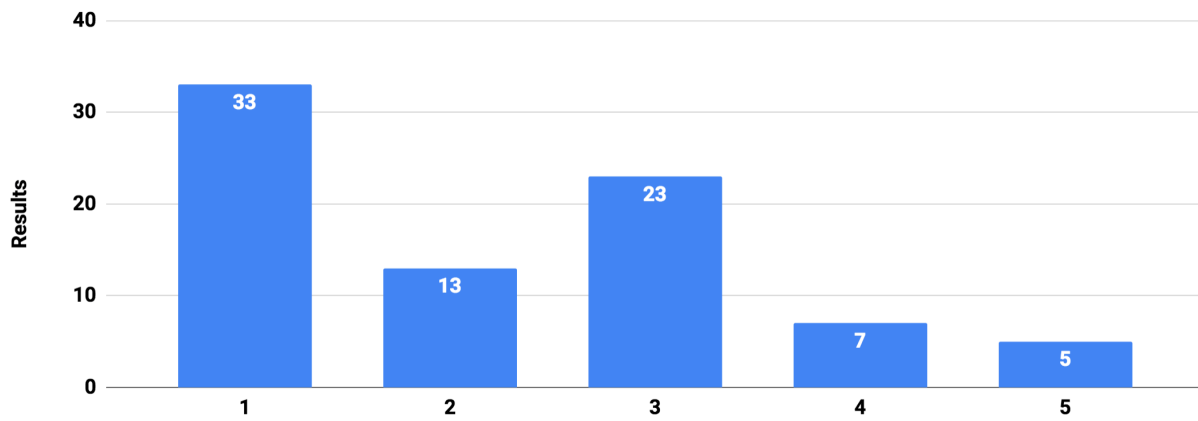
g. Voter registration process completed by an outside organization

- Larger schools rated the use of an outside organization for the voter registration process more successful than smaller schools.

All schools: Outside Organization 1=least successful 5=most successful

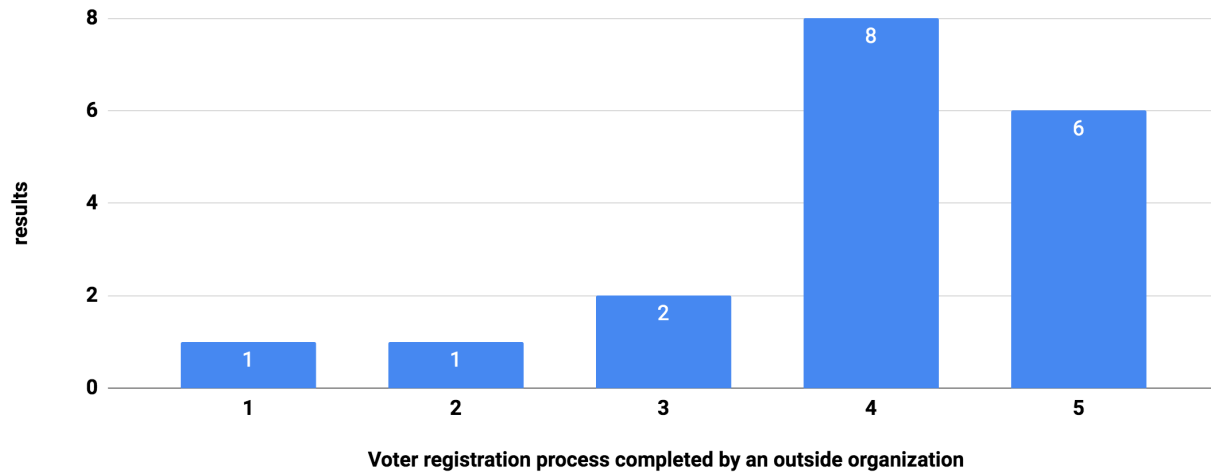


500 or less students: Voter registration process completed by an outside organization 1=least successful 5=most successful



