



# Care Enough To Vote



A PRACTICAL  
GUIDE TO  
SIMPLIFY AND  
ENGAGE  
EDUCATORS IN  
THE CIVIC  
RESPONSIBILITY  
OF VOTING



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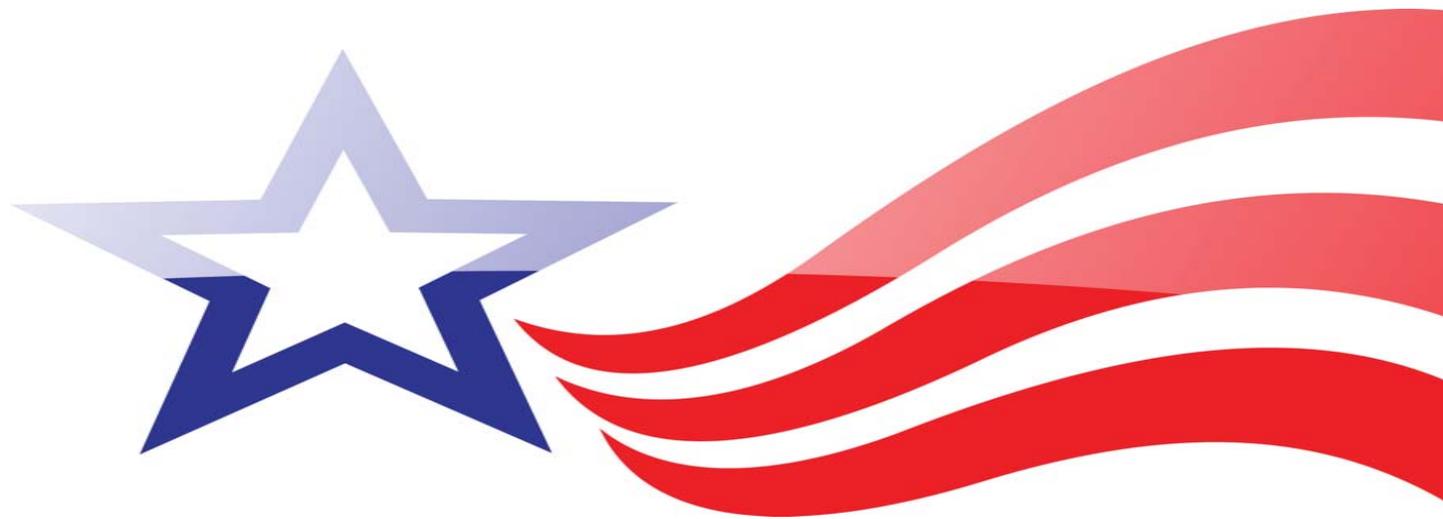
Voting is a civic responsibility. Many adults find themselves with feelings of apathy and indifference toward voting. Life is increasingly busy. People are spending more time working, traveling and trying to make ends meet. Mobilizing voters is harder than ever especially in the cities of Texas because individuals feel their single vote will not make a difference.

The truth is there is no apolitical option to voting. If you choose not to participate in the process, your disengagement is an act of engagement. In not voting, you are not letting your voice be heard as you are voting against both candidates and both visions for Texas and the United States. Many people do not exercise this constitutional right to vote, yet, they will bash, ridicule, make declarations about and slander people elected into office.

Conversely, an individual who votes and mobilizes others to vote is doing ones civic responsibility, not getting involved in politics. One enters politics when deciding to run for an elected office or campaign for a specific candidate.

In accepting a position of public trust as Texas educators, we are charged with the noble responsibility of demonstrating exemplary conduct – both to our colleagues and to our students. We must model positive civic conduct by regularly casting our ballots in every election. It is our responsibility as educators to participate in elections. It is our responsibility to VOTE.

We must take a stand as educators and let our voice be heard through the voting process. It is up to us to get the word out and encourage our colleagues, family and neighbors to vote. What follows is a simple guide of how to engage our fellow citizens.



