Texas High School Deputy Registrar Guide

Texas Secretary *of* State
Elections Division

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INTRODUCTION

The Elections Division of the Office of the Secretary of State has prepared this guide for High School Deputy Registrars. This serves as a guide for high school principals in Texas and contains essential information, tips, and resources needed to confidently and accurately assist with voter registration.

Section 13.046 of the Texas Election Code designates public and private high school principals in Texas as deputy registrars. They play a vital role in promoting engagement among young individuals by helping eligible students register to vote before they graduate. They ensure students are informed about their voting rights and are prepared to participate in elections as soon as they reach voting age. By bringing voter registration directly into schools, these registrars help greatly in increasing youth voter activity.

References in this guide are made to the appropriate sections in the Texas Election Code, unless otherwise indicated.

Visit sos.texas.gov, as well as VoteTexas.gov, for additional election information.

The Office of the Secretary of State does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, or disability in employment or the provision of services.

GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF A HIGH SCHOOL DEPUTY REGISTRAR

High school deputy registrars aid in making voter registration accessible and informative and help prepare students to become active participants in elections.

- High school deputy voter registrars should obtain voter registration applications and materials from their school board administrator or the Secretary of State.
- During the final month of each semester, high school deputy registrars are required to distribute voter registration applications along with a notice (PDF) informing students how to return their completed voter registration application. The Secretary of State encourages all schools to establish a practice of providing all eligible students voter registration applications upon turning 18 years of age. However, high school deputy registrars may also distribute voter registration applications throughout the school year.
- Upon request by the applicant, the high school deputy registrar may provide assistance to a student or employee filling out the application form.
- Upon receipt of an application, the high school deputy registrar should review the voter registration application for completeness and may return it to the applicant for completion, if needed.

WHO CAN PERFORM THESE DUTIES

A high school principal may designate one individual in writing to serve as the high school deputy voter registrar, acting on the principal's behalf to register eligible voters. No specific form is mandated for this written designation; an email or interoffice memorandum is acceptable. The designated person can use this document to identify their role as the authorized deputy registrar.

The principal has the right to remove the designated representative from the position at any time by providing them with written notification (which can also be an email or interoffice memorandum) clearly stating the basis for removal. Should the designated person be removed or leave their school, they are required to return all voter registration materials to the high school principal. Following such a removal, the principal will resume the responsibilities of high school deputy registrar until a new designation is made.

WHERE TO GET VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATIONS

Primary Source

Specially-coded voter registration applications for use by public and private high schools may be obtained from the Secretary of State's office free of charge.

- To order these applications, please use the High School Voter Registration Application Order Form.
- Forms are available in both English and Spanish.

Secondary Source

- Contact your county election office for voter registration applications or refer applicants to the Secretary of State's website to print their own applications. Find your county's election office contact information here.
- Write on the completed applications "H.S. 18" before delivering them in order to aid in tracking.

- You must also provide the Notice to High School Students or Employees Registering to Vote to applicants along with their application.
- These applications have the same delivery deadline of 5 days.

WHEN TO DISTRIBUTE VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATIONS

The law requires that high school principals distribute voter registration applications to eligible students at least twice a year. This should be done during the final month of each semester to maximize the number of eligible students who have turned 18 since the last distribution. However, there is nothing in the law that prevents you from distributing applications throughout the year.

You may distribute and collect the specially-coded high school voter registration applications for both students and employees of your school.

Other Approaches to Registering Eligible Voters

While there are unlimited ways of introducing voter registration in high schools, it is important to be aware that emphasizing the importance of voter registration is what makes the biggest impact in involvement.

Passive Methods

- Have voter registration applications available in the school library or front office for seniors to take, complete, and return to the high school deputy registrar.
- Set up a table in a common area (like the cafeteria or main hallway) with registration forms, eligibility requirements, and instructions for seniors to take and complete at their convenience.
- Add a link to the Secretary of State's website on the school website or student portals.
- Dedicate a space for a bulletin board that includes registration information, deadlines, and eligibility information.

Active Methods

- Discuss voter registration in presentations in Government and Economic classes.
- Host school-wide events for seniors during lunch, assemblies, or information nights where students can register with help from voter registrars.
- Include voter registration in graduation preparations.
- Use morning announcements, posters, and school newsletters to share information and encourage registration.

ROLE OF A HIGH SCHOOL DEPUTY REGISTRAR

Who is Eligible to Register to Vote?

