



U.S. Department of Education Toolkit for the

# **PROMOTION OF VOTER PARTICIPATION FOR STUDENTS**

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# LETTER FROM SECRETARY CARDONA

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

In March 2021, President Biden issued an executive order, “[Promoting Access to Voting](#),” which called on federal agencies to consider ways to expand opportunities for all Americans to register to vote and to obtain information about, and participate in, the electoral process. Later that year, the Biden-Harris Administration issued a [fact sheet](#) detailing new steps that agencies would take to promote voter participation. The U.S. Department of Education (Department) committed to preparing a toolkit of resources and strategies for increasing civic engagement at the elementary school, secondary school, and higher education levels. The toolkit was envisioned as a nonpartisan resource that could help more than 67 million students and their families learn about civic opportunities, and that would encourage institutions to identify additional opportunities to assist eligible students with voter registration. I am proud that we are releasing that toolkit.

Our nation’s schools, colleges, and universities play a critical role in supporting and strengthening our democratic society. And our higher education institutions, in particular, can help all students gain access to resources to engage in our electoral process.

At the Department, we recognize that the right to vote is the foundation of American democracy. However, students, especially students of color, Native American students, English learners, students with disabilities, and other underserved students, confront significant obstacles to exercising this fundamental right. These obstacles include difficulties with voter registration, lack of election information, and barriers to access at polling places. Our education system plays a critical role in promoting and supporting participation for all students in the electoral process – from providing civic education during a student’s elementary and secondary school years to facilitating the voting process during a student’s postsecondary education.

Since the beginning of the Biden-Harris Administration, the Department has taken several steps to expand voting access. We added a link to [vote.gov](#) on the [Federal Student Aid website](#) to make information about voting more accessible to college students. In April 2022, the Department issued a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) to remind institutions of higher education of the Federal requirements regarding voting that are tied to participation in Federal student aid programs. In that guidance, we made clear that Federal Work Study (FWS) funds could be used to compensate a student who is employed directly by a postsecondary institution for employment involving voter registration activities that take place on or off-campus. We have since provided [guidance](#) stating that current law allows institutions to use FWS funds for employment by a Federal, state, local, or Tribal public agency for nonpartisan election-related work that is not associated with a particular interest or group. This work can include supporting broad-based get-out-the-vote activities, providing voter assistance at a polling place or through a voter hotline, or serving as a poll worker.

We hope this toolkit helps schools support all students’ civic engagement. Within the following pages, you will find promising examples that show some of the ways in which schools are currently supporting nonpartisan voter registration activities to expand youth voter participation.

Thank you for your support and commitment to civic engagement. We look forward to continued partnership with you in this work.



Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.  
U.S. Secretary of Education







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# VOTER REGISTRATION

## Current Applicable Law

Under the *Higher Education Act*, institutions of higher education are required to make “a good faith effort to distribute a mail voter registration form, requested and received from the State, to each student enrolled in a degree or certificate program and physically in attendance at the institution, and to make such forms widely available to students at the institution.”<sup>1</sup> Institutions are required to request the forms from their state 120 days prior to the deadline for registering to vote within the state for each general and special election for Federal offices, governor, or other state executive offices. In order to be in compliance, the institution must, at a minimum, electronically transmit a message containing a voter registration form to each student, or can send an email to students—as long as the message is exclusively about voter registration—and provide a website where the form can be downloaded.

## Recommendations for Colleges and Universities

- Clearly identify the staff member(s) in the institution’s leadership who is responsible for requesting the required documents from the state’s election office.
- Identify the date(s) when the school will communicate the required information to students.
- Determine the format(s) the school will use to communicate this information to students.
- Identify what additional information about voter registration the institution will provide to students, including:
  - key deadlines;
  - information about how students can check whether they are registered at the correct address;
  - an explanation that students can register either in their home state or the state where they are attending school;
- notice that students need to register anytime they have a new address and how to do so; and
- how to vote (whether there is early voting and vote by mail; how to locate the correct polling location and hours).
- Identify additional communication opportunities to provide the registration form and to encourage students to register to vote, including during on-campus events and when students are filling out other forms for the institution such as during course registration, when they are getting their student identification cards, when they are signing up for on-campus housing, and during orientation sessions.
- Consider creating a dedicated website to provide students with updated information about registering and voting.
- Identify how the institution is using prior voting cycle data to determine steps to expand voter registration.
  - The [National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement \(NSLVE\)](#) is the nation’s largest study of college and university student voting, with nearly 1,200 campuses of all types across 50 states and the District of Columbia reporting their voter registration data. Institutions who opt in to the study can use their own campus reports to see where there are gaps among their students in registering, and all schools can use the national dataset to determine target populations.
- Identify opportunities for leadership to engage a broad coalition of interest groups across campus to be involved in voter registration work.
- Develop a plan for engaging with faculty and administrators so they can help support students in voting.
- Identify a process and timeline for communicating with students who are overseas to ensure they know what they need to do to be able to register to vote and vote absentee.
- Explore opportunities to partner with the local election office.