Much of the data reported here are from the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS) Supplements on Voting, Volunteering and Civic Engagements.



# Understanding the Voting Process

## Who Can Vote

To be eligible to register to vote in Texas, a person must be:

- A U.S. citizen.
- At least 18 years old (may register at 17 years and 10 months) and a resident of the Texas county in which application for registration is made.
- A person not declared mentally incapacitated by a court of law.

Note: A convicted felon regains the right to vote after completing his or her sentence. Therefore, after the convict completes the punishment phase (including any term of incarceration, parole, or supervision and probation) the person is eligible to register to vote.

## How to Register to Vote

Pick up a voter registration application at your public library or post office or download a form from the internet at:

<http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/votregduties.shtml>

Mail the completed application to the 'Voter Registrar' in your county. If unsure of the address, do an Internet search for *County Voter Registration*. You will see a list of counties, registration officials and their addresses. Upon acceptance, your voter registration will be effective 30 days from registration.

## Where to Vote

Look for a voter registration card with your personal information and the number of the precinct where you will vote to be delivered by mail.

Check the local newspapers close to the election date for the address of the polling place for your precinct. The precinct number is on the bottom of your registration card. Call the County Clerk or County Elections Administrator to find your polling location. For more information call the Secretary of State's office toll free number 1-800-252-VOTE (8683).

Arrive at the polling place between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. to cast your ballot.

Bring your registration card and a valid ID (Driver's License) to show to the election official. If you have misplaced or lost the voter registration card, don't panic. Take your driver's license to the polls. The election official has a copy of all registered voters and will check your address and driver's license against the official list.

## When to Vote

Ninety percent, yes, 90% of all state-wide elected offices in Texas will be determined in the **March 4, 2014 primary elections**. For a Texas voter to make an impact, the person must vote in the primary election.

For detailed information on election dates go online to:

<http://www.sos.tx.us/elections/voter/2013dates.shtml>

Typically there is a November and May Uniform Election Date. Be sure to mark your calendars now to VOTE in the primary election on March 4, 2014.

## What's on the Ballot?

Be an informed voter. Find the candidates' names and political party affiliation on the following website:

<http://votetexas.gov/voting/what>

This website will not state political stances for candidates. Information can be found on a candidate's webpage or maintained by the respective parties. To find out about political views of candidate's go online to:

- Republican Party (<http://www.texasgop.org>)
- Democratic Party (<http://www.txdemocrats.org/>)
- Libertarian Party (<http://www.lptexas.org/>)
- Green Party (<http://web.txgreens.org>)

If there are propositions on the ballot, investigate these early. Local newspapers typically offer much discussion on these issues. However, if a state-wide proposition impacts education, seek out your school associations' and your professional associations' positions on the proposition.

## Early Voting

(February 18-28, 2014 \* First business day after Presidents' Day)

Can anyone vote early to avoid lines on Election Day?

**Yes**, early voting is easy and even preferred by many voters. If you are new to a community and uncertain which precinct you reside within, early voting is the way to go.