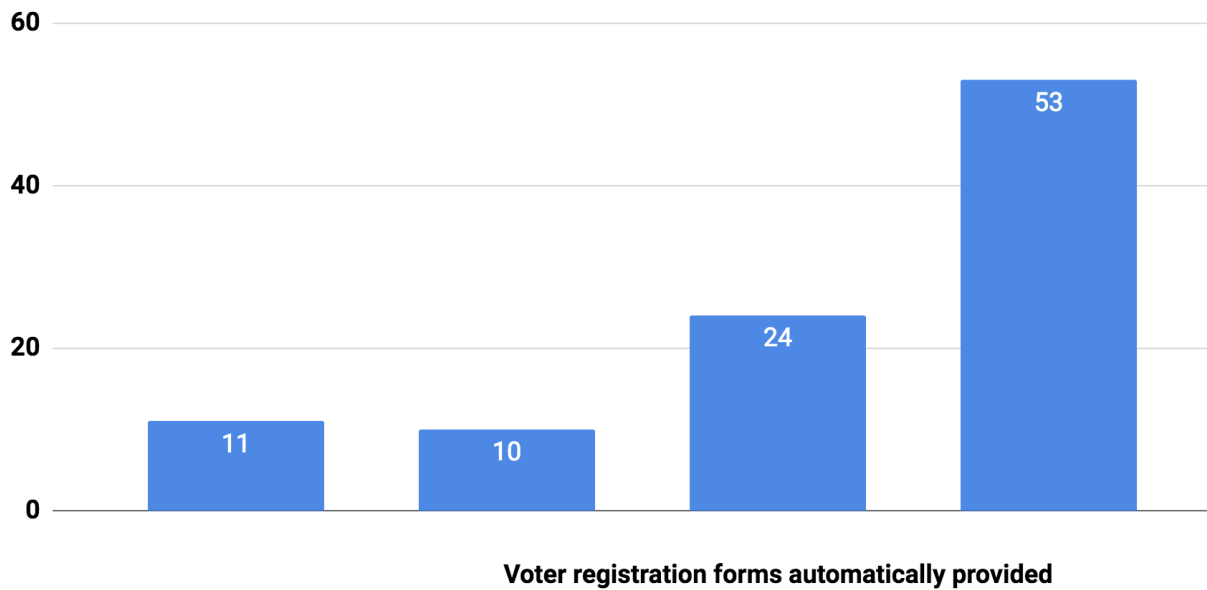
n. Voter registration process completed by an outside organization

2000 and over students: Voter registration process completed by an outside organization 1=least successful 2=most successful



h. Voter Registration forms automatically provided to high schools.

