



How Collin County Community College Got On-Campus Polling Sites

Every election cycle, Collin County Community College students, employees and local citizens walk around campus wearing “I voted!” stickers. This is the result of a project Collin College launched 10 years ago to make their campuses into official polling sites where students, members of the community, and employees could all vote. The move resulted in increased civic engagement of students and employees, and it has also brought the community to campus more than ever.

How can turn your campus into an official polling site? Start with your local election office.

Collin County Community College contacted the Collin County Elections Administration in 2001 to learn about the process of hosting a polling site. Several years ago, local governmental entities were told to standardize their polling places. Creating a set of uniform sites, voters become comfortable and knowledgeable of where to cast a ballot.

The College’s county election officials conducted a site visit to ensure Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and there was ample space available to accommodate a crowd of voters. In addition, Collin College demonstrated it had the necessary electrical capabilities to supply power for the voting machines and laptops used to check voter registration. The college’s abundant and convenient free parking also made it an ideal site.

Their three main campuses in the county’s three largest cities of Plano, McKinney and Frisco were selected as polling sites for all general elections, which included early voting. Collin College’s campus in Frisco, which one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States according to the Census Bureau, was one of only three polling sites in the city of more than 120,000 people.

Collin College saw offering campuses as polling locations as a means of promoting voter registration and exercising the right to vote to the burgeoning numbers of its students, who had just hit the legal voting age of 18. Providing a convenient and easy venue for registering to vote through their Rock the Vote! initiative encouraged civic engagement and became a lesson in being a responsible steward of basic freedom of an open and free election.

The decision also opened the doors to members of the community, who might not have discovered Collin College otherwise. Collin County is one of the fastest growing in the nation. Located in the suburbs north of Dallas, Collin County’s population grew from about 490,000 in 2000 to more nearly 800,000 in 2010. With growth of that proportion, it is critical to stay ahead reach out and as the tone of the community and power centers change. With the polls on campus, voters across the county were able to conveniently and easily cast their ballot.

This November, Collin County will institute a “voting center” format allowing citizens to vote in the presidential election at any precinct making the need for sufficient space a priority -- an accommodation Collin College can meet.

By hosting polling sites on campus, Collin County Community sees this format as a win-win for the college and constituents. With national elections of the horizon, this is yet another way to encourage civic engagement for the nation.