



# CAMPUS ELECTION ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

## 2020 Initial Report and 2021–2022 Plan

The Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) engaged students in every close state in 2020’s critical election, helping them vote despite all the barriers. The Covid-19 pandemic created major challenges—from campuses being physically closed and key campus allies furloughed or unavailable by phone, to CEEP student Fellows getting Covid or losing close family members. Still, we found creative ways to adapt, engaging a record 609 colleges with a total enrollment of 6.4 million students. With 2020 youth turnout projected to reach as high as [56%, compared to 48% in 2016](#), we know that students who we helped to vote played an important role.

Here’s our initial summary of our 2020 impact, including the [Georgia Senate runoffs](#). We also detail our [plans to use 2021 to seed the ground for the critical 2022 election](#), much as the relationships we built and approaches we developed in 2019 made a key difference in our 2020 impact, despite all the disruptions. It will take major work to keep momentum building, and prevent a return to the dismal student and youth voting rates of [2010](#) and [2014](#), but we think we’ve created a powerful model.

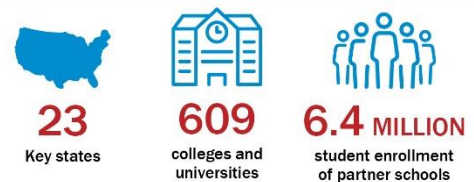
### 2020 CEEP Impact

CEEP is still collecting surveys from our campus partners. We’ll update this report as responses arrive, but initial responses have been overwhelmingly enthusiastic.

#### In 2020, CEEP...

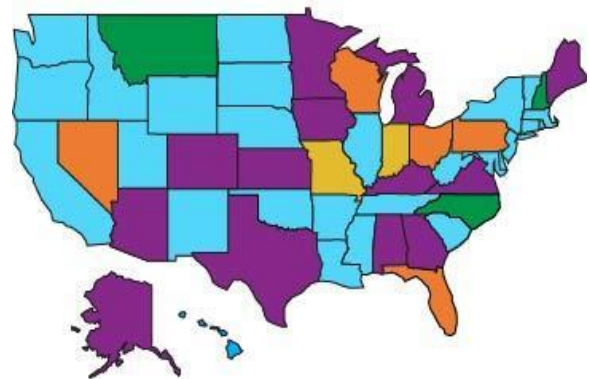
- **Worked intensively with college and universities in 23 key states** involving students in the Presidential race, all major U.S. Senate and governor’s races, and key Congressional and state legislative races. Our At-Large Director engaged states where CEEP didn’t have assigned staff.
- **Partnered with 609 colleges and universities with student enrollment of 6,366,837.** This included 128 community colleges 29 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and numbers other campuses with high minority enrollment. From the surveys we’ve received so far, 99% of our campus partners said we made a difference in helping their students to vote and 98% called us a leader in the campus engagement space. Partners and allies distributed our resources to another 1100 schools with a total enrollment of just under 9 million students.
- **Supported 476 student Fellowships** to implement critical peer-to-peer outreach and institutional initiatives. We started in spring with 124 Fellows at 104 campuses. In fall, we provided \$1,000 stipends to a record 352 Fellows on 239 campuses enrolling almost 3.5 million students. They recruited 8,000 other student volunteers and engaged 300,000 students through

#### 2020 REACH AT A GLANCE



An additional 1,100 schools with a combined enrollment of 8.9 million received our resources either directly or from partners and allies like Campus Compact and its affiliates.

2020 CEEP States



Presidential, Congressional & Legislative races in target states, plus:



activities like voter registration tables, marches to the polls, and virtual and in-person debate watches, forums and town halls.

- Helped **97%** of the 206 campuses that have reported so far **send key election information via all-campus email**, which would **project to 6.2 million students, with most receiving multiple election resources**. Our fellows reached 2,363,000 directly. The rest were reached by administrators at all the other campuses we engaged.
- **Created nonpartisan [candidate guides](#)** to 38 key races, plus Spanish versions in relevant states. These meticulously researched and sourced guides, the favorite resource of the schools, offer an accessible look at candidate stands, and were also distributed widely by major non-campus partners.

