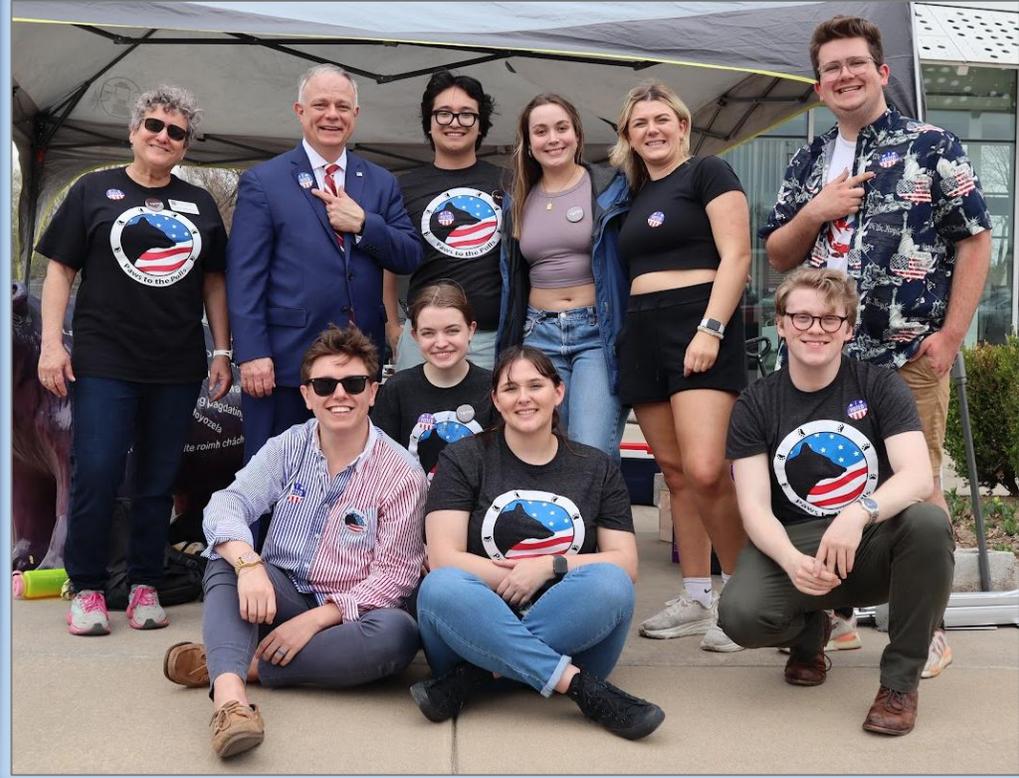


Missouri State University's Voter Education Initiative Cultivates Informed Democratic Engagement

Suzanne Walker-Pacheco, PhD
Emily Fessler, MPH
Liz Wertz
Ava Taylor





Session Goals

- Identify barriers to student voting
- Describe approach taken to overcome barriers
- Present ideas for creating collaborative relationships in grassroots movement
- Evaluate existing resources
- Recognize value of social science perspective
- Demonstrate tailoring actions to a particular community
- Demonstrate data used and data-driven actions
- Share ideas



Rationale

Low college-age national voting rates

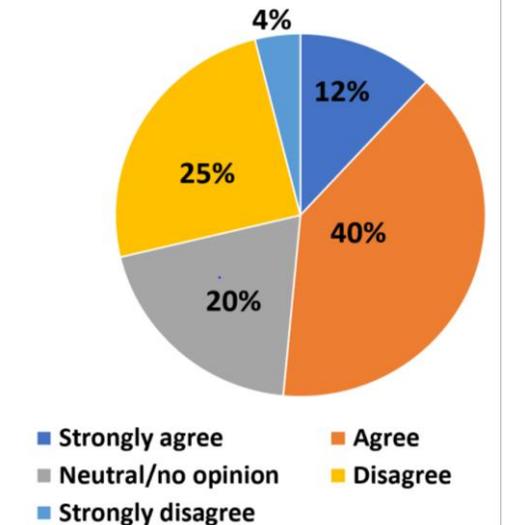
Fall 2019: Information-gathering

- Informal focus groups (~ 60 students)
- Issues of importance to students
- Low voting rates in local elections
- Political information obtained from social media
- Lack of access to nonpartisan resources
- Unfamiliar with practical aspects of voting
- Feelings of disengagement or anxiety related to voting

Surveys from Classroom Visits 2020 & 2021

Indicate your level of agreement with this statement:

I know where to find sources of nonpartisan, unbiased political information (N=256)



OUR MISSION



Civic Engagement and the Public Affairs Mission

Paws to the Polls formed to increase voter engagement and voting knowledge at Missouri State University. Our mission is to drive culture change by turning MSU into a voting campus. Inspired by the university's mission in public affairs, our aim is to weave civic engagement into the fabric of the university via education and outreach.

