



The Florida Joint
Center for Citizenship
A Partnership for Florida's Civic Health



Voting as Civic Engagement

A Partnership of the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship and the Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections

The Florida Joint Center for Citizenship (FJCC) and the Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections (FSASE) established a formal partnership in May 2014 to advance Florida's civic health. Both organizations share deep concerns about the state of Florida's civic health and believe that joining forces is vital to expand the knowledge of Florida's K-12 student population and will foster greater voter participation among our state's future voters.

Voting is one piece of Florida's anemic civic health that this partnership seeks to address as Florida's civic health is low compared with the nation as a whole. Across the last three presidential election cycles, Florida's participation ranked 18th in civic engagement. This ranking, which includes the percentage of Florida residents volunteering (21%), attending public meetings (7%) and donating at least \$25 to charity (45%), is lower than the national average. In fact, Florida is dead last (6%) among states in its percentage of residents working with their neighbors to solve problems. There are strong connections among these civic actions, as individuals who vote are more likely to take part in other civic actions while those who do not vote are also less likely to engage in other forms of civic participation. Young people are less likely than older generations to take part in civic action for various reasons including lack of resources, higher mobility among the college aged and newly graduated, and a lack of confidence that their voices will have an impact on their government.

One effort intended to address concerns about civic health among young people in Florida is the Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Civic Education Act (2010). This Act was adopted by the Florida Legislature after four years of work led by former U.S. Senator Bob Graham and former Congressman Lou Frey. The bill was sponsored in the House by Representative Charles McBurney (R-Jacksonville) and in the Senate by Senator Nancy Detert (R-Venice). Key provisions of the act include:

- a) Civics instruction in middle school with a statewide end-of-course examination in the 7th grade. Student exam performance is factored into school grades, student grades and teacher evaluations
- b) Integration of civics lessons in reading and language arts courses K-12. Civics materials in all grades are linked to instructional benchmarks.

As a result, 200,000 young Floridians now receive intensive civics instruction each year and another 2.4 million students are exposed to civics lessons in reading and language arts courses.

The Florida Department of Education has adopted required instructional benchmarks for middle school civics that include participation in simulated election experiences which stress the importance of both civic knowledge and civic skills. According to the Department, students are expected to “Experience the responsibilities of citizens at the local, state, or federal levels (examples are registering/pre-registering to vote and participating in a political campaign/mock election.)”

The partnership between the FSASE and the FJCC will provide tools to support teachers throughout Florida as they teach their students about the role of voting and elections in the American democratic process. As they implement this partnership, FSASE and FJCC will be guided by, but not limited to, the following guidelines:

- a) The Florida Student Mock Election will be publically identified as a joint effort. This will include, but not be limited to, the inclusion of FSASE logos appearing on the Florida Student Mock Election website.
 - a. A FSASE Technical Advisory Committee, organized and supported by FJCC personnel, will provide guidance on the Florida Student Mock Election website;
 - b. Election and voting-related lessons for elementary, middle, and high school civics and government classes
 - c. FSASE members will be available to supplement and support classroom efforts by making presentations at schools or at the local election office, serving as a resource to classroom teachers, posting mock election results on election supervisors’ websites, and/or providing collateral materials, such as Voter Guides, “I Voted” stickers, etc.
- b) FSASE and FJCC will work together to create awareness and commitment to student participation in the Florida Student Mock Election. This may include FSASE members writing letters to their county school superintendents supporting student participation in the mock election.
- c) FSASE members will share best practices to be posted on the Florida Student Mock Election website.

The goal of the FJCC-FSASE partnership is to make a quality enriching civic engagement experience available to all 7th grade students every year and to all Florida students in presidential and off-year election cycles.

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