## Engaging Students to Vote Despite Covid

As mentioned, Covid created major challenges. Among our student Fellows, 125 worked at schools that were entirely virtual, 196 at ones with significant physical closures and only 21 at campuses that were fully open with masks and distancing. In response, CEEP reacted swiftly to adapt and create additional approaches, resources and models to support electoral engagement despite all the disruptions of this new environment. While we won't know specific *student* voting numbers until the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement ([NSLVE](#)) releases its data in late 2021, we have every reason to believe student turnout rates will match the impressive gains [through which the youth vote increased by a projected 8 points](#) from 2016 to 2020.

Here are some of the ways we increased student voting this year:

### Institutional Projects

Institutional projects create systemic change in campus election and voting environments. Our goal is to develop promising practices and build sustainable engagement systems, to reach *every student* with election engagement information and opportunities, and reach them *every year*. Our 2020 Institutional successes include:

- **Statewide Student Voter Summits and Partnerships with Elected Officials.** In collaboration with other nonpartisan election groups, CEEP hosted statewide voting summits in nearly every one of our states, involving key officials like the Secretary of State or chief clerks of the largest counties. Bringing together administrators, students, and faculty, we initially held these summits in person, then shifted them online and drew even more participants because people were so hungry for information. These summits provided valuable training, strengthened coordination within and between campuses and developed the best possible approaches tailored by state. We also helped the Colorado and Michigan Secretaries of State create youth advisory committees, with Colorado launching [COYouthVote.org](#) as a state-wide portal that included numerous CEEP resources. Some



*“This fellowship has shown me that politics is what you make it. The more you get involved, the better chance to have your voice heard. I learned how much my voice matters and how to use it.”*

—Dana Freeman, CEEP Student Fellow, Temple University, PA

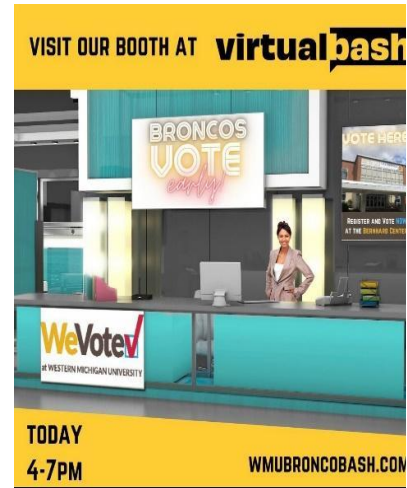


University of Wisconsin Parkside Fellow

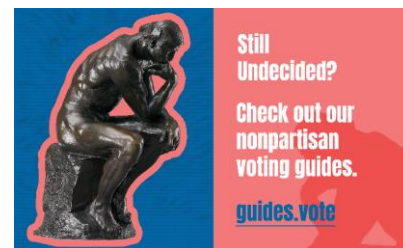
major Michigan schools secured on-campus satellite clerk’s offices—with 5,400 students registering and 8,500 voting at the University of Michigan office alone.

- **New Campus Coalitions.** Despite Covid, 30% of our Fellows created new nonpartisan election coalitions or organizations at their schools, from Duke and Marquette to Penn State and University of West Georgia. Central Michigan University secured a permanent school-funded voter engagement position. Georgia State wrote CEEP into the constitution of their Panthers Vote coalition. Our Fellows played a key role as University of Iowa’s Hawk the Vote coalition recruited 100 student volunteer Ambassadors, who collectively engaged 5,000 students, and got 30 student organizations to register 90% or more of their members as part of their “90% Challenge.”
- **Integrated Voter Registration.** As in previous cycles, CEEP staff and Fellows continued to integrate voter registration opportunities into New Student Orientation and First-Year Programs. This time most programs were virtual, but we engaged many campuses that had never done this before, including Penn State, Central Michigan University, Florida Atlantic University, University of Louisville, and several of the Miami Dade campuses. When University of Michigan Dearborn cancelled Orientation entirely, our Fellow ensured that voter information was distributed with student ID cards. Other campuses trained Residence Hall and Academic Advising staff in how to register students.
- **Election Day Class Holiday.** Our Fellows helped get **38 schools enrolling 535,000 students to cancel Election Day classes**, reduce class hours or allow no-excuse absences. They included major Pennsylvania campuses like Penn State, Drexel, West Chester, Shippensburg, and [Community College of Philadelphia](#), Michigan schools like Wayne State, Central Michigan University and Grand Valley State, and colleges and universities in almost every state we engaged, including Georgia Tech, Virginia Commonwealth University, Northern Virginia Community College, University of Montana, and the Virginia HBCUs Norfolk State and Virginia State. Other schools, like the [University of Missouri system](#) encouraged faculty to allow no-excuse absences on Election Day (with the support of their Faculty Senate), but didn’t mandate it.
- **Email and Social Media.** With many schools closed, email and social media became even more essential components of activating student voters. As mentioned, our Fellows and state directors got 97% of schools reporting so far to distribute key information through all-campus email. Schools also engaged students on social media, drawing on our ready-to-use, calendarized Facebook, Twitter and Instagram messages and graphics. Students particularly responded to “I Vote Because…” social media challenges, which encouraged their personal voice.