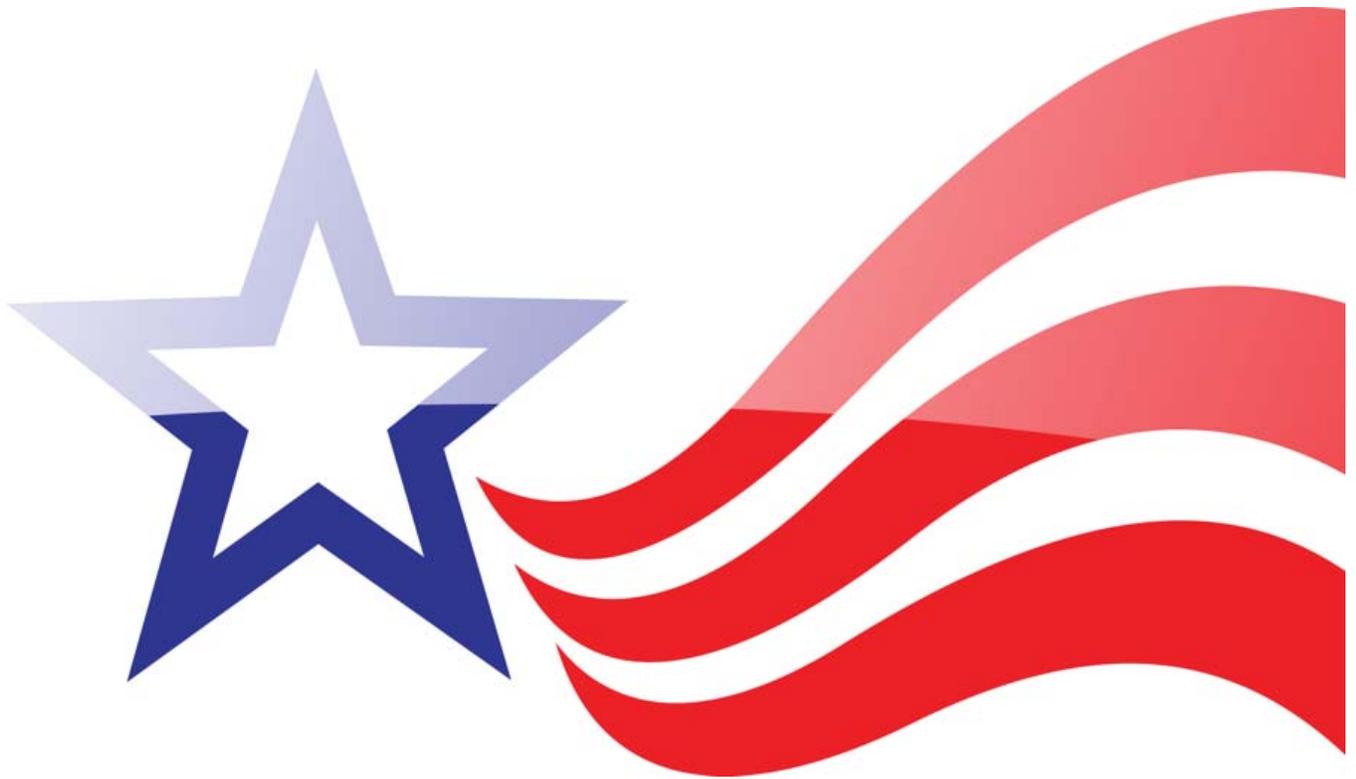
Remember, any registered voter can vote early *in person*. Registered voters may vote at *any* early voting location in their county of residence. To find out specific locations in each county go online to:

<http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/cclerks.shtml>

Go online and search the Internet for '*Early Voting Locations in Specific Counties*'.

Polling place hours vary at each early voting location.

Note: On Election Day a registered voter must vote at their assigned precinct. The precinct information is at the bottom of the registration card. Election Day voting hours are 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. statewide.



## WHAT CAN LEADERS DO TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION IN VOTING?

Despite being possibly one of the greatest civic responsibilities, voting is the least exercised. Voter turnout is low – alarmingly low among Texans. Texas is 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation for voter turnout. Educational leaders, teachers, staff and all auxiliary workers involved in the community need additional information and knowledge about the process. When citizens do not vote regularly, elected officials may not be held accountable. By keeping all citizens informed about the process and emphasizing the civic responsibility of voting, participation in this constitutional right may increase.

Texas has some 26 million residents, all of whom are affected by the outcome of political elections. Of those 26 million residents, some 18 million are eligible to vote. Texas voter registration documents have some 14 million registered voters.

*The process of legislation impacting education has many voices that must be heard. Any organization that fails to express their voice will fail to achieve the objectives of their organization.*

Jimmie Don Aycock

Texas State Representative

According to the Texas Education Agency, Texas has 332,000 teachers plus another 70,000 professional staff such as principals, central office administrators and others – about 390,000 prospective voters serving 4.7 million students.

