

# HALF THE STORY: WHAT TEXAS' HIGH SCHOOL VOTER REGISTRATION LAW IS AND HOW MISSING DATA COULD MEAN THAT TEXAS' YOUNGEST VOTERS ARE GETTING LEFT BEHIND

## OVERVIEW


Since 1985, Texas has had a law on the books requiring every public and private high school in the state to distribute voter registration applications to eligible students at least twice each school year. The principal, or the principal's designee, of each high school – public and private – is designated by law as the high school deputy registrar (HSDR).<sup>1</sup> This individual – whether the school principal or a designated staff member – has a legal obligation to register students once per semester and return the completed forms to the county.

## METHODOLOGY

Continuing an effort previously managed by the Texas Civil Rights Project, our partners in tracking and improving compliance with this law, Common Cause Texas submitted a Public Information Act request to the Texas Secretary of State for copies of all voter registration request forms submitted by high school principals. We requested all documents and information related to the duties of high school deputy registrars for the time period from August 1, 2020 through May 31, 2022, including all copies of forms used by high school principals to request voter registration applications from the Secretary of State's office.

Our report aims to publish the findings of which public and private high schools in Texas are **textually compliant** with the law. Found in the notice sent to high school principals every semester that was obtained by Common Cause Texas in our Public Information Act Request sent to the Secretary of State, and publicly listed in the Texas Administrative Code's 'Directive for High School Deputy Registrars' is the recommendation that **"the high school deputy voter registrars contact the Secretary of State for registration applications and not the county voter registrar; the voter registrar's applications are not coded for use by high school deputy registrars."**<sup>2</sup>

### Where to Get Applications

- You may use the enclosed order form to request blank specially coded applications from our office.
- Coded applications may also be ordered online here:  

- You may print copies of the attached coded registration forms, available in both English and Spanish, and distribute them to your eligible students.

*NOTE: We strongly suggest you use the enclosed order form or the online order form referenced above to acquire the voter registrations applications.*

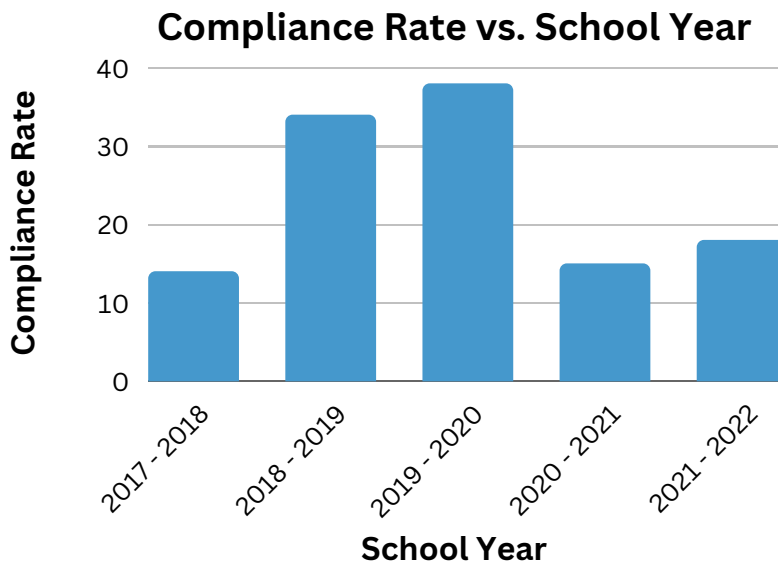
<sup>1</sup> <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/EL/hitm/EL.13.htm#13.046>

<sup>2</sup> [https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p\\_dir=&p\\_rloc=&p\\_tloc=&p\\_ploc=&pg=1&p\\_tac=&ti=1&pt=4&ch=81&rl=7](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=1&pt=4&ch=81&rl=7)

## LATEST FINDINGS & ANALYSIS: 2020-2021 & 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEARS

We saw compliance reach its peak in 2019-2020 at 38% – thanks to reporting done by our partners at the Texas Civil Rights Project – only for compliance in the 2020-2021 school year to drop 23 points to 15% of schools following the text of the high school voter registration law. The 2021-2022 school year saw a slight increase to 18% of schools compliant, meaning since 2020 – over 2,000 high schools in Texas may not be following the HSVR law, and students are being disenfranchised in the process.

School Year	Compliance Rate
2017-2018	14%
2018-2019	34%
2019-2020	38%
2020-2021	15%
2021-2022	18%



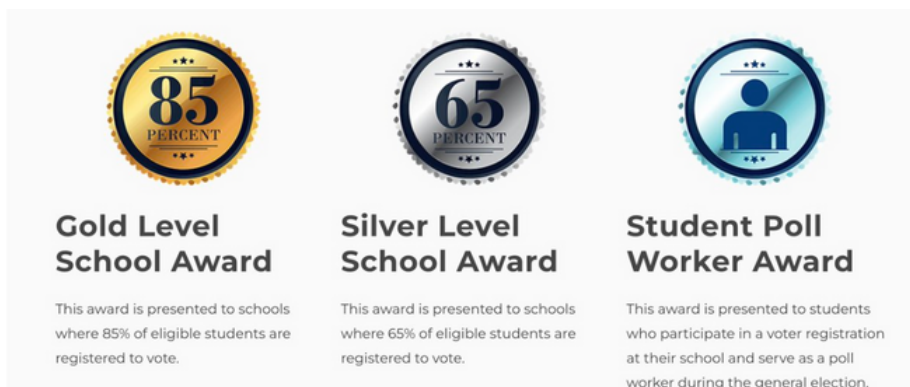
One piece of context that factors into the dip following the peak compliance rates in 2019-2020 was the move to virtual or hybrid class options due to COVID-19, and the absence of full electronic voter registration in Texas meant limited access to students. Compliance went up in the 2021-2022 school year by 3%, in part because of schools increasingly operating more in-person.

## RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

This report tracks textual compliance with the law through pursuit of public information with the Secretary of State's office as to how many high schools or school districts request forms they need every year or semester. However, we recognize that this is an incomplete picture - some schools may use leftovers from previous years, and many others partner with organizations in our coalition who can bring local representatives to host nonpartisan voter registration drives on their campuses (for example: The League of Women Voters of Texas operates in schools in over a dozen counties across Texas).

The following are possible actions the Secretary of State's office can take right now, with their existing administrative authority and without directive or policy changes from the state legislature, to improve compliance with Texas' high school voter registration law:

- 1** Track and publish online on a monthly basis the number of high school voter registration forms requested from the Secretary's Office, the number of high school voter registration forms that have been submitted, and the number that have been accepted, with numbers reported both on a statewide and county level basis. Additionally, report who the designated staff member is if the principal appoints a counselor, administrator, or teacher as the HSDR for their campus.
- 2** Promote a culture of civic engagement by creating a system of awards for people, groups, and high schools that perform excellent voter registration work, including but not limited to a civic seal for high schools that commit to providing the required number of high school voter registration opportunities.



*Pennsylvania has a Governor's Civic Engagement Award which celebrates schools that register 85% of eligible students to vote AND separately awards students who serve as a poll worker during the general elections.*

- 3** Expand language accessibility for eligible student voters by expanding the coded high school voter registration forms beyond just the currently provided English and Spanish options.