h. All Schools: Voter Registration forms automatically provided to high schools

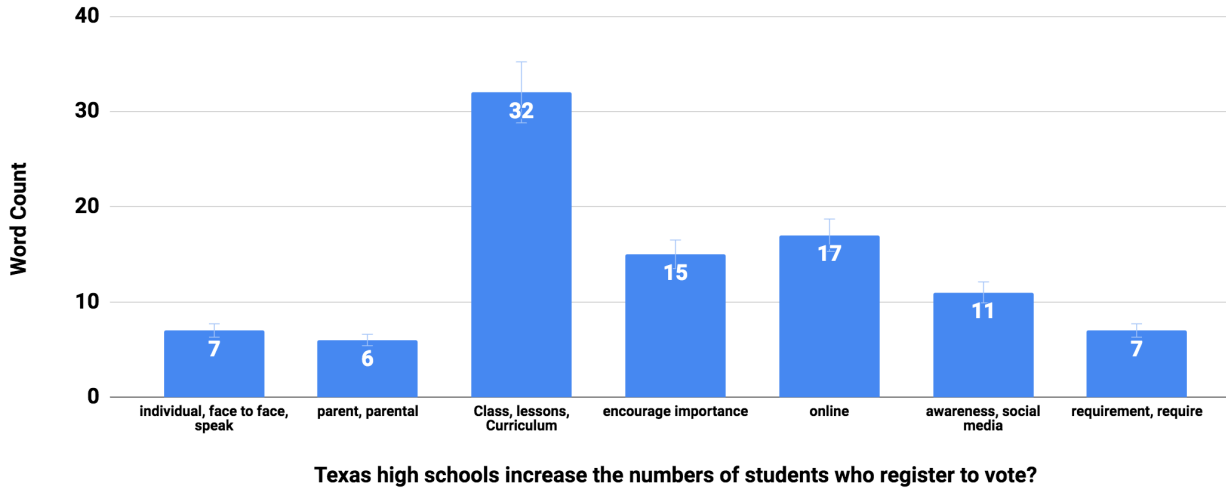


3. What do you think would help Texas high schools increase the numbers of students who register to vote?

Top 3 recommendations to increase the numbers of students registering to vote determined by word count.

1. Offer voter registration in class with lessons and curriculum
2. Provide online voter registration (not currently available in Texas)
3. Emphasize the importance of voter registration and encourage it

13. All Schools: What would help Texas high schools increase the numbers of students who register to vote?

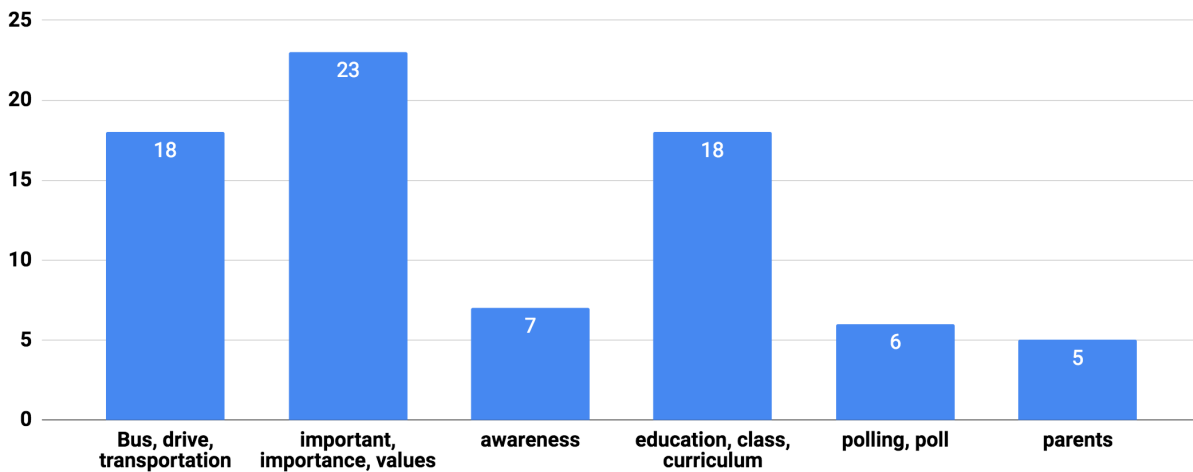


14. Registering high school students is a first step. Texas has one of the lowest voting rates in the U.S. What other efforts, if any, should high schools take to increase voter participation?

Top three recommendations to increase voter participation determined by word count:

1. Emphasize the importance of voting
2. Provide classes
3. Provide transportation

What other efforts should high schools take to increase voter participation?



Summary of Results

Results indicate the many ways high schools are registering voters around Texas. Tools and strategies that work best to register students depend on the size of the schools.

73% of the schools that responded to the survey reported that they offered voter registration opportunities twice a year as required by the [*Sec. 13.046 of Texas Election Code](#). 89.4% of schools offer voter registration opportunities at least once a year. 58.9% schools use a high school deputy registrar (HSDR) to offer voter registration opportunities to students. Schools with a higher student population use a HSDR more than schools with lower student populations. The principal and the government/social studies teacher are the assigned HSDR in nearly all schools. 33.9% of schools use staff as Volunteer Deputy Registrars (VDRs).