Timeline - 2020



Evolution of a logo

February & early March 2020

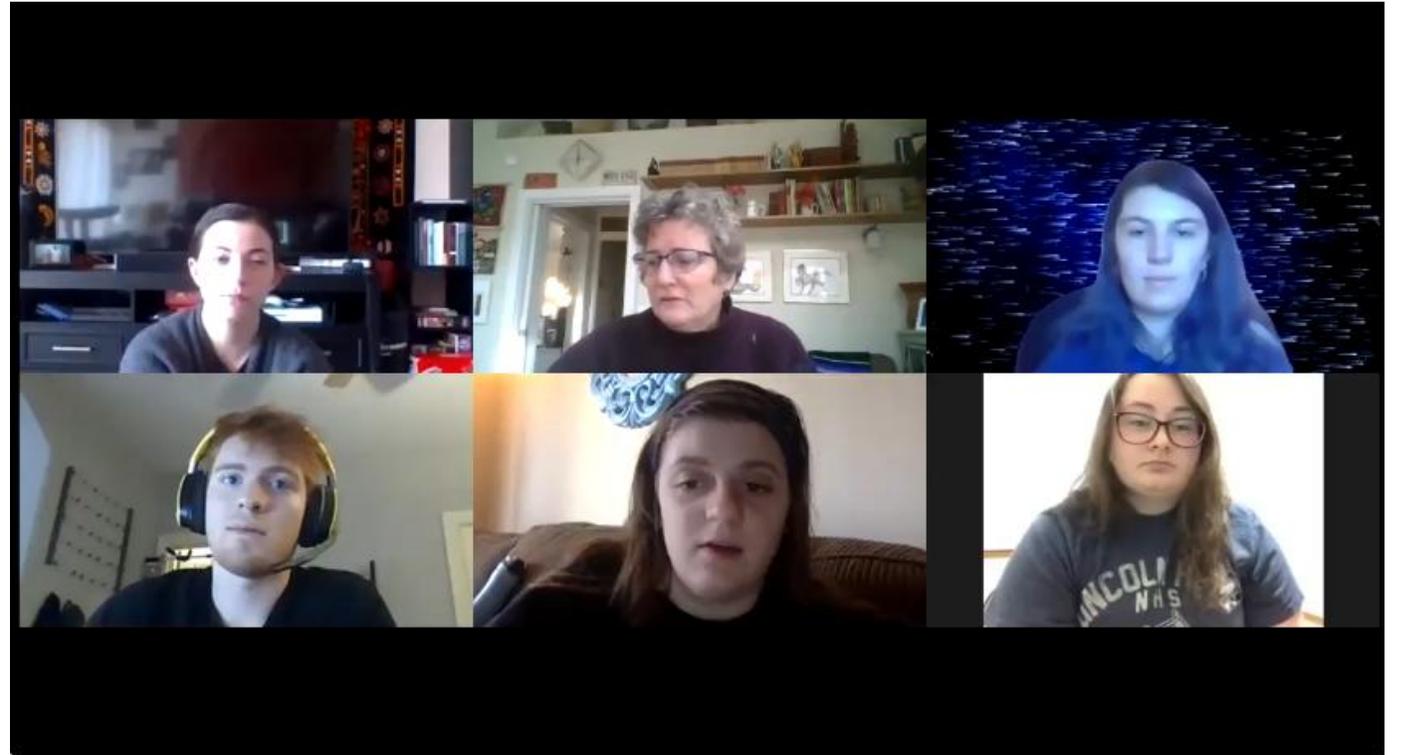
- Initial meetings

Mid-March 2020

- Pandemic begins, campus closed

April and May 2020

- Multiple meetings per week via Zoom



Timeline - 2020



Evolution of a logo

February & early March 2020

- Initial meetings

Mid-March 2020

- Pandemic begins, campus closed

April and May 2020

- Multiple meetings per week via Zoom

Summer 2020

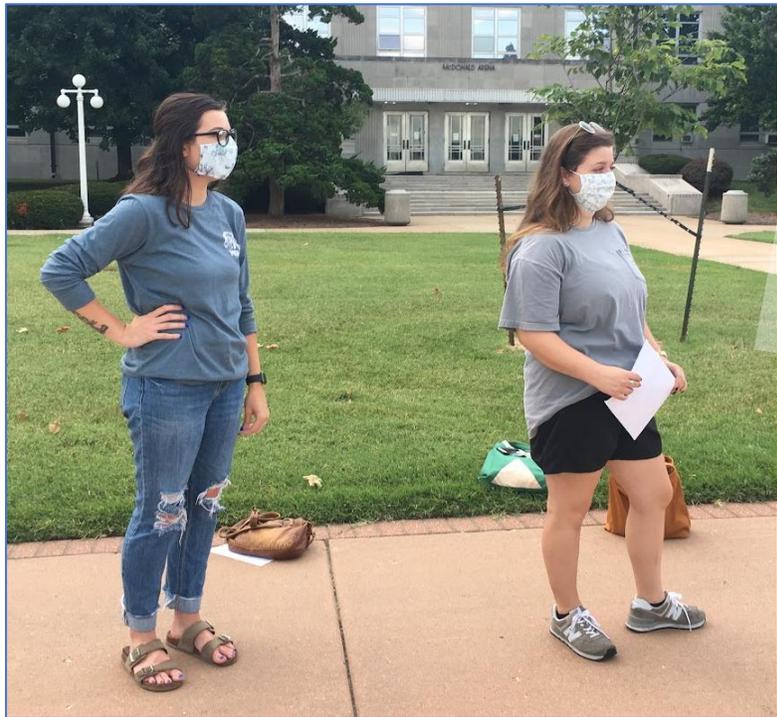
- Video production
- Voter Education Curriculum produced
- Proposal prepared for campus funding
- Production of Voter Information Booklet

Fall 2020

- Tabling, presentations, distribution of Voter Information Booklet
- Partnership established with Office of Public Affairs Support; website development



Current & Former Participants as Co-Authors



Emily Fessler

Liz Wertz



Ava Taylor



Ava



Liz



Emily



Barriers to Voting

- **Logistical barriers**
 - Election laws and policies
- **Educational barriers**
 - Lack of institutional transmission of voting information
 - Little opportunity to discover personal relevance of voting
 - Bias and misinformation in resources
 - Not knowing they can register where they attend college
- **Perceived barriers**
 - Emotional and psychological factors

WHAT'S IN MISSOURI'S NEW VOTING LAW, HB 1878?

VOTER ID RESTRICTIONS EFFECTIVE 8-22-22

PHOTO I.D. REQUIRED



Eliminates voter registration card and student ID options. Present one of the following to cast a regular ballot in person:

- A nonexpired Missouri driver's license or non-driver state ID card;
- A nonexpired military ID, including a veteran's ID card;
- A nonexpired United States passport;
- A photo ID that expired after the last general election (Nov. 2020)

No valid photo ID? Cast a provisional ballot that will only count if voter returns to poll with photo ID or the signature matches

VOTER REGISTRATION RESTRICTIONS ON HOLD



- Judge issued injunction on ban for anyone (except gov't) to be paid or compensated for soliciting voter registration
- Those soliciting 10 or more voter registrations must register with the Secretary of State as a Voter Registration Solicitor
- Solicitors must be 18 and Missouri registered voters

ABSENTEE VOTING CHANGES



- Judge issued temporary injunction on ban on "soliciting" of absentee ballot application
- 2 weeks no-excuse in-person absentee voting with photo ID
- First responders can vote absentee; caregivers must reside with confined person to vote absentee
- No absentee ballot drop boxes

OTHER VOTING CHANGES IN HB 1878

- Eliminates Presidential Preference Primaries
- Allows SOS to audit voter rolls and order removal of voters
- Eliminates electronic machines, requires hand-counted paper ballots
- Gives legislature power over challenges to voting laws
- No grants or outside funds to local election authorities
- Allows private audits of elections
- Allows voters to update registration address at the polls

YOUR VOICE YOUR POWER YOUR VOTE

GET INVOLVED!
HELP PROTECT THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN MISSOURI!
bit.ly/protectmovoters
info@movpc.org

MOVPC **LWV** LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
#ProtectMoVoters



Overcoming the Barriers

- **Solutions: logistical barriers**
 - Distribute information to counter confusion and voting law changes
 - Advocate for college student voter access in Jefferson City
- **Solutions: educational barriers**
 - Provide practical information on the voting process
 - Facilitate understanding the relevance of voting
 - Offer nonpartisan resources, clarify voting regulations
- **Solutions: perceived barriers**
 - Familiarize students with voting process to ease anxiety
 - Provide information to promote engagement
 - Strive to enhance outreach



Exploring Existing Resources

- Campus

- Office of Public Affairs Support
- American Democracy Project
- NSLVE
- Campus Central Polling Location

- Community

- Greene County Clerk
- League of Women Voters

Fact-Checking websites:

 POLITIFACT

 FACTCHECK.ORG

 Science Feedback

Unbiased sources of political information:



U.S. Vote Foundation www.usvotefoundation.org:

Assists citizens to register, vote and request absentee ballots; provides voter information



Vote Smart www.votesmart.org: Provides unbiased information on candidates via various categories of information



All Sides www.allsides.org: News from left, right, and center perspectives



ActiVote www.activote.net: App that is the one-stop shop for all things political: elected officials, candidates, current legislation, plus daily surveys and results