Only about 59% of those registered voters turned out to vote in the Presidential election in November 2012. Even fewer vote in mid-term elections. So questions remain, why did 44% of registered voters NOT vote? What were the main reasons some people did not take the time to let their voice be heard? Does my vote really make a difference?

Research shows:

- New attention directed toward almost any problem produces positive results
- Culture is a primary factor in why people vote
- Educators can change culture
- Every vote matters



## **S.B. 553 – HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SERVING AS EARLY VOTING CLERKS**

In the last legislative session, the Texas legislature enacted a law which allows high school students to serve as early voting clerks in an election.

Section 25.087, Texas Education Code states: a school district may adopt a policy excusing a student from attending school for service as a student early voting clerk in an election.

A student whose absence is excused may not be penalized for that absence and shall be counted as if the student attended school for purposes of calculating the average daily attendance of students in the school district. A student who is excused shall be allowed a reasonable time to make up school work missed on those days. If the student satisfactorily completes the

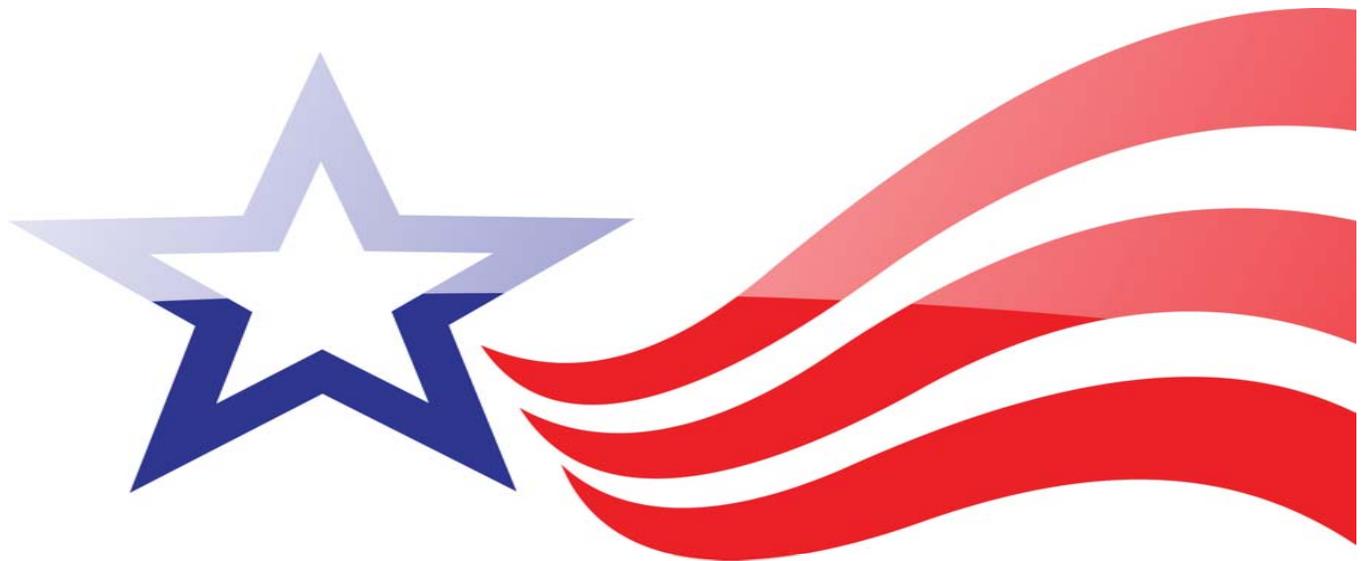
***With the fastest growing population being those over 55 and those under 18, failure to exercise the right to vote will jeopardize sound policy in the areas of health care and education.***

Dr. Mike Moses  
Senior Education Advisor  
Raise Your Hand Texas

school work, the day of absence shall be counted as a day of compulsory attendance.

A school district may excuse the student for a maximum of two days a school year. The student election clerk or student early voting clerk may apply the time toward: (1) a requirement for a school project at the discretion of the teacher who assigned the project; or (2) a service requirement for participation in an advanced academic course program at the discretion of the teacher or program sponsor.

A student early voting clerk is entitled to compensation in the same manner as other early voting clerks. Not more than four student early voting clerks may serve at an early voting polling place.



## 14 Tips for 2014

# Central Administration

*The future of the Republic is in the hands of the American voter.*

Dwight D. Eisenhower

34<sup>th</sup> President of the United States

1953-1961

1. **Lead** a district-wide culture of civic participation. Aim for 100% voter turnout of all district employees.
2. **Facilitate** voting for employees. In an age of drive-thru banking and dining, voting should be easy. Contact election officials and offer school campuses as Early Voting locations.

3. **Celebrate** voting by allowing departments to vote as a group on the first day of early voting.
4. **Keep current.** At district level meetings with central office staff and school administrators, have a “Legislative Update” section on the agenda. Emphasize in communications that 90% of the Texas Legislature will be selected in the March 4, 2014 primary election.
5. **Introduce** employees to a culture of civic responsibility. Encourage veteran staff to bring and display their voter registration cards.
6. **Hire** new school district employees and ask them to register and vote or show you their voter registration card. Be sure to let new employees know the district considers this right to be an important civic responsibility.
7. **Require** employees to notify the Human Resources Department of a change of address. Send them a voter registration card after changing that information.
8. **Remind** employees to vote. Send district-wide news blasts via email, social networks and the district website to remind employees about Early Voting dates and Election Day. Repeat this reminder with a countdown to Election Day on the website. Identify websites where voter registration applications can be found. The Superintendent can send a compelling letter to employees or an email message about the importance of voting (nonpartisan, not candidate oriented) and especially encourage spouses of educators to vote to double the impact.
9. **Host** candidate forums. Invite candidates to speak for a limited period of time. Remain nonpartisan. Have questions developed in advance to ask the candidates in regard to education.
10. **Coordinate** with city and county officials to encourage voting.
  
11. **Share** stories about past legislation. Be articulate and express information about educational bills that were addressed. Give examples of bills that were passed that gave back some funding that had previously been cut. Get the details correct. Discuss what impact it had on education in Texas.
12. **Encourage** the education association to host a “Get Out To Vote” rally for school district employees.
13. **Host** demonstrations of the new electronic voting machines at the high school to capture the interest of 18-year-olds or other first time voters.
14. **Adopt** local policies and administrative guidelines consistent with “Get Out To Vote” and civic responsibility. Parent notification systems may be incorporated to notify parents of election details through email and social media outlets.

***Most Texans value high quality public education, but well organized fringe groups and special interests are using elections to impose an anti-public school agenda. Elections are determined by who shows up and your vote could determine the future of public education.***

Blake G. Powell, President

Friends of Texas Public Schools



# 14 Tips for 2014

## Campus Administrators

1. **Lead** your campus to 100% voter turnout – because voting is an important part of the community’s culture.
2. **Remind** staff and patrons that Texas elections for state government are won in the primary.
3. **Post** reminders for patrons and staff to VOTE on marquees, including dates and locations (especially during Early Voting).
4. **Host** before school “Muffins with Mom” breakfast and “Donuts with Dad” along with encouragement to go vote during early voting.
5. **Place** printed reminder notes in staff mailboxes about voting.
6. **Promote** voting among all campus employees. Challenge each campus to have a 100% voter-turnout to win the district challenge. Model for staff by wearing an “I Voted” badge during Early Voting and on March 4.

7. **Hold** mock elections with students to stimulate interest in candidate positions. Prompt kids to encourage their parents to vote.
8. **Schedule** a special assembly for seniors in high school and register students who will be 18-years-old by Election Day. Remind students that it is a part of the culture of civic responsibility to VOTE and a right given to them by our founding fathers.
9. **Register** students to vote (60 days before 18<sup>th</sup> birthday) and who attend adult education and credit recovery programs. Mid-January is the time for student voter registration drives. Make voting registration a lesson on completing an application form on the Internet.
10. **Allow** employees to leave campus during planning periods, at lunch, or when the students leave immediately after school to vote early. Allow departments to vote as a group during early voting.
11. **Organize** an art contest where students design voting posters. Display the artwork throughout the school and in local store windows and restaurants. Create a unique emblem or design and display it as artwork each time “VOTING” is mentioned.
12. **Inspire** the twenty-something age group to get involved and vote. Social networks offer a great tool.
13. **Teach** parents the impact of budget decisions on their child’s school and why elections matter.
14. **Distribute** dots to place on cell phones or a watch as a reminder to vote. Do this right before the election. **Let’s all VOTE.**

## 14 Tips for 2014 Teachers



1. **Lead** colleagues and students to vote so as to have 100% voter turnout – because voting is an important part of the community’s culture.
2. **Inform** parents and students that Texas elections for state government are won in the primary.
3. **Be** a model of civic participation by being involved in elections. Know where the candidates stand and be able to articulate how these views may affect education.
4. **Know** the candidates and issues. Attend candidate forums and read and discuss legislative updates.

5. **Engage** colleagues in the voting process. Assist employees new to the district by reminding them to register to vote. Help them understand the culture of civic responsibility is a source of pride in the community. Social networks are a great tool.
6. **Encourage** colleagues in your department to vote as a group on the first day of early voting – February 18, 2014. Meet spouses and other eligible family members at the polls to be a part of this “group vote.”
7. **Wear** your “I Voted” badge with pride on early voting days and on Election Day.
8. **Display** voter registration cards at teacher orientation meetings.
9. **Discuss** with students the importance of elections and the voting process. Remind them that voting is a civic responsibility.
10. **Help** older students register to vote as early as 60 days before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
11. **Make** registering to vote a lesson on completing an application form on the Internet.
12. **Consider** offering extra credit for students who become registered voters.
13. **Inform** students about Early Voting – February 18-28, 2014. Discuss the importance of the Primary Election on March 4, 2014.
14. **Offer** extra credit for students who voted. Students will need to wear the “I Voted” badge/sticker to class to get the extra credit.



## 14 Tips for 2014

# Parents and Students

As parents we continually guide our children toward experiences that will enhance their knowledge and appreciation of the community, country and world in which they live.

1. **Vote** in the Primary Elections. Ninety percent of all statewide elections in Texas will be decided when the primary polls close on **March 4, 2014**.
2. **Vote early**. Early voting occurs February 18-28, 2014.
3. **Keep current**. The newspaper, news, radio shows, reliable online news sources, all of these are great resources for you and your child as you keep up-to-date on current

events. As a parent, you are your child's first and most influential teacher and your example will have an impact on your child's habits.