Schools with higher student populations used outside organizations more often to register student voters. Outside organizations included the County, teachers, the League of Women Voters (LWV), Republican & Democratic parties, Mi Familia Vota, Texas Organizing Project (TOPS), National Organization of Women (NOW), KYAC, Cal Farley's Boys Ranch, Familias Inmigrantes y Estudiantes en la Lucha (FIEL), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Rotary Club, The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Communities in Schools, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. Student organizations such as the Student Council and National Honor Society and Parent Organizations such as Parent Involvement Center, Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

Schools responding to the survey obtain voter registration forms 37 % from their County Voter Registrar, 27% from the Secretary of State's office and 17% report obtaining their forms from both. Schools report offering voter registration opportunities in class, the office, the cafeteria and at assemblies.

The method used to register high schools voters rated the most successful was classroom presentations. The least successful methods were assemblies, after school events, table in cafeteria, form sent in mail, link on high school website. The availability of forms in the office was considered neutral. Larger schools found assemblies more successful than smaller schools.

Tools high schools use to register students that were most successful include curriculum, online voter registration tool (not available by law currently but rated most successful), and voter registration forms automatically provided to high schools (not offered currently). Tools rated least successful include use of outside organizations (Note: Larger schools use outside organizations more often to register students and viewed use of an outside organization for the voter registration process more successful than smaller schools.). Tools considered neutral were videos, handouts, posters, and powerpoints.

Top recommendations to increase numbers of students registering to vote include offering voter registration in class with lessons and curriculum, providing online voter registration (not currently available in Texas) and emphasizing the importance of voter registration.

Response from a rural high school with 500 or fewer students

“I meet with each individual as they approach 18, they are familiar with a similar form and I talk them through the process and explain what they need to do when they move to a new town for college or work.”

Response from an urban high school with 2000 or more students

“Relevant motivational speakers from local Non-Partisan Organizations speaking on real issues that policy makers and elected officials impact that directly relate to the school's demographic and community.”

Top recommendations to increase voter participation included emphasizing the importance of voting, providing classes and curriculum to encourage voting and providing transportation to vote.

Responses from rural high schools with 500 or fewer students

Perhaps a field trip to polling site during election days.

“Have local groups assist in stressing the importance of voting.”

“Repeated efforts. As with any concept or skill development, repetition is the key to mastery/accomplishment.”

“During the early voting I present our registered voters with the measures they will see on the ballot with links where they can study for the election to make informed choices. During the early voting phase, if the students want to vote in the election, I drive them to the Courthouse and guide them through signing in and teach them how to use the voting machine. I never discuss my views or tell them how to vote. I feel they will be more apt to vote in future elections if they know the full process.”

Responses from an urban high school with 1000 - 2000 or more students

“Implement more practical lessons during government classes. At conclusion of STAAR?EOC testing have teacher spend 2 weeks on student civic responsibility (i.e., voting, jury duty, etc)”

“I have secured bus transportation to take my students to ... and actually participate in the voting. Schools should pay for buses and take students to vote. Plan to have voter poll station close to campuses”

Discussion

Through our efforts, we found that principals and schools are indeed offering a variety of voter registration opportunities. A number of schools provided their best practices, and we received calls for streamlined methods of voter registration and increased emphasis on the importance of voting.

The League of Women Voters of Texas understands that this survey is a snapshot of voter registration efforts high schools are using around the state. We acknowledge the representation of schools in the study included a high number of schools with a student population under 500. We hope that future surveys include even more schools in order to represent the broad range of schools in Texas.

The League of Women Voters of Texas and the 30 local Leagues serving their communities appreciate the hard work of educators to provide voter registration opportunities for high school students. These efforts, while not always visible in counts of specific voter registration forms, are appreciated. This survey provides

some insight into the many ways Texas schools, rural and urban, small and large, provide voter registration opportunities for their students.

Local Leagues in Texas will continue to work closely with high schools to register student voters. We applaud the important work of educators who are determined to create a culture of voting in Texas.

Recommendations

All high schools are encouraged to follow the election law and offer voter registration opportunities twice a year. Schools should provide voter registration in class and include a civics curriculum that emphasizes the importance of voting. High schools should advocate for their County Voter Registrar and the Secretary of State to automatically provide voter registration forms.

The League asks Texas high schools to:

- Understand and follow current election law found in [Sec. 13.046 of Texas Election Code](#)³ and on the League's [For Educators](#)⁴ webpage.
- Use trackable voter registration forms when registering students in high schools in order to track the numbers of high school students registered in Texas.
 - **All** HSDR voter registration forms provided by the SOS are trackable
 - **Any** voter registration form can be made trackable to high schools by adding the code "HS 18" on the voter registration forms.
 - Track the numbers of students registered.
- Coordinate registration offerings at least twice a year with election cycles⁵. Keep in mind the last day to register to vote dates⁶ for upcoming elections.
- Provide curriculum and classroom time for voter registration and civics, emphasize the importance of voting, and if there is an election provide transportation to the polls (to enhance the civics curriculum and with approval from administration).
- Use League Resources:
 - [BeATexasVoter.org](#)⁷ The League of Women Voters of Texas and Dallas County Community Colleges are providing this voter education series to help young people better understand their role as citizens in our state. The six modules are prepared in compliance with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) social studies requirements and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Common Core standards. The materials are designed to teach high school, dual credit, and college level students about the importance of voting and to provide tools for becoming informed voters.
 - Use nonpartisan League resources found online on [www.lwvtexas.org](#) at Get out the Vote and the League's *Voters Guide* on [www.VOTE411.org](#) to encourage students to vote and create a culture of voting in your school.
 - Ask a [local League](#) or other nonpartisan organization to assist with voter registration

³ Texas Election Code - ELEC § 13.046. High School Deputy Registrars <https://codes.findlaw.com/tx/election-code/elec-sect-13-046.html>

⁴ League of Women Voters of Texas "For Educators" web page <https://my.lwv.org/texas/educators>

⁵ League of Women Voters of Texas "Election Cycles" <https://my.lwv.org/texas/voting/election-cycles>

⁶ Texas Secretary of State's Important Election Dates <http://www.votetexas.gov/voting/when.html>

⁷ League of Women Voters of Texas Be A Texas Voter Curriculum <http://beatexasvoter.org/>

- Review and use resources found on our [For Educators web page](#)

The League will advocate for the Texas Secretary of State office and county voter registrars to:

- Coordinate to provide High School Deputy Registration forms and county Voter Registration forms automatically to high schools.
- Encourage the use of trackable voter registration forms by anyone registering students in high schools in order to track the numbers of high school students registered in Texas.
- Provide simple clear instructions on the use of High School Deputy Registration forms
- Communicate with high schools and educator organizations
 - Send timely reminders encouraging high school voter registration.
 - Share the election laws impacting high schools and students.
 - Promote upcoming statewide important election dates.
 - Promote the high school student voting day (the first Friday of early voting).
 - Promote a High School Voter Registration Day (coordinate this date with the [National Voter Registration Day](#)⁸).

The League will advocate at the Texas Legislature to:

- Pass legislation in support of online voter registration.
- Pass legislation to facilitate high school voter registration by simplifying the high school Deputy Voter Registration process.

The League will continue to work towards a future where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate in our democracy by:

- Coordinating high school voter registration efforts with educators and other nonpartisan voting advocacy organizations through collaborations such as TCRP's www.OurOwnVote.org⁹ at the local and state levels.
- Continuing to partner government and election officials to make this a reality.

Elections impact every aspect of our lives. From the economy to the future of health care and our energy security, our elected officials are making decisions now that will affect today's youth for decades to come. Young voters have a critical voice to lend. The League aims to empower young people to stand up and make the most of their right to vote. That's why we believe it is vital to reach America's future voters while they are still in high school.

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⁸ [Annual National Voter Registration Day https://nationalvoterregistrationday.org:](https://nationalvoterregistrationday.org)

⁹ [OurOwnVote coordination platform http://ownourvote.org/](http://ownourvote.org/)

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