Accessing & Utilizing Funding

- Assess funding needs
- Engage students
 - Food, giveaways
 - Fun or interesting
 - Make local government visible
- Internal funding for faculty/staff



Paws to the Polls Funding History

2020	LWV Education Fund, \$400
2020	SGA Student Initiative Fund Grant, \$6831
2021	SGA Student Initiative Fund Grant, \$7639
2021	LWV Education Fund, \$1000
2022	SGA Student Initiative Fund Grant, \$10,966
2022	LWV Education Fund, \$1000
2023	LWV Education Fund, \$1700
2020-24	Office of Public Affairs Support logistical & in-kind support
2022-23	Provost's Office & Student Affairs, \$8700



Peer engagement

Self-discovery

Paws to the Polls Voter Education Initiative



Student Organization

Education

- Voter Education Modules
- Voter Information Booklets
- Video Production

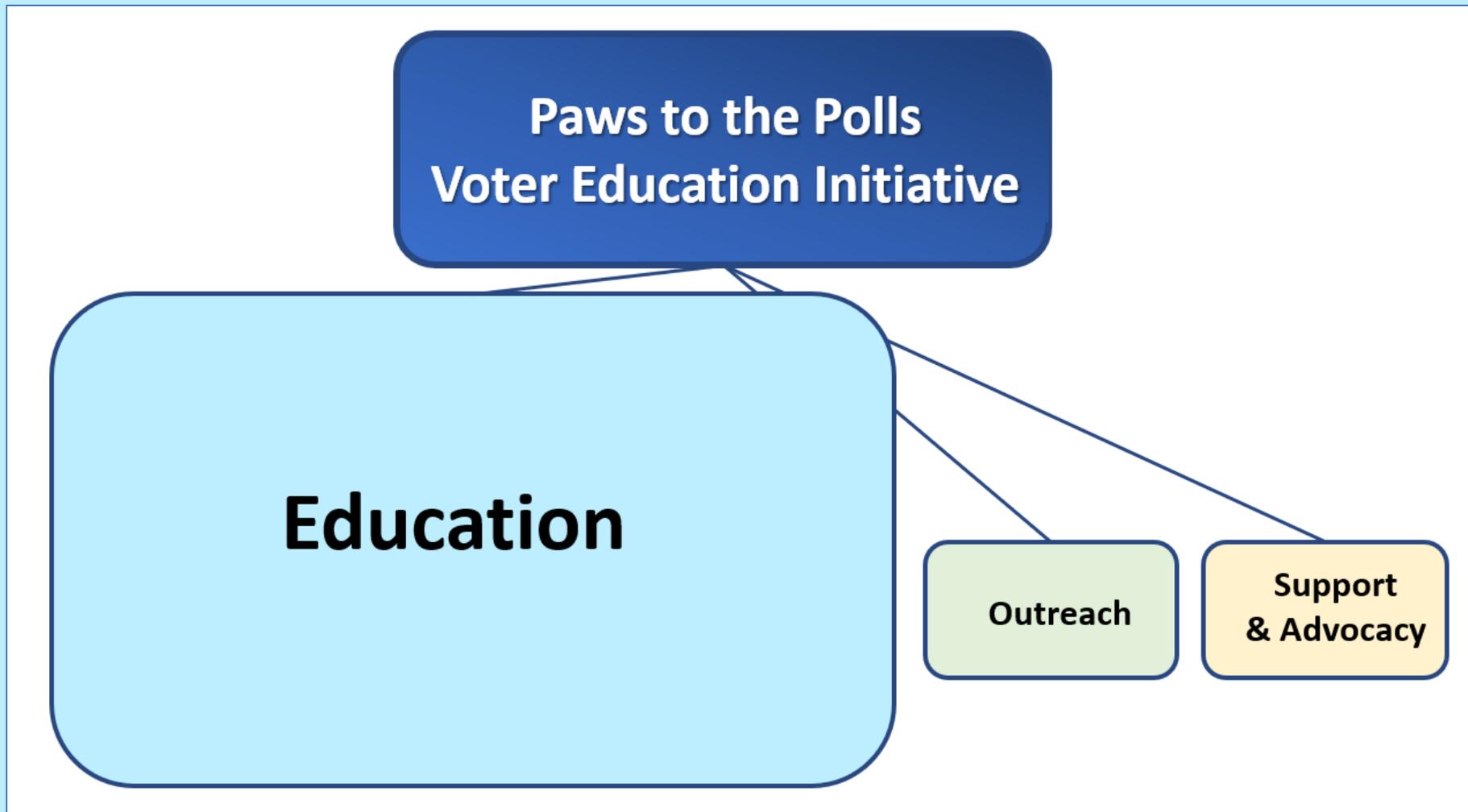
Outreach

(Campus and Community)

- Voter Registration Tabling
- Presentations
- Events

Support & Advocacy

- Legislative Interactions
 - Jefferson City
 - On campus
- Liaison w/Greene County Clerk



“It is intimidating for college students to feel confident in the voting process because it is not taught in normal curricula. Young people are magically expected to have this information, but the voting process can be complicated and initially very intimidating. That is why initiatives like Paws to the Polls are so important in helping to educate about the voting process.”

Veronica Jacobs, '21

Voter Education Curriculum

Five modules:

1. Personalize voting
2. Registering to vote, regulations, locating nonpartisan information
3. Identifying your election districts and your elected officials
4. Recognizing and avoiding bias
5. Familiarization with voting process

~ 3 hrs total to complete

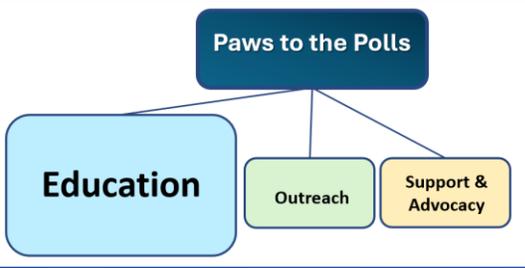
~ 640 students have accessed curriculum

Module 5

Casting Your Vote



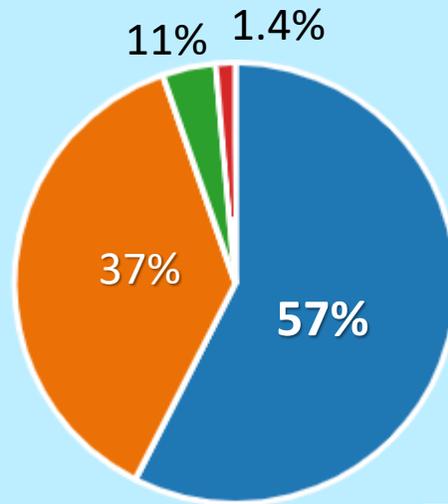
Voter Education Curriculum Results



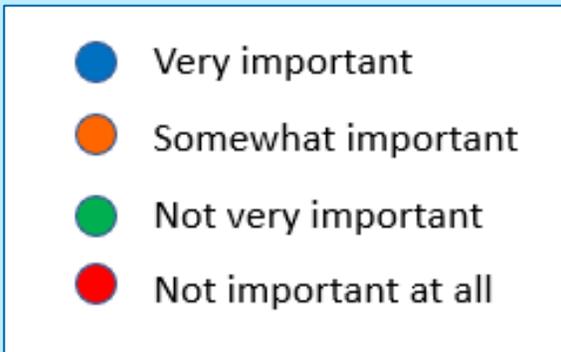
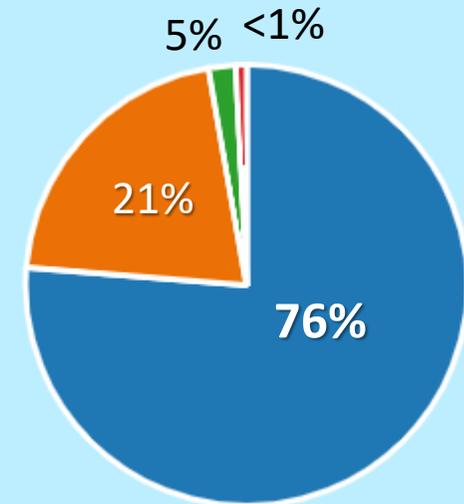
- Sample results, Fall 2022-Fall 2023
- 2 self-assessment questions
- 14 objective questions

“How important do you feel it is to vote?”

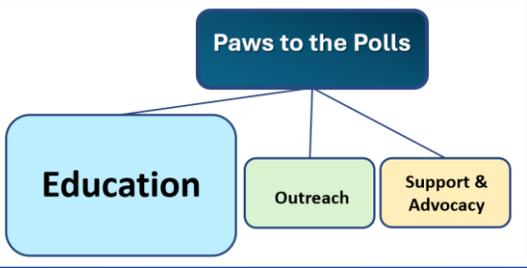
Pre-test (N=280)



Post-test (N=253)



$\chi^2 = 21.06$ $p < .001$

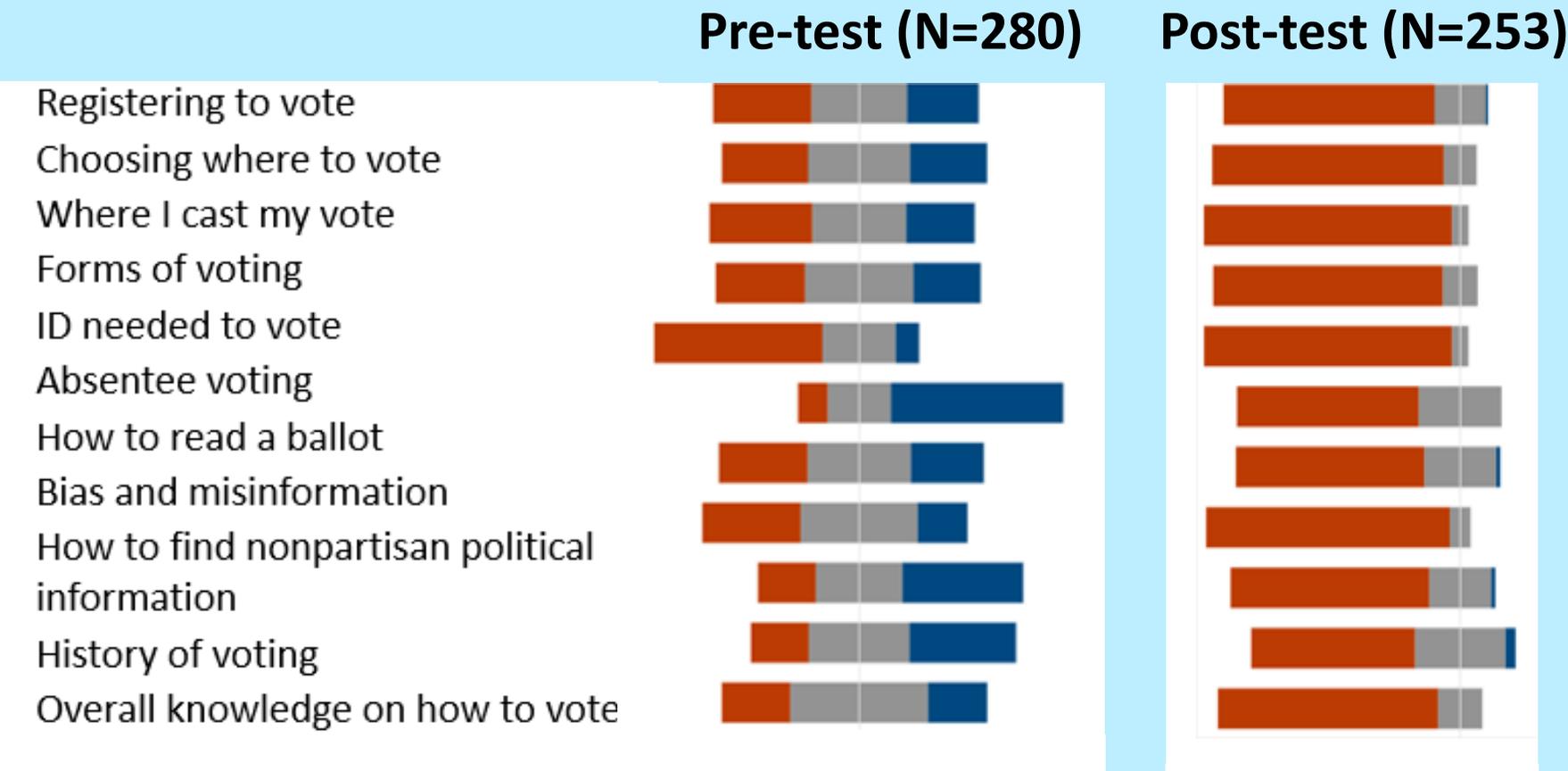


Voter Education Curriculum Results

Voting-Related Knowledge



All variables sign. @ p<.001



Voter Information Booklet



**Get Your Vote On,
Missouri State!**

Voter Information and Resources 2024-25

- Voter Information
 - Registration and voting process, absentee voting, etc.
 - Nonpartisan sources of political information
 - Benefits of voting at school vs. home
- Linktree to online resources
- ~9000 distributed (printed copies)
 - All incoming first-year students
 - Presentations
 - Tabling events
 - Community



“If every college student in the United States who was eligible to vote sought information from various sources, asked themselves hard questions about where their beliefs come from, had conversations with people who disagreed with them, and exercised their right to vote – the entire country would experience a significant change for the better.”

Jacqueline Batista-Martinez, '21

Local Election Voter Guide

What's on your Ballot?



*Nonpartisan Guide to
the Greene County
Municipal Election*

Focus on Springfield, MO

CAST YOUR VOTE!
April 2, 2024

- Produced, printed, and distributed for April 2023 and April 2024 municipal elections
- Candidate responses to student-developed questions
- Information on ballot measures
- 2,000 ('23) & 3,200 ('24) guides distributed
 - Campus
 - Community

Video Production

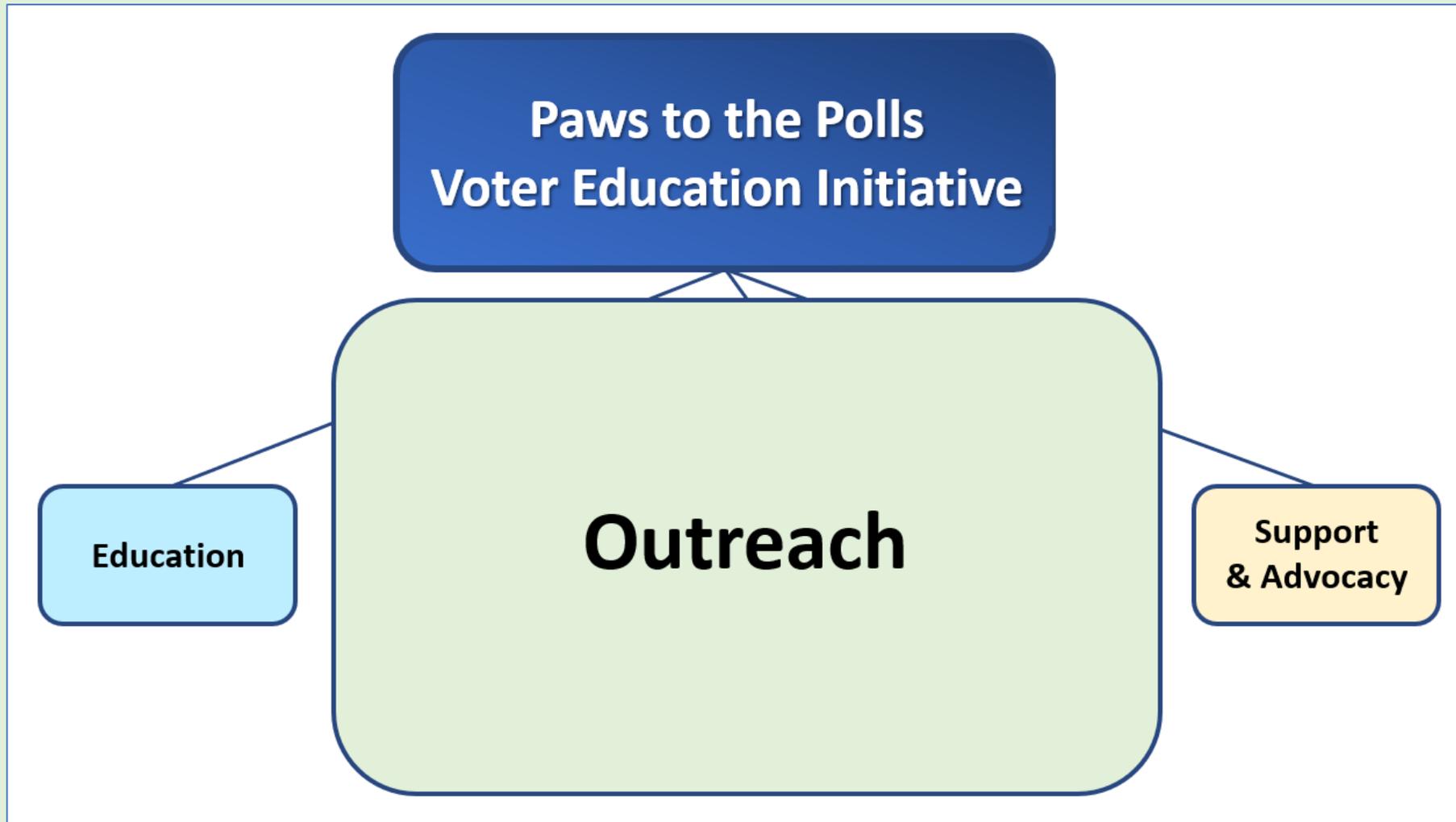


- Student-produced
- Student perspectives on voter engagement
- 2020
 - "Finding Your Voice"
 - "Casting Your Vote"
- 2024
 - Remake of "Casting Your Vote"
 - "33 Questions with Paws to the Polls"



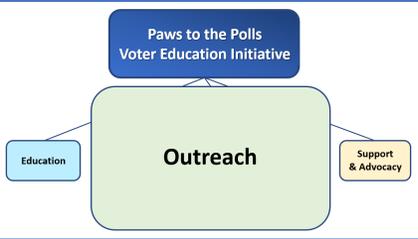
"As a film student, it is important for me to participate in an initiative that strives to find and deliver unbiased sources of information."

Aby Dawson, '22



“Paws to the Polls is deeply centered on promoting inclusivity to help make becoming a voter an easier and more important process for young voters. Voting, especially as a student at Missouri State University with its public affairs mission, should be something to be proud of. But to make that happen for the majority of students, we must first help to change the culture around voting and make it our own.”

Veronica Jacobs, ‘21



Campus Collaborations

Campus Offices & Departments – Collaboration & Support

- Office of Public Affairs Support*
- Department of Sociology, Anthropology, & Gerontology
- Department of Political Science
- Office of Multicultural Programs
- First-Year Programs
- Residence Life's Diversity Committee
- and more...

~16 Student Organizations – Collaboration & Participation

*Provides logistical, in-kind, and financial support for events



Community Partners

League of Women Voters of SW Missouri



Greene County Clerk



Graduates of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity



Youth Civic Leadership



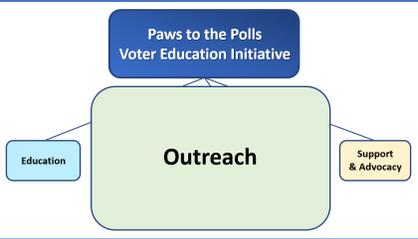
Local businesses:

Pickleman's Deli

Alamo Drafthouse

Big Momma's





Presentations

Campus

- ~4600 students reached via classroom presentations
- Presentations to ~160 students in residence halls, student organizations, & campus groups

Community

- Youth Civic Leadership Institute
- Greenwood Lab School
- Alpha Phi Alpha (MLK Day Panel, 2022)
- Drew Lewis Foundation
- History Museum



“Peer-to-peer engagement is real, and Paws to the Polls understands that and uses that to motivate the Missouri State student body. While it takes some time to change the culture of a university, there are students that are passionate about this and truly want to see MSU as a voting campus.”

Emily Fessler, BA '20, MPH '22

Tabling & Activities

Campus

- 40+ days of voter registration tabling
- Trivia nights
- Election Day tabling @ campus Central Polling Location

1600+ students have participated in our events

Community

- Labor Day Parade
- MLK, Jr. Day events
- High school voter reg (w/LWV)

With community partners



Voter Awareness Week



- Introduced Fall 2022
- Includes 3 **Voting Fairs** (~1100 attendees)
- Presentations
- Voter registration tabling
- Social media contest
- Offices & classes have created activities timed to coincide with “Voter Awareness Week”



VOTING AWARENESS

Tuesday, October 17th 12:00-3:30PM, MRC (PSU 101)

- Learn about voting and advocacy from PROMO & Paws to the Polls
- Who is PROMO? Missouri's statewide organization advocating for LGBTQ+ equality
- Who is Paws to the Polls? Our own non-partisan campus organization to increase civic engagement with a focus on voter participation and voter literacy at Missouri State University

VOTE!

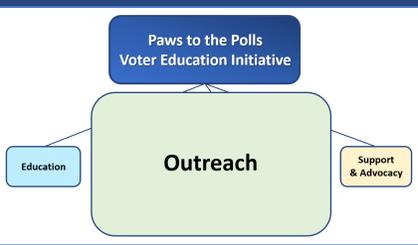
- Register to vote & get a charm for Crocs
- Learn about voting
- Learn about advocacy
- Come to Voting event
-

Missouri State LIBRARY STUDENT SERVICES OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL PROGRAMS

To individuals who need special services, assistance, or appropriate modifications to fully



Panels and Forums



Voter Awareness Week Event

October 6, 2022

Plaster Student Union Theater

3:30 – 5:00 PM

Collaborative Conversations: A Discussion with Our Elected Officials

Agenda

Introduction	Suzanne Walker-Pacheco, PhD & Zion Riffe-Stevens, Grad. Asst.
Opening Remarks	Ken McClure, Mayor of Springfield
Panel Discussion Q&A	Nora Cox, Moderator
Closing Remarks	Paws to the Polls student leader

GUEST SPEAKERS



Senator
Doug Beck
District 1



Senator
Lincoln Hough
District 30



Representative
Alex Riley
District 134



Representative
Betsy Fogle
District 135



Visit the
Paws to the Polls
website

Missouri State

Today's program is sponsored by:
Paws to the Polls with support of the
MSU Office of Public Affairs Support



- Elected Officials Discussion Panel, 2023
- Local Election Candidate Forums, 2023 & 2024

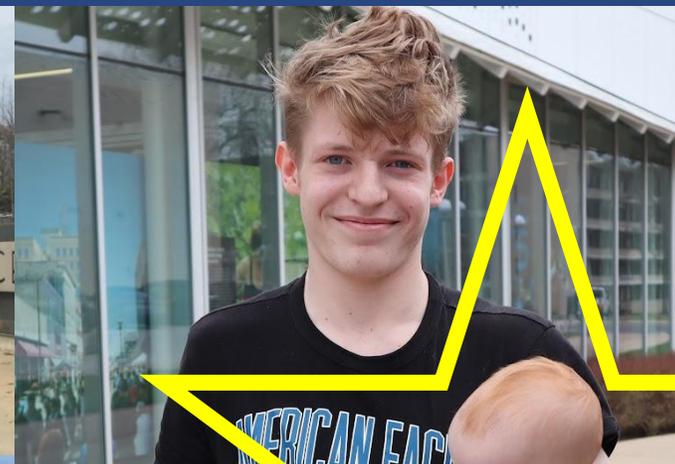
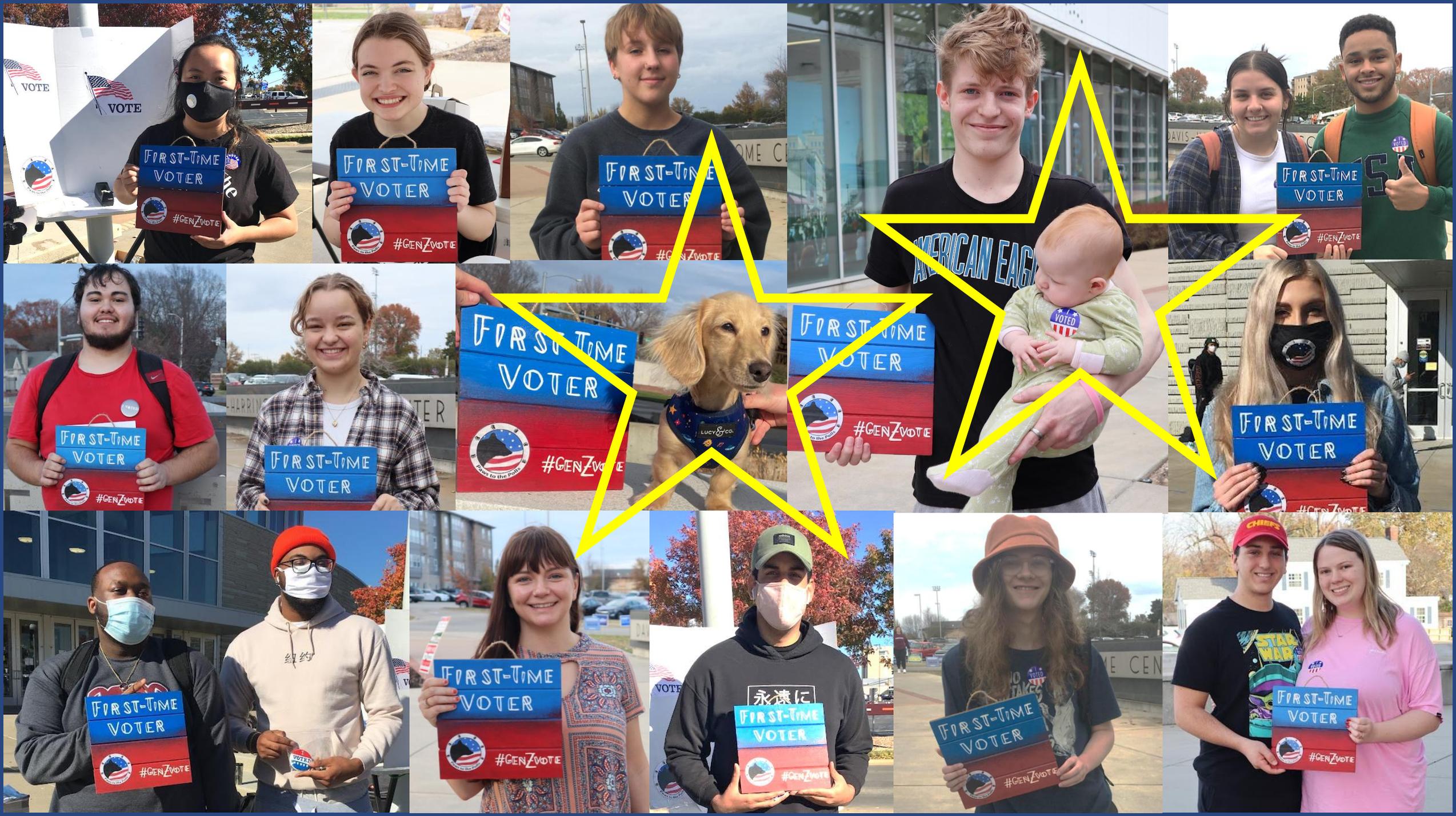
ELECTIONS

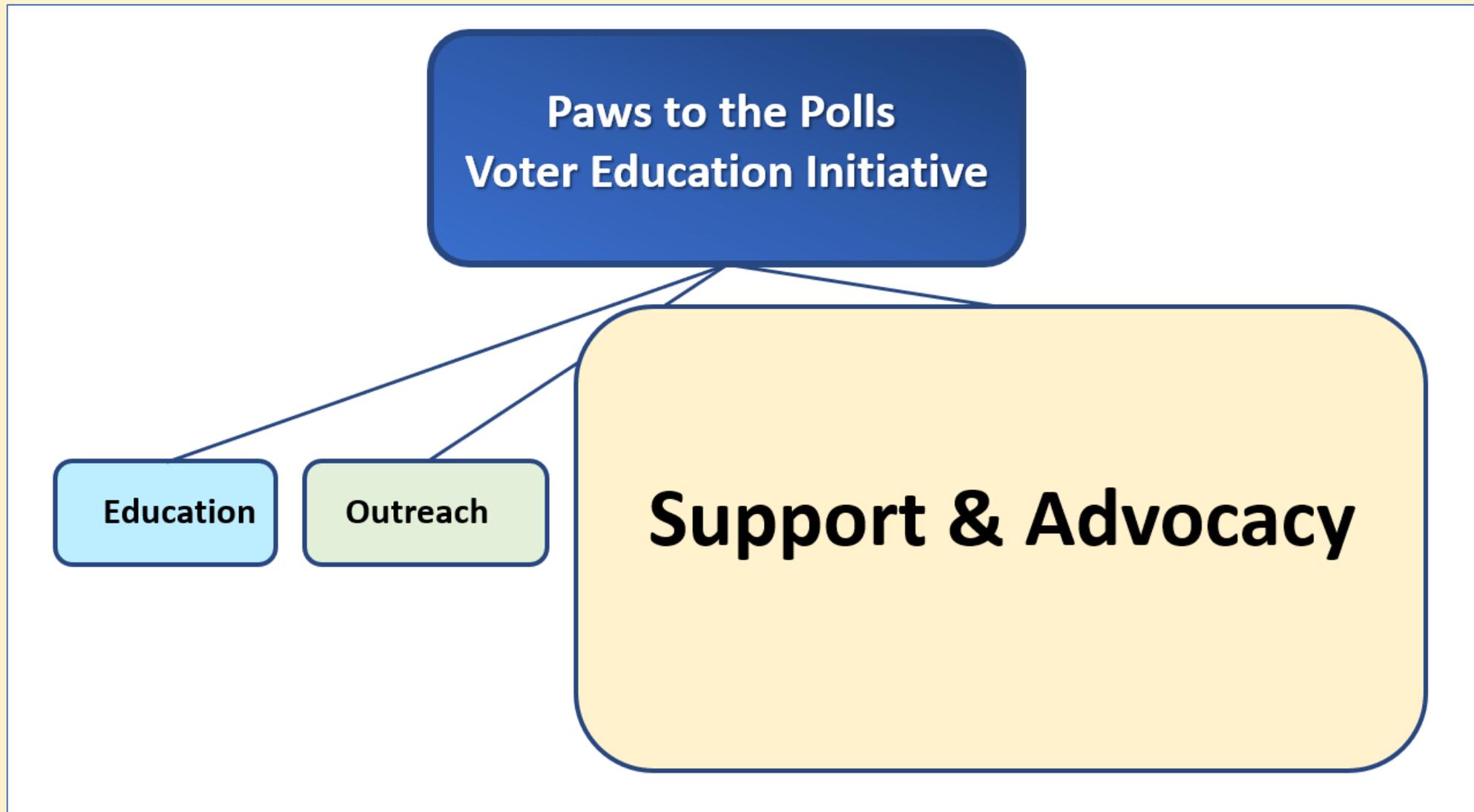
Mayoral hopefuls face off in candidate forum organized by Missouri State student group

Andrew Sullender Springfield News-Leader

Published 5:03 a.m. CT Feb. 28, 2023







I've seen numerous images and documentaries about the groundwork Blacks have made in order to vote. As a young Black woman, I find it extremely important to honor the lives and strides made by the people before me by using my right to vote.

Kristen Brown, '21

Registration, Broader Civic Engagement, Legislative Awareness

Deputy Registrar Training with Greene County Clerk's Office

- 15 trained deputy registrars
- Over 580 registered with paper forms, many more online

Partnering with League of Women Voters

- 12 Paws are LWV members
- Delegates to State Conference
- Ran fundraiser for LWV Annual Meeting 2023 & 2024
- Civics on the Square @ History Museum
- High school voter registration 2023 & 2024

State & Federal Civic Engagement

- Legislative tracking for MO voting-related bills
- Letter-writing campaigns to advocate for federal bills
- Written testimony to MO House Elections Committee



Legislator Interactions



Paws to the Polls is a nonpartisan, student-driven initiative at Missouri State University. Our goal is to increase civic engagement on campus and ensure that all citizens eligible to vote can do so without undue hardship.

People who work or attend college in MO are part of our community. They should be able to register and vote where they live, work, and study.

11% (over 32,000,000) of our fellow U.S. Citizens lack state-issued ID.

Other secure forms of ID should be restored as valid for voting.

IDs issued by MO state employers, schools, or universities require birth certificate and/or social security number. Their security is equal to current voter IDs.

"As an out-of-state student, I study, work, and live here just like every other MSU student. My Colorado ID does not mean that my life is unaffected by local elections, yet it keeps my voice unheard. Out-of-state students are active participants in the community and, as citizens of the United States, should be allowed to exercise the right to vote where we live."
Isabella Rossi, Missouri State U

Strengthening our Democracy:
Supporting Secure Voting Access for
All Eligible U.S. Citizens

Support for HB 219 & HB 975

House Bill 219 and HB 975 seek to restore use of a nonexpired student ID issued by a Missouri high school or accredited institution of higher education as acceptable for voter identification, and HB 219 to restore use of a Missouri state-issued employee identification card.

Our federal and state government accepts university ID as valid photo ID associated with the I-9 form for employment. These IDs have stringent requirements and are secure forms of photo identification. Voting access for our citizens strengthens our democracy.



Why doesn't everyone have a state-issued ID?

Life's priorities:
•16% of MO citizens lack sufficient food and /or stable housing

•Their priority is to work or study

•Voting should be feasible for them with use of other forms of secure ID

• Non-drivers shouldn't have to prioritize state-issued ID (includes elderly, disabled, those lacking a car)

Difficult for some to attain:

•Many necessary documents

•Documents unavailable/inaccessible

•Name discrepancies or changes on official records (errors, adoption, marriage...)