- 4. Keep talking.** At an age appropriate level, discuss current events with your child and the impact those events may have on the family.
- 5. Take the micro-macro view.** Help your child learn about key issues at all levels...from events in your neighborhood to regional, state, national, and global events.
- 6. Introduce** your child to elected officials. Meeting officials can have a meaningful impact on a child's understanding and appreciation for our democracy.
- 7. Bring it home.** It may be difficult for your child to connect events in other places and votes in Washington (or at any other level) with their everyday lives. Help your child make those connections. How does a vote on college tuition affect your family? How does rezoning affect your neighborhood? World news stories about restricted learning opportunities for girls, famine, and crackdowns on dissidents can lead to family discussions on public education, natural resources, and freedoms enjoyed in this country.
- 8. Vote.** Wear the "I Voted" sticker/badge with pride. Explain why you vote. Talk about how you can become an informed voter. What happens when people decide not to vote?
- 9. Value talk and talk values.** Talk to children about their day. Our daily lives are rich with opportunities to discuss values such as equity, fairness, and responsibility.
- 10. Duty-bound obligations.** Talk to your child about your own experiences in a positive way. While jury duty, voting and other civic duties may not always be convenient, they're important.
- 11. Instill community pride.** Take pride in the life of your community. Attend festivals, art shows, sporting events, and school activities. Join local service and civic clubs. Support your child's participation in scouting, community sports, or other youth groups.
- 12. Serve others together.** Check with United Way (dial 2-1-1) or contact other community agencies to participate and volunteer in worthwhile projects.
- 13. Get involved.** This instrument is not intended as an advocacy tool for or against any education issue or candidate and it is beyond the scope of this document to identify all of the groups working on education issues for parents but some include: Texas Parent PAC, <http://www.txparentpac.com>, and Texas Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment (TAMSA), <http://www.tamsatx.org>, and Texas Rural Education Association (TREA), <http://www.txrea.com>. In contrast, a nonpolitical group that celebrates successes of public education but does not advocate is the Friends of Texas Public Schools, [www.fotps.org](http://www.fotps.org).
- 14. Find culture close to home.** Visit Austin and tour the Texas State Capitol. Arrange visits to the LBJ Presidential Library, the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Blanton Museum of Art and other places rich in history and art. Look for family events in the area and participate.

## A NOTE TO PARENTS FROM THE TEXAS PARENT PAC

*The March 4, 2014 primary election is critically important to Texas families because about 90% of the seats in the Texas legislature will be decided in the primary. That's right—about 90% of our state representatives and senators will be chosen in the Republican and Democratic primaries.*

*Many legislative races are contests between strong public school supporters and opponents who are not. The Texas Parent Pac wants to inform all voters of the more than 35 pro-public education candidates endorsed by Texas Parent PAC. If you would like to see a list of legislators who will stand up for children and neighborhood public schools and learn more about the Texas Parent PAC go online to: <http://www.txparentpac.com>.*

Carolyn Boyle, Chair

Texas Parent PAC



## **A List of Do's and Don'ts**

- Public resources, no matter how small, cannot be used to advocate for or against an issue or candidate. Remember, a public servant commits a criminal offense if, with the intent to obtain a benefit or harm another, the public servant *misapplies anything of value belonging to the government* that is in their custody or possession by virtue of public office or employment. *See* Texas Penal Code § 39.02(a) (2). Simply stated, this means that *all* government property should be used for governmental purposes; not for personal or private purposes – including political campaigns.

- 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 early voting and to encourage a culture of participation. You may certainly use your personal email account to advocate.
- 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 early voting and to encourage a culture of civic participation. You may certainly use your personal social network accounts to advocate.
- 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. *See Ethics Advisory Opinion No. 172 (1993).* 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. The Texas Government Code prohibits a state agency or local government from using appropriated funds in connection with a political campaign. *See Texas Government Code § 556.004.*
- Officers and employees should not use their official authority to interfere with or attempt to influence the outcome of any election. *See Texas Government Code § 556.004.*
- 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.



## General Observations

- 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 new study done by the Annette Strauss Institute at The University of Texas. This means that a small minority of citizens are making decisions about our representation. This is especially true in the primary elections.

- Research indicates that if a candidate makes a negative first impression, it takes an additional 20 interactions to change that impression if it ever changes. In addition, it takes “seven interactions/touches” by a candidate to get a person to vote in the primary election. Personal ‘touches’ are the most important.
- Most common reasons for not voting are: don’t know the candidates and don’t have time to become educated on the issues, no time to vote, one vote doesn’t matter, and no interest in local elections.
- Secondary reasons for not voting are: unaware an election is taking place, lines too long, inconvenient times for polling, candidates are insincere and don’t do what they say they will, and the thought that nothing changes anyway.
- The lack of awareness of election dates is a greater issue for the primary election than the general elections. Voters that are questioned at the polls said that information about early voting dates and locations could enhance turnout.
- A desire to receive information that does not appear to be overly biased or negative was a recurring theme among respondents.
- When discussing issues, respondents said education and taxes were the two most important issues. In addition, curriculums, testing standards, support of education funding, teacher and retired teacher pay raises, and public education in general were focal points of discussion.
- There was significant interest from the under-thirty-age group in the use of Facebook and other social media to get the word out; this type media should be used as an effective tool in reaching and encouraging adults to vote.
- 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 on 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.