- A student who:
    - Is a citizen of the United States;
    - Is at least 17 years and 10 months old to register, and will be 18 years of age by Election Day;
    - Has not been finally convicted of a felony, or if a felon, must have completed all of the punishment, including any term of incarceration, parole, supervision, or period of

probation, or must have been pardoned or otherwise released from the resulting disability to vote; and
    - Has not been determined by a final judgment of a court exercising probate jurisdiction to be totally mentally incapacitated or partially mentally incapacitated without the right to vote.
- An employee of your high school can also register.

Assisting with Applications

- You may help a person fill out the application if he/she cannot read or has a physical disability.
- If an applicant cannot sign his/her name on the application, the applicant may make a mark on the signature line. Print the name of the applicant beside the mark. If the applicant cannot make a mark, state that fact on the application and print the applicant's name. Sign and print your name, and provide your residence address as the witness.
- You may allow another registered voter (or anyone who has submitted a registration application) to fill out and sign an application for his/her spouse, parent or child. That person must sign the application as "agent" and state the relationship to the applicant on the application. The "agent" must have the permission of the applicant to do this.

Reviewing the Applications

High school deputy registrars must review the application for completeness. However, it is not required to review the application in the applicant's presence. The following sections of the voter registration application are required to be completed:

- **Section 1:** Applicant must select why they are submitting the application (new application, change of current information, or request for replacement). Applicant must also answer citizenship and age questions;
- **Section 2:** Full name, including any middle, maiden, or former name;
- **Section 3:** Residence address must be a street address or a description of the location of the residence;
- **Section 4:** Valid mailing address, if mail cannot be delivered to the residence address;
- **Section 5:** City and county of former residence in Texas;
- **Section 6:** Date of birth, including month, day, and year;
- **Section 9:** Texas driver's license number, Texas personal ID number, or last 4 digits of social security number. If the applicant has not been issued any of these items, he or she must check the box in this section affirming this statement; and
- **Section 10:** Signature of applicant and date of signing. Be sure the applicant has read the statements that he/she is signing regarding qualifications to register. If an agent is registering for an applicant, be sure the agent provides his/her relationship to the applicant.

You CANNOT:

- Determine if the applicant is actually qualified to register to vote or
- Make the applicant provide his/her gender or telephone number.

Notice to Provide High School Students or Employees When Registering to Vote

Each application form must be accompanied by a notice regarding the delivery of their voter registration application.

Notice to High School Students or Employees Registering to Vote

This notice informs the applicant how to submit their voter registration application. The application may be submitted in person or by mail to the voter registrar of the county in which the applicant resides or in person to a high school deputy registrar or a volunteer deputy registrar for delivery to the voter registrar of the county in which the applicant resides.

Delivery of Completed Applications

- All completed applications must be delivered to the county voter registrar by mail or in person as soon as possible after they are received, but no later than 5:00 p.m. on the fifth day after they are received.
- If an application is completed within 4 days before the last day to register for the upcoming election, you must deliver the application to the voter registrar by 5:00 p.m. the next business day after the date to submit a timely application.
- If an application is completed on the last day to register to be able to vote in the upcoming election, it must be delivered to the voter registrar by 5:00 p.m. the next day.
- Applications delivered by mail are considered to be delivered upon receipt by the county voter registrar.

Note: Section 13.042(c) of the Code states that you must deliver an application submitted after the 34th day before the date of an election and on or before the last day for a person to timely submit a registration application for that election to the county voter registrar not later than 5 p.m. of the next regular business day after the date to timely submit a registration application for that election.

REGISTRATION

When is the Registration Effective?

Tell the applicant that they can vote as soon as the 30th day after submitting the application. This 30-day period starts when the high school deputy registrar receives the application form.

If the applicant is under the age of 18, the registration will become effective on the 30th day after the voter registrar receives the application or on the applicant's 18th birthday, whichever comes later.

How Long is the Registration Effective?

Tell the applicant that the registration will be automatically renewed every even-numbered year unless:

- The voter moves to another address;
- The voter receives a final felony conviction and has not completed the sentence, probation, or parole or been pardoned or otherwise released from the resulting disability to vote (note: "deferred adjudication" does not constitute a "final felony conviction"); or
- The voter has been determined by a final judgment of a court exercising probate jurisdiction to be totally mentally incapacitated or partially mentally incapacitated without the right to vote.

Deadline for Voter Registration

Texas law requires eligible voters to register by the 30th day before Election Day. If you receive a voter registration application within four days before the last day to register for the upcoming election, you are required to deliver the application to the county voter registrar no later than 5:00 p.m. of the next regular business day after the date to submit a timely application.

Specific election dates and deadlines information including last day to register to vote can be found on our website's Important Election Dates webpage.

VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATION TIPS

Use Ink

The application should always be filled out with a black, blue, or other dark colored ink pen.

Print Legibly

All information on the application must be legible. If an elections official cannot read the information on the application, they may not be able to enter the voter's name or other required information into the system.

Do Not Use Abbreviations

For cities or street names, make sure the applicant has spelled out the address in its entirety unless they are commonly accepted, for example, "St" for "Street" or "Rd" for "Road."

No White-Out or Cross-Outs

If an applicant makes a mistake, please have them start over with a new form instead of trying to fix the mistake by crossing out the incorrect information.

MOST COMMON VOTER REGISTRATION MISTAKES

While registering to vote is a simple process, small mistakes on an application can lead to delays or even prevent a person from being successfully registered. As a high school deputy registrar, it is important to be aware of the most common errors so you can help applicants avoid them. Catching these mistakes early ensures an application is completed accurately and processed without issues.

- **Failing to answer a required question in Section 1.** Checking the required boxes on an application is crucial because the purpose is to confirm essential eligibility criteria, such as U.S. citizenship and age requirements. Without checking these boxes, the application may be considered incomplete or invalid, leading to the applicant possibly being denied the opportunity to register.
- **Incorrect or outdated address.** An accurate address is essential on an application because it determines the voter's proper voting precinct, polling location and the specific local elections in which they are eligible to vote. If the address is incorrect or outdated, the voter may receive the wrong ballot, be assigned to the wrong district, or face delays or issues on Election Day. A correct address helps facilitate a smooth voting experience.
- **Not providing information in Section 9.** Providing a driver's license number or the last four digits of the applicant's Social Security Number is important because it helps verify identity when registering to vote. This information is used to confirm that the person submitting the application is who they say they are, which helps prevent voter fraud. Without this verification, the application may be delayed or rejected.
- **No signature or wrong date provided**. Not signing the application or writing the wrong date can make the application invalid. The signature serves as a legal authentication that the information provided is accurate. The date confirms when the application was completed. An unsigned form

or incorrect date can delay processing which can lead to the individual not being registered before the deadline.

Reminders

High School Deputy Registrars are allowed to:

- Distribute voter registration applications to eligible students.
- Assist students in correctly completing their voter registration forms.
- Collect completed forms from students.
- Submit completed forms to the appropriate election office within the required deadline.
- Host voter registration drives or information sessions at the school.
- Encourage all eligible students to register to vote without pressuring or influencing their political choices.

High School Deputy Registrars are not allowed to:

- Withhold voter registration opportunities from eligible students requesting an application.
- Endorse or oppose political candidates or their parties while acting as a registrar.
- Refuse registration assistance based on political beliefs.
- Alter or withhold completed registration forms.

HIGH SCHOOL DEPUTY REGISTRAR FAQS

1) Are high school principals required to distribute voter registration applications to eligible students?

Yes. As noted in our letter, Section 13.046 of the Texas Election Code requires high school principals, or their designees, to distribute voter registration applications to eligible students at least twice per year.

2) When should I do this?

The voter registration deadline for each election in Texas is 30 days before election day. Because of the importance of the upcoming elections and the urgency of the registration deadline, we encourage you to institute a program to distribute voter registration applications to anyone who turned 18 or who is at least 17 years and 10 months old when the semester starts.

3) Why does the rule say to do this project at the end of each semester, but the letter asks us to do it at the beginning?

The law requires you to distribute voter registration applications at least twice a year. Our office established the rule that it must be done at the end of the semester (i.e., within the last 30 days) in order to maximize the number of students who are offered the opportunity to register to vote, as seniors tend to turn 18 during their senior year. However, there is nothing in the law preventing you from exceeding the minimum requirements. As noted above, because of the importance of the upcoming elections and the urgency of the registration deadline, we encourage you to institute a program to register anyone who turned 18 or who is at least 17 years and 10 months old when the semester starts. You can also institute a program to deliver a voter registration application to each student on or near their 18th birthday. Again, there is no legal limit on the number of times you may distribute voter registration applications to individuals at your school.

4) Do I have to do this myself?

No. You can designate one person in writing to act on your behalf in registering eligible voters at your school. There is no particular form that the writing needs to take. You are required to provide the designated person with a form or a card that identifies the designated representative as the high school deputy registrar. You might wish to accomplish this by sending an e-mail or an intraoffice memorandum to the person indicating that you are designating them to act on your behalf to be the deputy registrar for your school; the person can then use that e-mail or memorandum as the “form” or “card” the person needs to be identified as the high school deputy registrar.

