



# California Students Vote Project

## IMPROVING VOTER REGISTRATION ON CALIFORNIA'S CAMPUSES

A project of the California Secretary of State in partnership with the California Lieutenant Governor, CalPIRG, California Common Cause, and Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus

### YOUTH VOTER PARTICIPATION LAGS BADLY BEHIND OTHER AGE GROUPS

Stunningly, only 8% of eligible youth aged 18-24 voted in the 2014 general election. Only 52% of eligible youth were even registered to vote, more than 20 points below any other age group.<sup>1</sup>

We can improve these numbers. A California Secretary of State report revealed that from January 2014 to February 2015, just 8,454 of the 2.8 million students at California's public colleges and universities registered to vote through an online opportunity provided by their campus,<sup>2</sup> a mere 0.3 percent of the student body.

The University of California (UC), the California State University (CSU), and the California Community Colleges (CCC) have the power to improve youth voter participation and build a new generation of civic leaders. The changes sought by the California Students Vote Project are aimed at that goal.

### A PUBLIC-PRIVATE COALITION SEEKING CHANGE

The California Students Vote Project is an effort led by the California Secretary of State's office in partnership with the California Lieutenant

<sup>1</sup> California Civic Engagement Project, UC Davis Center for Regional Change, California's New Political Realities: The Impact of the Youth Vote on Our Electoral Landscape, Policy Brief Issue 9, January 2015.  
<sup>2</sup> California Secretary of State, COVR Registration by College System and Campus, 01/01/2014-02/03/2015.

Governor's office, and three nonprofit organizations, CalPIRG, California Common Cause, and Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus. These groups recognize that a healthy democracy must include the voices of California's next generation.

### SIMPLE CHANGES COULD SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE STUDENT VOTER PARTICIPATION

The California Students Vote Project is advocating for the implementation of student voter registration best practices at public colleges and universities. Sample best practices are below.

The California Students Vote Project seeks college and university commitments on these and other efforts through the signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between the college and university systems, Secretary of State, and/or campus student organizations. *Drafts of MOUs are available upon request.*

Best practices include:

[1. Asking students via their student portals to register to vote.](#)

The California Student Voter Registration Act (SVRA) requires every community college and California State University (CSU) campus to allow its students to register to vote during the class registration process using a link to California's online voter registration system. Under the current system, only 38,514 students have registered through an official

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campus Online Voter Registration (OVR) link as of 2014, while California college systems have a combined student enrollment of 2.8 million (2014-2015 academic year). We advocate that students be presented with a voter registration question or active and visible voter registration prompts/links when using student portals and campus webpages (to view syllabi and reading assignments, submit homework, sign up for services, pay tuition, etc.)

By making a voter registration link on a highly visible area on a targeted date (last day to register to vote for the primary in California) Facebook was able to help register nearly 200,000 people in one day. This was the second highest total voter registrations in the nearly four-year history of the online registration site.

California's social services agencies have built voter registration into their online applications as a question that every user encounters. The percentage of users who respond affirmatively is typically between 5 and 7 percent. If students register to vote at the same rate as social services clients, the result would be 140,000 to 200,000 new student voter registrations a year across California's three higher education systems.

### [2. Sending all-campus emails before voter registration deadlines and elections.](#)

Experience from the UC system before the 2012 presidential election showed that sending an email from the chancellor of a campus, the student body president, or both, to the entire campus could result in 800-1,000 voter registrations within 36 hours. Sending second and third reminder emails also generated hundreds of registrations. Additional emails sent after the voter registration deadline and shortly before Election Day can create excitement around voting and drive turnout. These emails can also be used

to do critical voter education on laws that strengthen the educational system.

### [3. Implementing established best practices for on-the-ground voter registration efforts.](#)

Substantial experience has shown that access to high-traffic and central locations on campuses are critical for successful student voter registration drives. Campuses should develop protocols to allow access for student voter registration drives to residential housing, campus plazas, and classes.

## **SECRETARY OF STATE COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES**

As part of the MOUs, Secretary of State Alex Padilla has made his own set of commitments to ensure success. Among other things, Secretary Padilla will make his office available to support campus voter registration efforts, (1) through amplification of a voter registration message using the SOS's press office and social media platforms, (2) through the provision of voter registration materials, (3) by providing tech support if necessary to ensure students are offered more and better online registration opportunities, and (4) by personally attending on-campus voter registration events when possible.

## **SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS ALREADY MADE**

The Secretary of State has already met with UC President Janet Napolitano, CSU President Timothy White, and interim Community College Chancellor Erik Skinner. All parties have signaled their support.

MOUs are currently being negotiated with the UC and the CSU, and outreach is being done by supporters of the California Students Vote Project on a district-by-district level within the community college system.

California Student Voter Registration Coalition:





#### HOW YOU CAN HELP:

If you are interested in helping with this project, please contact:

- Lizette Mata, Deputy SOS, Special Projects.  
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- Emily Rusch, Executive Director, CALPIRG,  
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The California Students Vote project is particularly in need of connections to the leadership of community college districts. Please reach out with any contacts you may have.

*California Student Voter Registration Coalition:*



**CALPIRG**