**CEEP reached 2.3 million people on social media** between the outreach of our Fellows, the social media networks of student groups, CEEP’s own social media accounts and some



Western Michigan University  
virtual Bash





winning posters displayed in the downtown Portland public library’s windows and distributed by the League of Women Voters to schools throughout the state.

Here are some other ways our CEEP staff and students Fellows helped students to vote:

## Voter Registration

- **Using Athletes as Influencers.** North Carolina State athletes served as Voter Ambassadors to register students. Penn State engaged all 14 member schools in the Big Ten Athletic Conference and sent out a video message from [a star football player](#). HBCUs Tennessee State and Alabama A&M held a marching band voter registration competition. We reached 250,000 people through an Instagram livestream voting challenge with bands from nine different HBCUs—[the Morehouse version](#) links to our [guides.vote](#) page. And we got Olympian Adam Rippon to be a CEEP ambassador, sharing our election engagement materials with his 840,000 Instagram followers.
- **From Tabling to Online Portals.** Our Fellows continued to conduct tabling where schools were open. The team led by our Texas State Fellow registered 700 people in a single day. But campus closures shifted our focus to encouraging [online voter tools](#) and linked QR codes to help students register, check and update registrations, request absentee ballots and receive election reminders.

*“Before I was a CEEP fellow I had no idea of how many components go into voting. I didn’t know what voting district I was in or my state legislators. I can now say that I am an educated citizen and will continue my studies centered around voting.”*

—Vicente Ortiz, Mesa Community College, Phoenix, AZ

## Voter Education

Colleges and universities face a dual challenge in educating student voters: educating students about election logistics and helping them make informed voting decisions. Even among *registered* students, many do not vote because they don’t understand the election process or lack confidence that they have accurate, fair information on candidates and issues.

In response we implemented these approaches:

- **Our Nonpartisan [Candidate Guides](#).** As always, our campus partners and student Fellows overwhelmingly praised the value of these guides for their independent research, comprehensive approach and nonpartisanship. Fellows distributed them through all-campus email, social media, and classroom discussions. They also displayed our blown-up vinyl banner versions of the guides and handed out printed versions where students were physically on campus. Faculty used the extensive linked guides, paired with our [guide to detecting disinformation](#), as media literacy resources. We also expanded the guides’ off-campus profile, arranging for them to be distributed or promoted by groups like Vote.org, Turbovote, Nonprofit Vote, Do Something, When We All Vote, the student Public Interest Research Groups, the major rock group partner Head Count, the Divine Nine African American fraternity and sorority networks, the Opportunity Youth Network, the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee, Asians in Philanthropy, Youth Service America, and *Ms.* magazine (which posted our entire [Georgia guides](#)) plus all the employees of Salesforce through their Tableau subsidiary, whose foundation helped support us.
- **Faculty and Course Integration.** Given Covid, faculty have become an even more important conduit to students both online and on campus. CEEP Fellows persuaded faculty to include election information on their course syllabi and email signatures—and Michigan’s Secretary of State shared these approaches at the conference of the National Secretaries of

State. We encouraged faculty to incorporate [election issues](#) in their courses and to explore how their particular disciplines [can use Covid as a teachable moment](#). CEEP provided customized faculty support through a live faculty workshop series and templates for integrating election-related themes into online teaching and learning platforms like Blackboard, Canvas, and the game-based platform Kahoot!