You may remove this person at any time from this position, with or without cause. If the person is not performing his or her duties, you must relieve the person of the role of high school deputy registrar. If you remove the person, you must put the removal in writing and clearly state the grounds for removal, and provide the person you are removing with the written notice. This can also be done via e-mail or intraoffice memorandum, for example. The removed person must return their voter registration materials to you, or otherwise account for the materials. You shall then resume the role of high school deputy registrar until you designate a new person to act on your behalf.

If the designated individual is transferred or terminated from employment, the designated individual must also return the voter registration materials to you.

5) Who else can register students?

While high school principals or their designees must distribute voter registration applications to eligible students at least twice per year, other members of the school community who are citizens, over the age of 18 and meet other criteria are also eligible to distribute applications. These eligible "Volunteer Deputy Registrars" must be deputized through the county voter registrar's office before they can collect completed applications. Teachers, members of the PTA, grassroots groups, and student organizations, and others may become deputized provided they meet the other criteria under the law to be appointed as a Volunteer Deputy Registrar.

Only high school principals (or their designees) and those deputized as a Volunteer Deputy Registrars can collect completed voter registration applications. It is a crime for others to do so.

You can learn more about the Volunteer Deputy Registrar rules and procedures at https://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/laws/volunteer-deputy-registrars.shtml.

6) Do I have to order the blank voter registration applications from the Secretary of State's office?

No, but you are strongly encouraged to do so. If you order applications from the Secretary of State's office, the applications that we send you have a code on them indicating that they come from the high school deputy registrar program. It is important for tracking purposes that you use the coded applications if you can. However, your key role is to make sure that students and other persons at the school have the opportunity to register to vote. Thus, providing blank applications from your county election office or referring applicants to our office's website to print applications (after the applicant fills in the electronic fields), and you collecting and delivering the applications to the county voter registrar/elections administrator (or the applicant delivering it directly to the county voter registrar/elections administrator), will also work for the purpose of registering people in your school. If you can write on the completed applications "H.S. 18" before turning them into the voter registrar, this will also aid with the tracking. You must provide the "Notice to High School Students or Employees Registering to Vote" to any voters to whom you provide either the specially coded applications, the county applications, or the reference to our office's online form, however.

You can use the order form sent with this email or you can order the coded voter registration applications online at this site: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/hsvoterregistrationorderform

7) Who is eligible to register to vote/from whom should I accept applications?

Any student who is at least 17 years and 10 months old may register to vote. Anyone at your school over the age of 18 may also register to vote or use the application to update their voter registration information, including their name or address.

8) Can I help a student or an employee fill out an application?

Yes, a student or employee may ask you for help in filling out an application. If an applicant cannot sign the application due to physical disability or illiteracy, another person may witness the applicant's mark. The witness needs to include an address, printed name, and signature on the application. If an applicant is physically unable to make a mark, the witness must state this fact on the application.

9) Should I review the applications to make sure they're complete?

Yes, you must review the applications for completeness. You may do this in or out of the applicant's presence. If the application is missing required information and/or the required signature, you must return it to the applicant for completion and resubmission.

10) What do I do with the completed applications?

The completed applications need to be delivered to your county voter registrar/elections administrator promptly, and as soon as possible when you receive them. This can be done in person or by mail. They must arrive at the county voter registrar's office no later than 5:00 p.m. of the fifth day after they are submitted to you or your designee, unless the application was submitted after the 34th day and on or before the 30th day before the date of an election. In this case, they must be delivered no later than 5 p.m. of the next regular business day after the voter registration deadline.

You may deliver the completed applications to the voter registrar in person or by mail. The completed applications can be sent individually or in a package of several applications. For instance, one principal we spoke with collects them in a bin on his desk. The ones received each day are packaged and mailed that same day or the next day to the local voter registrar. Students and teachers can also drop them in the mail themselves, but that is not the preferred delivery method. Those mailed directly by the applicant come to our office in Austin where we open and sort them and then send them to the county. This extra step in getting the application to the county may delay the voter in becoming registered.

11) What if my school serves more than one county?

You are required to serve as a deputy voter registrar for each county in which territory served by the school is located, without regard to where the school is physically located. You must deliver completed applications to the voter registrar of the county in which the applicant resides.

12) What happens if I am transferred or terminated from employment?

You must deliver the voter registration materials to the new principal or newly designated representative.

13) What if I have a question?

We are here to help. We want to partner with you in performing this important service for your school community. You can call us at (800) 252-VOTE, email us at elections@sos.texas.gov, or simply go to www.votetexas.gov for answers.

Notes: