

## Teen voters targeted with technology and driver's licenses

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(Photo: STAR FILE PHOTO)

Teenagers and young adults typically vote in low numbers, a fact that elections officials are trying to reverse with technology, outreach campaigns and automatic sign-ups.

California residents will soon be registered to vote when they receive their driver's license or state identification cards. Residents can opt out but otherwise will automatically be enrolled, elections officials said.

The Department of Motor Vehicles is finalizing the program and expects to roll it out soon but no official date has been announced yet.

Teens who pre-register at age 16 or 17 will be automatically registered once they turn 18, the legal voting age.

On the technology side, Ventura County elections officials are launching a text message drive in conjunction with the state-designated High School Voter Education Weeks. The period started Monday and extends through April 27.

By texting "Ventura County" to "2VOTE," voters will be linked to the county elections website. The site offers information on how to register.

Like charities that have found texting a savvy way to raise money, public officials are trying to connect to voters who have embraced mobile phones.

"It allows those who use phones primarily a way to get to the website and register to vote," said Martin Cobos, elections operations manager. "It makes it a much simpler process."

He said the texting program is not particularly aimed at youth even if they seem to be on the forefront of embracing new technology.

"It is for everybody," he said.

Elections officials in Solano County have been using texting as a way to connect with voters since the 2016 primary election. Any voter can sign up but the elections office primarily targeted people who vote by mail, said Assistant Registrar John Gardner.

They're informed via text that the elections office received their ballots, then later that their votes were counted, he said.

About one-third of the 120,000 people in Solano County who vote by mail have signed up for text alerts. Gardner said the service has cut down on phone calls to the elections office because people know their ballots were processed.

The response, he said, has been "overwhelmingly positive."

Gardner said elections officials have put a "full on" press to let voters know about the service.

In Ventura County, officials say they're trying to engage young voters by sending a packet of information to each high school. The packets

offer information on the texting program, the process for teens to sign up to be poll workers and legislation that allows 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote.

The texting program is available now, Ventura County elections officials said. Message and data rates may apply.

For information, call 805-654-2664.

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