<sup>1</sup> 20 U.S.C. 1094(a)(23)

## Resources

- State-specific resources can be shared with students about voter registration: [Register And Vote in Your State | U.S. Election Assistance Commission \(eac.gov\)](#) [Check Voter Registration Deadlines and Laws in Your State | Vote.gov](#)
- Printable materials can be utilized to share key, accurate information with students: [Voting 101- Election Information for New Voters | U.S. Election Assistance Commission \(eac.gov\)](#)
- Registration and voting resources can be shared for students studying abroad: [FVAP.gov](#)
- Resources can be shared for multilingual students: [Language Access Resources | U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#)



## Examples from the Field

- **Georgetown University** created a MyAccess portal that enables students to register to vote, request an absentee ballot, monitor their registration status, and become informed about candidates. The resources are integrated into the school's course registration system and promoted through administrative guidance from the school.
- **Stony Brook University** developed a system that takes place during campus orientation to talk to every student through the registration process, collect registration forms, check them for accuracy, and communicate important dates with them.
- Working in collaboration with the Department of Interior, two postsecondary Tribal institutions—**Haskell Indian Nations University** in Kansas and the **Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI)** in New Mexico—received designation as Voter Registration agencies, which allows the schools to facilitate voter registration opportunities for enrolled students and members of the community.
- **Weber State University** partnered with their county elections office to utilize uniformed athletes for voter registration efforts and staffing polling places, helping to fulfill the office's need for volunteers and allowing their athletes to meet their civic engagement requirement for the National Collegiate Athletic Association.
- In an effort to reduce issues with rejected voter registration applications due to incorrect addresses, the Board of Elections of Lancaster County and **Franklin & Marshall College** in Pennsylvania collaborated to use a pre-printed voter registration form with a single campus address, since all students receive their mail through this single address.
- **Columbia College Chicago** integrated voter registration into the 17 sections of their campus' required first-year experience course. Students were trained as “voter registration geniuses” and delivered presentations about the importance of voting and the impact of the youth vote, as well as how to be an informed voter, and then helped students register to vote either on campus or back home.
- The Director of Elections and Voter Registration in Athens-Clark County, Georgia, has worked with the **University of Georgia** to develop a “Beyond the Arch” scavenger hunt, which encourages students to explore off-campus locations in Athens, learning more about the community where they attend school. One of the stops for students is the elections office, encouraging them to stop by in-person, learn more about voting, and potentially register to vote.
- **Simpson College** in Iowa worked with the Secretary of State's office to draft a lease agreement that colleges in Iowa could utilize with both the dorm address and the P.O. Box on one page so students would have the required documentation needed to register to vote.



# FEDERAL WORK STUDY (FWS)

## Current Applicable Law

In some circumstances, FWS funds can be used for jobs that include nonpartisan voter registration activities. Specifically, in order for an institution to meet the seven percent community service expenditure requirement for FWS employment,<sup>2</sup> students may be employed to perform civic education and participation activities that, among other things, teach civics in schools or increase civic participation. That means that, in the circumstances explained below, FWS funds can be used to employ students in nonpartisan civic engagement activities related to elections.

If a student is employed directly by a postsecondary institution, the school may compensate them for FWS employment involving voter registration activities that take place on or off-campus. This can include helping register students, faculty, staff, and other members of the campus community to vote through voter registration drives, staffing on-campus voter registration activities, or promoting voter registration and participation efforts while working in an on-campus FWS position such as a library, residential hall, student affairs office, or other campus department.

FWS funds can also be used for employment by a Federal, State, local, or Tribal public agency for election-related work that is not associated with a particular interest or group and is not associated

with a faction in an election for public or party office. This can include serving as a poll worker and verifying voter lists.