During the last legislative session, Texas 83<sup>rd</sup> Legislative Session-January 7, 2013 through May 27, 2013, bills were brought before the House and Senate that directly affect your family and the citizens of Texas. To find out the status of bills and see what new laws impact you, use the following website: <http://www.legis.state.tx.us>. Other items of interest on this website are:

How do I...

- Find a list of filed bills?
- Follow the status of a bill?
- Contact my legislator?
- Find how a legislator voted?
- Find when hearings are scheduled?
- View the text of a bill?
- Testify at a house committee hearing?
- Obtain a hard copy of a bill?
- Obtain a list of effective bills?

*In my first race in 2010, there were over 116,000 votes cast. I won by a margin of 402 votes over 31 counties (just under 13 votes per county). Needless to say, every vote counts. Texas public education is too big and too smart to let their power and their voice go unheard. Find out who supports public education and get out there and vote for them.*

Thomas Ratliff, Member

SBOE, District 9



### **A FINAL WORD**

Voting is a right bestowed upon citizens through the U.S. Constitution. No one can take this right away. Each citizen must foster a greater sense of civic responsibility in our communities through our students and the adult population.

The troubling state of civic responsibility, specifically voting in the Primary Election and General Election should be a concern to all Texas educators. We must work together to develop new civic habits.

Election Day is the customary opportunity to participate in one's ultimate civic duty. Let your voice be heard, take a stand, care enough to be informed. Get out and VOTE.

***The real key to our future as a viable public school entity lies at the ballot box and the involvement of supportive business people, parents, and Texas educators and other public school employees in exercising their influence with their vote for people who support our public schools through actions and not just lip service.***

Dr. Don Rogers, Executive Director

Texas Rural Education Association

## Additional Information/Websites

For additional information, read or visit the following:

Lawrence, R., Wise, D., & Einsohn, E. (2013). *Texas Civic Health Index*, The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life.

U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS) Supplements on Voting, Volunteering and Civic Engagements

<a href="http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/votregduties.shtml">http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/votregduties.shtml</a>	How to Register to Vote
<a href="http://www.sos.tx.us/elections/voter/2013dates.shtml">http://www.sos.tx.us/elections/voter/2013dates.shtml</a>	Information on Election Dates
<a href="http://votetexas.gov/voting/what">http://votetexas.gov/voting/what</a>	Candidate's Names/Political Party
<a href="http://www.texasgop.org">http://www.texasgop.org</a>	Republican Party
<a href="http://www.txdemocrats.org">http://www.txdemocrats.org</a>	Democratic Party
<a href="http://www.lptexas.org">http://www.lptexas.org</a>	Libertarian Party
<a href="http://web.txgreens.org">http://web.txgreens.org</a>	Green Party
<a href="http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/cclerks.shtml">http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/cclerks.shtml</a>	Early Voting Locations
<a href="http://www.legis.state.tx.us">http://www.legis.state.tx.us</a>	Find Out the Status of a Bill
<a href="http://www.txparentpac.com">http://www.txparentpac.com</a>	Texas Parent PAC
<a href="http://www.tamsatx.org">http://www.tamsatx.org</a>	Texas Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment
<a href="http://www.txrea.com">http://www.txrea.com</a>	TX Rural Education Association
<a href="http://www.fotps.org">www.fotps.org</a>	Friends of Texas Public Schools
<a href="http://www.powell-leon.com">www.powell-leon.com</a>	Powell & Leon, L.L.P. – Attorneys for TX Public Schools

Find an electronic copy of this booklet online at <http://www.txrea.com>