Temple University shared our training on how faculty could address election issues in a nonpartisan way with their faculty campus-wide. Fellows and state directors reached out to faculty in STEM fields, whose students are far less likely to vote. CEEP helped political science and journalism profs at three Wisconsin schools create resources for STEM field colleagues. A Miami-Dade College fellow created a voter engagement initiative for the school’s continuing education programs. Our Florida International University Fellows got registration information into all first-year course syllabi.

- **Classroom Visits.** Our Fellows combined in-person and virtual classroom visits, educating students about election dates and processes, as well as sharing nonpartisan information on candidates and ballot measures. Our University of North Carolina Asheville Fellows recruited Political Science Club members to make 66 visits. Bowling Green State Fellows reached 1,000 students with their team of volunteers. Our Fellows at Southwest Minnesota State and Florida’s Nova Southeastern University each organized a combination of live and video presentations to all the schools’ first-year classes. The team led by our Fellow at Michigan’s Oakland University registered a third of the freshman Honors College class.

## Get Out the Vote

- **Voting Visibility.** Where schools were still physically in session, CEEP Fellows used rallies and parades to increase voting awareness. At North Carolina HBCU Winston-Salem State, 2,500 people [marched with NBA star Chris Paul](#) to an on-campus early voting site. We got the Student Affairs divisions of Florida State, Florida A&M, and Tallahassee Community College to sponsor a day of [staggered marches](#) to their downtown early voting site. University of North Carolina Charlotte Fellows organized a Women’s Walk to the Polls. University of Wisconsin–La Crosse held a combined [early voting march](#) with community members. The College of Southern Nevada held a festival centered on the Women’s Suffrage Amendment.
- **Reaching Students.** We also targeted students who were in dorms at closed schools or at off-campus apartments, like distributing door hangers and fliers on voting logistics at Michigan State and Iowa State. University of Wisconsin–Madison put voter information on the grab-and-go dining hall food table. Florida State trained dorm RAs to register student residents. Since students weren’t that enthusiastic about Biden or Trump, and therefore didn’t display

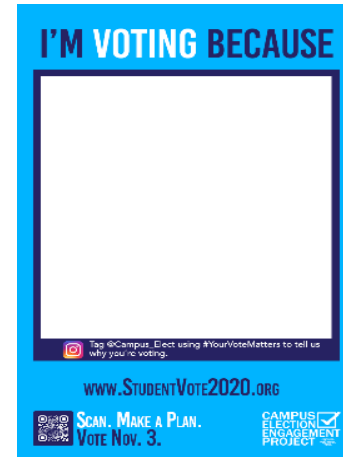


*Chris Paul leads Winston Salem State early voting march*



many signs, CEEP printed Get Out the Vote signs that students could hang in dorm or apartment windows, with a QR code to our voter tools and the back designed for social media selfies on why their vote mattered. Faculty at Phoenix’s Mesa Community College kept raving to us about all the social media messages that the selfies generated.

- **Addressing specific Covid and other challenges.** We coordinated throughout the states with Secretaries of State and County Clerks to improve safe student voter access despite all the new challenges. At University of Michigan, we secured an emergency ballot drop box in the dorm where 800 students were quarantined and Secretary of State Benson issued guidelines for similar accommodations for other students in quarantine statewide. We got Ohio State to put drop boxes for registration and absentee ballot requests in every residence hall, while other schools distributed free stamps. At Milwaukee’s Alverno College, our student Fellow took the lead in recruiting [178 student poll workers](#), dispersed between 173 of Milwaukee’s 180 precincts. Northern Kentucky University distributed 2,000 “VOTE” masks, as did many of our other schools. In Philadelphia, we distributed Lyft coupons for free rides to the polls for students who were intimidated by a massive National Guard presence in response to protests around an election-week killing by a police officer.