## Recommendations for Colleges and Universities

- Identify opportunities to incorporate nonpartisan voter registration activities into on-campus FWS jobs where those students are in a public-facing role with other students.
- Ensure opportunities are promoted for FWS students to partake in allowable nonpartisan election related activities on and off campus, such as work in polling places.
- Identify opportunities to pay students with FWS funds to house a nonpartisan student voting group.
- Conduct outreach to state and local government entities, such as Secretary of State offices and local election offices, who engage in nonpartisan election activities to see if there are opportunities for FWS jobs.

## Resources

- Guidance can be provided on how FWS funds can be used to support voter registration: [Use of Federal Work-Study Funds for Voter Registration](#)
- Information can be shared with students about becoming a poll worker: [Poll Worker Resources for Voters | U.S. Election Assistance Commission \(eac.gov\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> 20 U.S. Code § 1087-53(b)(2)(A).



## Examples from the Field

- At **Florida International University**, FWS students helped organize and advertise several nonpartisan voter education events, including Voter Registration Day, Early Voting Day, an Accessibility and Voting panel with the Miami-Dade County Supervisor of Elections, and a webinar with several local Florida Supervisors of Elections.
- **Simpson College** established an FWS position that assists with voter registration and engagement projects.
- At **Northwestern University**, staff used FWS funds to pay returning students to help new students through the voter registration process while they registered for courses and applied for student identification cards during move-in day.
- **Alabama A&M University** recruited residential advisors, provided them with stipends using FWS funds, and trained them to help register students as part of their day-to-day responsibilities of engaging with the students in their respective dorms.



## FACILITATING VOTING

### Current Applicable Law

To support students' easy access to voting, postsecondary institutions can be eligible—based on the relevant local election laws—to serve as voting sites, including providing drop box locations, hosting early voting sites, and serving as a polling place.

### Recommendations for Colleges and Universities

- Communicate regularly with students encouraging them to vote and reminding them of key deadlines and dates.
- Host a polling location or ballot drop box on campus(es).
- Provide resources that make it easier for students to vote, like postage stamps and a public notary to support voting by mail.
- Establish attendance policies or other policies to make it easier for students to have time to vote or serve as a nonpartisan poll worker.
- Align the institution's ID with the state's ID requirements for voting. If it is not aligned, communicate with students what documentation they need to bring with them to the polls.
- Share information with students about their right to vote and how to report potential violations of their rights, including voter intimidation.

- Provide students with access to nonpartisan information to help them feel prepared to vote, like sample ballots which are often available on state election websites.
- Set a goal for increasing student voting participation and track the percentage of students voting (note, this should not track party affiliation, rather the data should be used to set goals and assess the institution's nonpartisan efforts to increase voting participation).

### Resources

- Information can be shared with students on their rights as a voter and how to report voter issues:  
[Know Your Voting Rights; Guide to Federal Voting Rights Laws \(justice.gov\)](https://www.justice.gov/civilrights/division-civil-rights)

#### [Civil Rights Division - Department of Justice - Voting resources](https://www.justice.gov/civilrights/division-civil-rights)

#### **The Election Protection Hotline:**

English: 866-OUR-VOTE / 866-687-8683;  
Spanish: 888-VE-Y-VOTA / 888-839-8682;  
Arabic: 844-YALLA-US / 844-925-5287;  
Bengali, Cantonese, Hindi, Urdu, Korean,  
Mandarin, Tagalog, or Vietnamese:  
888-API-VOTE/ 888-274-8683





## Examples from the Field

- **American University** hosted Absentee Ballot Days—a three-day event at the library providing students with state-by-state information on how to vote and request an absentee ballot, and providing postage and certified notary publics. As a follow-up, the school emailed all students an online voting guide featuring absentee ballot information for all 50 states and D.C.
- **Montclair State University** identified where their students lived and then used that information to guide them to the correct location to register and to vote. They created a flier with a voting location guide for each resident hall and partnered with the director of residence life for distribution of this information to students.
- **Georgia State University** had the first polling location on a university campus that was 100 percent run by students who attend the university.
- The Ann Arbor clerk partnered with the **University of Michigan's** Art and Design School to design an on-campus voting location. This included hosting a satellite city clerk's office at the University's Museum of Art and designing simpler-to-understand voter registration forms after the state implemented same-day registration.
- **Wayne State University** adjusted their academic calendar to not have classes on Election Day, and worked with local election officials to add a polling precinct on campus.
- **Pace University** made Election Day an "asynchronous instruction day," where classes do not meet in real time.
- **University of Iowa** created a temporary student ID card and handed them out to students to meet the state's voter ID requirement that a school-issued photo ID include an expiration date.
- **The University of Wisconsin-Madison** issued a free voter-compliant ID card to students who have a valid student ID since the normal student ID doesn't meet the state's requirements. Voter ID print stations were staffed by students and university employees at on-campus polling locations.
- **Florida International University** was designated an early voting site for Miami-Dade County and promoted opportunities for students to serve as poll workers with the Miami-Dade Elections office.
- The Guam Election Commission partnered with the **University of Guam** Public Administration Degree Program to offer an academic credit bearing class on Elections Administration in an effort to recruit poll workers.
- **Agnes Scott College** evaluated its action plan to increase voter engagement based on participation numbers from democratic engagement and civic education events on campus, and used the data to better integrate democratic engagement and civic learning across campus.



**RESOURCES FOR  
K-12 INSTITUTIONS**

## K-12 INSTITUTIONS

### Background

Civic education, starting at a young age, is critical to a healthy democracy. A robust civic education can help teach critical skills that help students participate in civic life and has been found to lead to more informed voters and increased civic participation, including volunteerism and community involvement.<sup>3</sup> Research shows that engaging youth in elections and teaching about voter registration and civic participation before they reach the age of 18 can increase the likelihood of voting.<sup>4</sup>

According to research by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University, nonpartisan instruction about elections, including about the voting process, is effective but often sorely lacking in K-12 schools.<sup>5</sup> K-12 schools can play an important role in encouraging and supporting voter registration and civic participation.

### Recommendations for Schools

- Determine if your state allows pre-registration for individuals under 18 years old and, if so, identify opportunities for high school students to do so.
- Identify any state or local laws that require schools to provide students with voter registration forms, and establish a process for meeting those requirements.
- Develop a plan and designate staff to distribute and collect voter registration materials, and regularly provide students with information about registering and voting, including key deadlines and dates.



- Identify a staff member to be trained in voter registration who can support implementation of related policies.
- Identify opportunities to partner with local election officials.
- Create opportunities to engage students in designing and implementing voter registration drives.
- Provide opportunities in the classroom and through extracurricular activities for students to learn about our system of government and how they can participate.

### Resources

- Know what the laws are in your state on voting pre-registration for individuals younger than 18: [Pre-registration for Young Voters \(ncsl.org\)](https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/pre-registration-for-young-voters.aspx)
- Know how the Every Student Succeeds Act strengthens opportunities for states to expand and support civic learning and engagement: [ESSA-Mapping-opportunities-for-civic-education.pdf \(ecs.org\)](https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ESSA-Mapping-opportunities-for-civic-education.pdf)
- Understand why civic education is important to increase voting participation: [Equitable Civic Learning for All: How K-12 Schools Can Grow Voters | CIRCLE \(tufts.edu\)](https://www.cIRCLE.tufts.edu/research/2020/equitable-civic-learning-for-all-how-k-12-schools-can-grow-voters)

<sup>3</sup> [14 Reasons Why Teaching Civics is Important Right Now | iCivics](https://www.civics.org/14-reasons-why-teaching-civics-is-important-right-now/)

<sup>4</sup> [Growing Voters: Engaging Youth Before they Reach Voting Age to Strengthen Democracy | CIRCLE \(tufts.edu\)](https://www.cIRCLE.tufts.edu/research/2020/growing-voters-engaging-youth-before-they-reach-voting-age-to-strengthen-democracy/)

<sup>5</sup> [How educators and policymakers can prepare young people to engage in the 2024 election | Brookings](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/How-educators-and-policy-makers-can-prepare-young-people-to-engage-in-the-2024-election.pdf)





## Examples from the Field

- In **Santa Clara County** provides a toolkit for high school voter registration that includes resources to help students identify what they care about when voting, activities to guide them through making informed decisions, and tools for developing their voting checklist and plan to continue voting in future elections.
- In **Maryland**, the State Board of Education runs a program to train student registrars during National Student Leadership Week, which culminates in the election of the Student Member of the Board of Education (SMOB). This election uses actual election equipment with certification by the Board of Elections, and students are taught how they have a real impact when they exercise their civic rights.
- In **Lee County, Florida**, the school district organized a voter registration competition among its campuses with a kick-off assembly led by representatives from the board of elections and government teachers and giving a trophy to the school that registered the most voters.
- In **Virginia**, government teachers volunteer to partner with county registrars, allowing the registrars time to talk to students in their classrooms about voter registration.