•Fees required for documents or court actions

•Lack transportation

Need residential address:

•Lower-income and college students move often

•Many people do not receive utility bills or bank statements with address

•Housing instability

- Jefferson City (MO capital) voter advocacy trips
 - 2022, 2023 (2), 2024
 - Created & distributed white papers
 - ~40 meetings with legislators
 - Recognized on House and Senate floor
- Campus meetings with state legislators
- Legislation introduced in 2022 (HB 219) based on our advocacy to reinstate university ID





Recognition



- 2020 All-in-Democracy Challenge Silver Campus
- 2021 Washington Monthly – top 200 voting colleges
- 2021 Springfield Community Focus Report Update
- 2022 All-in Democracy Challenge Presidential Commitment Signatory
- 2023 All-in Democracy Challenge Student Award for Promoting Democracy on Campus (Z. Stevens, PttP graduate asst)
- 2023 League of Women Voters of MO, Harriet Woods Award for Exemplary Community Service (S. Walker-Pacheco, Faculty Coordinator)

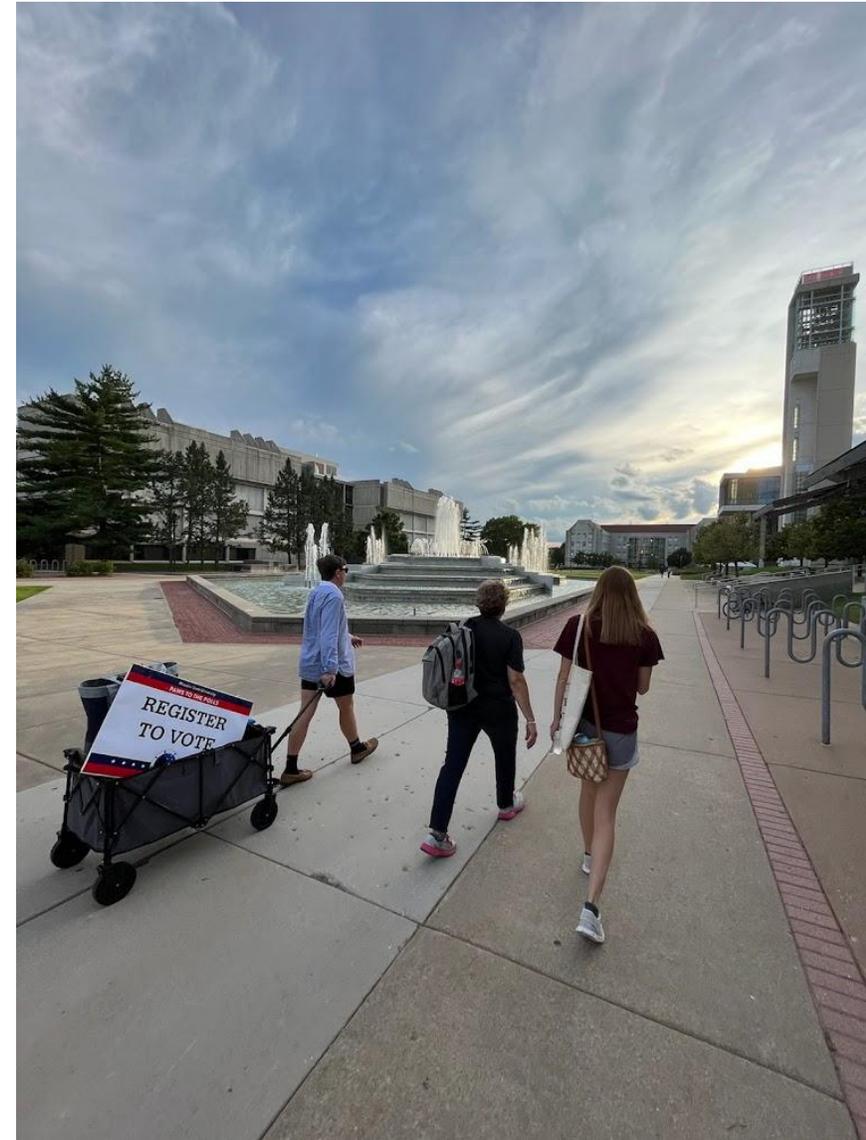
Missouri State U

62.6%
2020 Voting Rate

+12.2
Change From 2016

“The path of the person who acts is not always easy, but it is always worth it.”

Josh Slocum, '22



PAWS in the NEWS



OZARKSFIRST.com

Missouri State University working to get more 'Paws to the Polls'

Missouri State students provide resources to community



From left to right, Paws to the Polls members Sam Wang, Ava Taylor, Emma Bloodworth and Clemmie Taylor pose for a photo outside of the Davis-Harrington Welcome Center on Missouri State University's campus on Tuesday, April 4, 2023. Greta Cross/Springfield News-Leader



About 112 results (0.31 seconds)

KSMU

Paws to the Polls works to educate MSU students about the election process

The organization is hosting its annual Voter Awareness Week, which will include the 2nd Annual Voting Fair on Wednesday, October 18,...

2 days ago

OzarksFirst.com

Get registered to vote for upcoming elections in Springfield

GREENE COUNTY, Mo. — A coalition of Springfield and Greene County partners will celebrate National Voter Registration Day with drives aimed...

1 month ago

The Standard

Bohlen: In elections big and small, student votes matter

As new and returning students march onto campus this August, some are coming from across the country or the world, while some are simply...

Aug 20, 2023

M News

Empowering MSU to engage students in democracy

Engagement in campus democracy is important, especially to Zion Riffe-Stevens. Zion Riffe-Stevens. A Missouri State University student and...

May 9, 2023



72° OZARKSFIRST.com LIVE

LOCAL NEWS

MSU organization helps prepare students for voter registration

HAPPENING TODAY

PAWS TO THE POLLS VOTING FAIR KY3

MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY, SPRINGFIELD 5:30 54°

Paws to the Polls Voter Education Initiative



Student Organization

Education

- Voter Education Modules
- Voter Information Booklets
- Video Production

Outreach

(Campus and Community)

- Voter Registration Tabling
- Presentations
- Events

Support & Advocacy

- Legislative Interactions
 - Jefferson City
 - On campus
- Liaison w/Greene County Clerk

Future Directions

Building community around interdisciplinary public affairs & civic engagement



 **Paws to the Polls Student Organization**

- Activities & Events
- Public Relations
- Outreach

Research
(Faculty-Student Collab)

- Methods & Polling
- Pedagogy
- Modeling Voter Initiative
- Pure Research

Education

Curriculum

- Voter Ed Modules → **Civic Engagement & Public Affairs**
- Certificate Programs
- Internships & Directed Research
- Leadership Opportunities

Voter Education

- Information Booklets
- Video Production

Outreach
(Campus & Community)

- Voter Reg Tabling
- Presentations
- Events

Support & Advocacy

- Legislative Interactions
 - Jefferson City
 - On campus
- Liaison w/Greene County Clerk
- Formalized Legislative Tracking

"...Our mission is to drive culture change by turning MSU into a voting campus..."



Benefits

- Campus community
 - Resource for voting needs
 - Community-building
- PttP Leadership Team
 - Enhances educational experience
 - Skill-building
 - Leadership opportunity
 - Team-building, social cohesion
 - Retention and success
 - Long-term civic engagement post-graduation



Challenges

- Time commitment
- Necessity for faculty/staff leadership for sustainability
 - Students help drive direction
- Difficult to balance/organize all aspects
- New pathways, uncharted territory
- Maintaining & expanding visibility





Contact us:

pawstothepolls@missouristate.edu

Follow us:



@pawstothepolls

Find us: 

Consider submitting articles to
eJournal of Public Affairs, Missouri State

Thank You

- Missouri State University
 - Office of Public Affairs Support
 - Student Affairs
 - Office of the Provost
- League of Women Voters
- Greene County Clerk

