



**ENGAGING
FIRST-TIME VOTERS**

**IN THE
LIBRARY**

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With its power to reach millions of young voters, social media has long been viewed as a time-waster and billboard for misinformation. In the past few years, however, that power has given teen activists a platform to shine a light on laws and proposed legislation that directly impact the lives of young people across the country. Because of this, our students are becoming more aware of the ways politics are directly impacting their daily lives, and these young people are eager to have their voices heard in our election process. They have become engaged in this social discussion in ways I had never seen before in my lifetime, and they are turning those discussions into a movement to motivate young voters to register and vote in elections at all levels.

As a school librarian, one of my jobs is to help students find relevant and authoritative information for their needs. I can think of no better way to carry out my duty than to provide my students with unbiased information on how they can be active participants in the process to vote for their representation in government. Some of the info I give learners is about registering to vote. Since Texas voters are unable to register online to vote, offering voter registration forms in the school library is one way I can help streamline the registration process for my students.

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Facilitating Voter Registration

Throughout the school year I promote various deadlines for voter registration as well as encourage participation in local, state, and national elections. Frequent reminders are posted on the school library's social media accounts (see figure 1 for an example) for our students who have recently turned eighteen to pick up voter registration forms in the school library. Each year I contact our Texas Secretary of State's office and request

new voter registration forms so we always have a ready supply for our students who are eager to participate in our election process. (Students can mail completed forms to a local election office.)

Twice a year I host voter registration drives for our students. Tables are set up in our courtyard during lunches to make the registration services more visible to students who may not be frequent school library visitors. Our beautiful therapy dog, Mo, who visits our school library monthly, is a special guest during these voter drives (see figure 2). Mo is a crowd favorite and attracts large numbers to our space so we can offer our voting resources to more students. I asked a volunteer deputy registrar to attend my most-recent voter registration drive (see figure 3), and we were both thrilled when we had more than twenty students sign up to register to vote. Since that particular drive was in the spring semester, we also offered information on how to request absentee ballots for those students who would be attending college away from home in the fall.

This year, during our annual open house, I offered voter information, including voter registration cards, at our school library information table. This is an effort to encourage

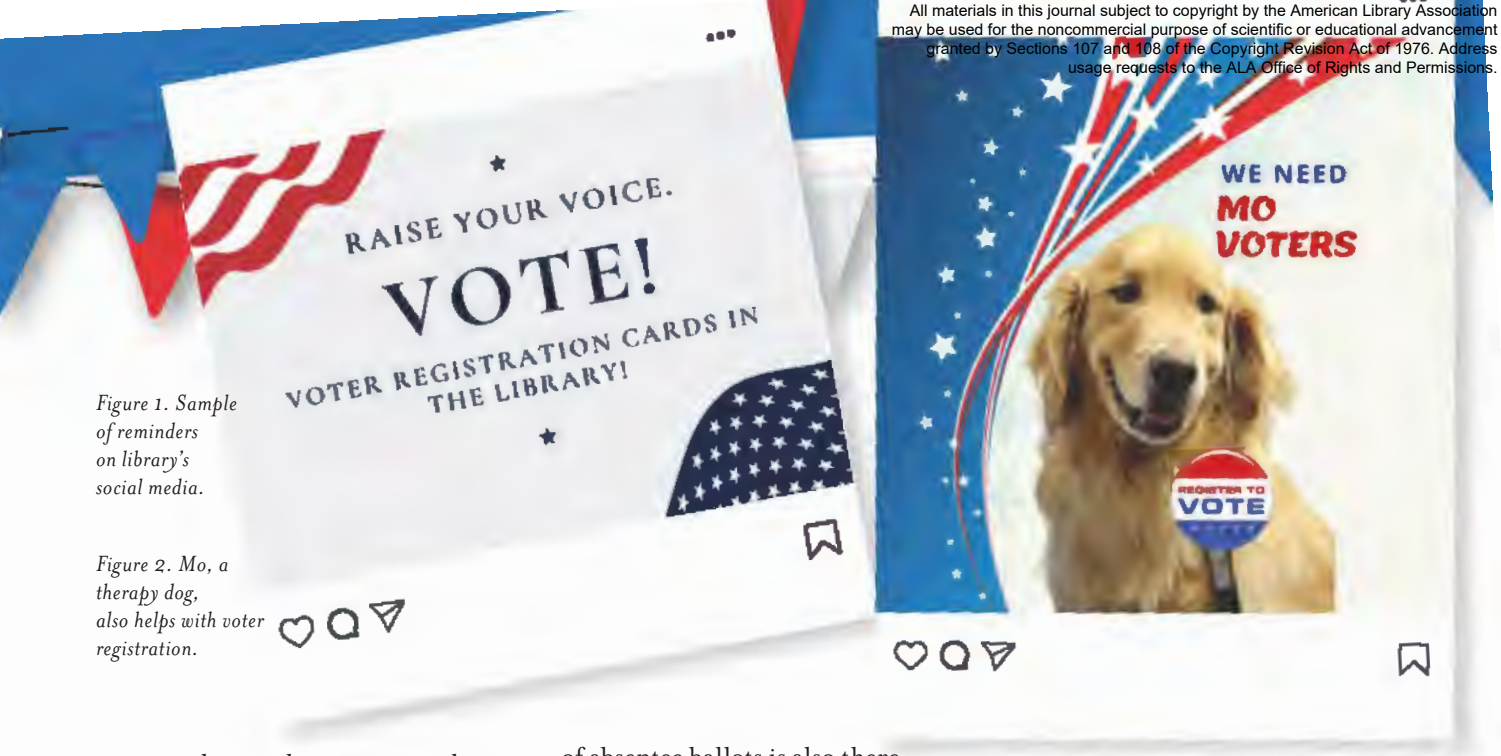


Figure 1. Sample of reminders on library's social media.

Figure 2. Mo, a therapy dog, also helps with voter registration.

parents who may have just moved into our area to model participation in the election process for their children.

By offering these voter registration drives, our campus remains in compliance with a Texas state law that requires two opportunities per year for eligible students to register to vote. High school students are busy with their extra-curricular activities, afterschool jobs, and rigorous coursework. I am pleased this law allows an opportunity to encourage my busy students to become registered voters and engage in the election process.

Pointing Voters to Information about Voting and Candidates

Near the registration forms we provide handouts and a QR code that direct students to www.vote411.org, an informational website created by the nonpartisan League of Women Voters (LWV). This website offers a wealth of information on the voting process for all fifty states. When someone selects their home state from a menu, information is displayed about how to check voter registration status and what forms of ID are required to cast a ballot on election day. Information about use

of absentee ballots is also there. Links are provided to determine a person's voting precinct and to identify the open positions to be decided in their voting district. Voters can even look up polling locations and hours for their specific area.

Although our students may be hearing ads about state or national elections, the information on local elections provided by the LWV is a wonderful tool to inform them of local races and ballot initiatives. If candidates have responded to the LWV's candidate questionnaire, their answers are also provided so voters can make an informed selection. At Vote411.org a sample ballot is provided. Students can use it to research their choices, make notes, and then take the sample with them into the voting booth. As a voter myself, I really appreciate the information on the various district and county court positions and what kinds of cases each court hears. Long ballots can be intimidating, especially ones with so many judicial positions open that it is easy to become overwhelmed. The explanations and sample ballot offered by the LWV helps young and seasoned voters alike feel more comfortable with the process. Vote411.org is definitely a go-to

resource for me when helping my students navigate the voting process for our area, but it can be used in all fifty states, so I encourage you to see how it may help in your efforts to keep your students informed.

The American Library Association website also features some wonderful resources to increase voter awareness. In partnership with National Voter Registration Day, ALA encourages libraries to support voter participation in their communities. The ALA voter engagement website www.ala.org/advocacy/voter-engagement contains a *Voter Engagement Guide*, which includes resources and ideas; a *Tip Sheet for Community Leaders and Partners*, which highlights ways libraries can support voter engagement; and *A State Voting & Election Toolkit*. This toolkit is a simple-to-use site that directs people to voting and election information for each state, including registration and deadline information, and more. Although these toolkits and resources are geared toward public libraries, many of the strategies and materials can be adapted for use in a high school library in districts that allow educators to provide registration and voting information.

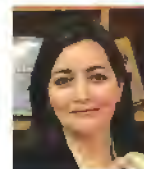
Figure 3. Author with a volunteer deputy registrar at the high school.



Helping Students Prepare for Their Futures

School libraries remain a hallmark of our societies. They are places where all students are welcome to use the abundant resources available to them to research topics for class study or explore ideas about which they are curious. At some school libraries it is also a place where students meet with military recruiters, sit for college interviews, complete job applica-

tions, and attend to other business as they prepare for their adult lives after high school. In our Texas public school library, preparing for life after high school also includes registering to vote and learning how to become an informed voter who sees the value in voting in every election.



Lucy Podmore has served as a school librarian for sixteen years in San Antonio and is currently chair of the Texas Association of School

Librarians. She has presented on library tools and roles at various district, state, and international conferences, including the annual conferences of the International Society for Technology in Education, Texas Computer Education Association, and Texas Library Association. She was named as Thomas C. Clark High School's Educator of the Year in 2018, Hector P. Garcia Middle School Educator of the Year in 2010, and TCEA's Library Media Specialist of the Year for 2014–2015. Her role as campus librarian encompasses many tasks, but her favorite of those is booktalking with anyone who will listen and planning LibraryPalooza, an author festival for teen readers in San Antonio.

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CALL FOR PROPOSALS OPENS FALL 2022

This fall watch for the American Association of School Librarians' call for proposals for concurrent sessions and programming at the 2023 AASL National Conference.