## Georgia Runoff

Given the importance of the Georgia runoff, we retained our top student Fellows to conduct critical peer-to-peer outreach and to help get faculty and administrators to share our voter education materials. Our Georgia state director, Daniel Coley, managed the Fellows and engaging key administrators, joined by a second CEEP director who had strong contacts with top Georgia administrators. We encouraged Fellows from other states to contact anyone they know in the state as well. Here are Daniel’s interviews with [Atlanta](#) and [Savannah](#) TV stations and with [Slate](#).

We’ve gotten particularly strong responses to our [resource with key GA information](#) on rules and logistics, and to updated nonpartisan guides for the [Ossoff-Perdue](#) and [Loeffler-Warnock](#) races. Beyond the campuses, Black Voters Matter posted the guides on their website, distributed 40,000 printed copies on their GOTV bus tour and gave them out at their [Collard Greens Caucus](#) voter turnout events. One of Georgia’s largest Latino groups [promoted them](#), including our [Spanish](#) versions. Vote.org mailed copies to the homes of 20,000 college students who hadn’t voted in November. The US Vote Foundation sent an adapted version of our information guide to the principals of every high school in the state to encourage students who turned 18 by January 5 to register, work at the polls and volunteer with campaigns.

## 2021 Plan

In 2021, we'll build on all the momentum we've created. We'll develop and promote new institutional initiatives, as we've done with increasing impact in recent off-year cycles. Much as our 2019 work was critical to our 2020 impact, what we do in 2021 will play a key role in whether students turn out for the critical 2022 midterms. As you may remember, student [turnout doubled to 39% in 2018 from 2014's 19%](#). Whether we can build on the momentum from 2018 and 2020 will depend largely on how well we engage students in this coming year, particularly as schools transition back from Covid-related disruptions.

For 2021, CEEP has three high-priority strategies to support a culture of voting, make an immediate impact on local elections and election-related policies, and build toward the 2022 midterm elections:

1. **Sustain relationships and keep driving institutional progress.**
2. **Expand faculty and course integration efforts.**
3. **Increase student electoral participation and voting in 2021.**

In partnership with our schools, we want to build on the success of 2018 and 2020 to keep engaging even more students and help make voting a habit for those who cast their first vote in 2020. Next year provides the opportunity to do this in a way that will lay critical groundwork for the 2022 midterms.

### 1. Sustain Relationships and Keep Driving Institutional Progress

Off-year election cycles offer a key opportunity to institutionalize student engagement, with the lead time to develop and implement innovative policies and programs. CEEP's goal is to ensure election engagement is part of every student's ongoing educational experience and to sustain that through institutional commitments. In 2021 we will keep developing and institutionalizing campus commitment, capacity and investment in student electoral engagement to help every eligible student to vote.

Many of our efforts will build on in-process 2020 initiatives. Florida State and the major Orlando community college system just needs their presidents' signature for a revised student ID card that will satisfy state voter ID requirements. University of Florida's Faculty Senate is considering automatic Election Day absences and Georgia's Kennesaw State's Student Senate passing a similar resolution. Prairie View A&M is awaiting final approval for an elections-related course where students register peers as a class project. Ohio State's student government is considering a slate of changes, including requiring that all students to do voter engagement projects, making Election Day an academic holiday, putting voting information on OSU's smartphone app, and training residence hall staff to run voter registration campaigns. We'll also continue developing our signature programs. University of Pittsburgh was so impressed by [our Fellows trainings](#) that they adapted them, with our permission, for all their student workers.

In 2021, CEEP will:

- Help students process the 2020 election and use it as a learning opportunity.



Central Michigan University GOTV



- Create coordinated campus plans drawing on our Electoral Engagement [Needs Assessment](#) and their [campus voting patterns](#), including targeting lower-participating campus constituencies like [STEM majors](#).
- Develop ongoing campus-funded election coalitions, like Ohio State’s OSU Votes, which expand the use of institutional resources to sponsor Fellows and engagement programming.
- Bring new stakeholders into campus student engagement coalitions, from [athletic teams](#) and [libraries](#) to STEM and other academic departments beyond the usual suspects.
- Secure student IDs that meet state voter identification requirements and create systems for needed residency documents such as zero- balance utility bills and campus proof-of-residence letters.
- Further integrate voter registration into [student orientation](#), First-Year courses and class registration.
- Get more administrators to sign off on election day holidays.
- Provide opportunities for students to have productive [civic conversations](#) across differences.
- Make the connection between voting and larger social and policy change efforts, including racial equity and police reform.
- Educate students on how to track the actions of elected officials, hold officials accountable to their campaign promises, and advocate for policy and legislative change.
- Engage students and encourage them to make their voices heard on redistricting, gerrymandering, and use of the new 2020 Census data.
- Prepare campus communications to use campus-wide communications and social media to send out key election information to every student.



## 2. Expand Faculty and Course Integration Efforts

Faculty have the greatest interaction with students and have become the critical conduit during the Covid pandemic. 2021 will be a key year to advance course planning.

CEEP will work with faculty to:

- Ensure active engagement by faculty in departments with lower student voter turnout, such as engineering, math, recreation and agriculture.
- Expand the use of election-related readings, assignments, research, and experiences in diverse disciplines.
- Increase student civic learning and skills, such as civil discourse, media literacy, public speaking and advocacy, community organizing, and leadership.
- Help faculty make the connection for students between voting and social change approaches like community organizing and protests.
- Leverage faculty communications, from signature lines to course syllabi, so faculty routinely share election and voting information.
- Make virtual or in-person classroom visits a regular component of student electoral engagement.

## 3. Increase Student Electoral Participation and Voting in 2021

CEEP will encourage and solidify habits of student voting in 2021 local and statewide elections, and promote student engagement beyond voting. We will also encourage reflection and dialogue on key

issues, including redistricting based on the 2020 Census, and advocacy for causes they believe in.

Local elections continue to have the lowest voting turnout and the greatest generational gaps: Voters over 65 are *seven times* more likely to vote in local mayoral elections than those aged 18–34. Next year will let us lock in voting behavior and help students understand how local elections impact daily life, from policing, schools and housing to health care and transportation. The current moment, with [45% of 18-30-year-olds](#) saying they volunteered in some way, like marching, around issues of racial justice, provides an opportunity to help students continue to actively engage these issues in the context of local elections. CEEP will continue to use our student Fellows program to help involve students. Depending on resources, we'll hire 50 to 100 student Fellows to work on local elections (and a few statewide elections like Virginia), plus year-long institutional projects.

## **Our Goal for 2021: Building Participation for the 2022 Midterm Election**

Election participation and voting can become habitual, especially if people start early and are encouraged to continue. Sustaining student voting from one election cycle to the next requires continual “care and feeding” of our campus partnerships. The more we can do in 2021, the more we'll be in a position to engage schools in 2022. This will be even more true as our campus partners face financial and staffing challenges from the pandemic. It's critical for them to know they can count on CEEP to be there after each election, building and planning for the next one.

Midterm elections, as in 2022, historically have seen the largest turnout drop-offs among youth. A concerted effort helped 2018 midterm participation climb to the near-record high of 40%. And the presidential election gave students clear and compelling reasons to vote, despite the Covid-related barriers. But these gains could easily be eroded without sustained effort, particularly with the potential cycle of disappointment if students' preferred candidates weren't successful—or if those elected don't instantly address America's multiple crises in all the ways students had hoped for. So the difference between the dismal student participation rates of 2010 and 2014 and the hopeful trends of 2018 and 2020 may depend on what groups like CEEP do to engage students.

By helping schools to keep building their election engagement programs, we assist them in developing the campus culture and institutional commitment to repeat or surpass recent higher turnout trends. What we do in 2021 will play a critical role in 2022 student turnout.

### **MAKE A GIFT**

Gifts can be made to Campus Election Engagement Project [online](#) (after nine years of fiscal sponsorship, we're now our own independent 501(c)(3)) or by sending a check or wire transfer to: Campus Election Engagement Project, c/o Ohio Campus Compact, 615 N. Pearl St., Granville, OH 43023. Your gift will be tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

For more information, contact CEEP founder Paul Loeb at [Paul@CampusElect.org](mailto:Paul@CampusElect.org), Director of Special Projects Nausheen Husain at [Nausheen@CampusElect.org](mailto:Nausheen@CampusElect.org), or visit [CampusElect.org](http://CampusElect.org).