

Minneapolis Elections & Voter Services Student Election Judge Program: Ensuring Language Accessibility

Since 1991, the Student Election Judge Program has engaged high school students ages 16 and older as poll workers on Election Day. High school students receive the same training and work alongside adult election judges, performing all the same duties at the same rate of pay. The Student Election Judge program serves multiple goals:

- Increase the number of election judges who are bilingual in targeted languages.
- Address short- and long-term election needs for effective, technology-adept poll workers.
- Increase the ethnic and age diversity of our election judges to better reflect the face of our community.
- Help high school students attain civic skills and dispositions.
- Provide high school students with increased connections to their community.

The program has been growing, expanding from 162 student election judges in 2014, to 352 in the 2016 general election. For the smaller-turnout 2017 municipal election, 291 student election judges have been assigned across the 132 precincts in Minneapolis, more than 10% of our election workforce.

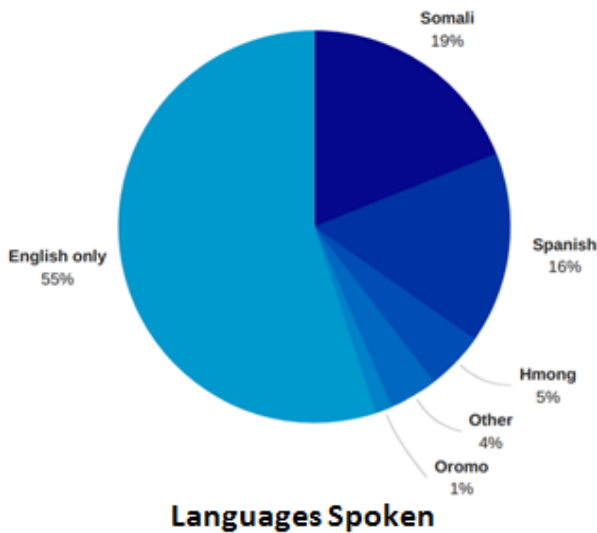
Language Support

The Student Election Judge Program has become an important strategy in providing language accessibility in the polling place in Minneapolis. Minneapolis has identified 56 precincts that serve voters needing language assistance, and aims to staff those precincts with election workers who speak the desired languages, including Amharic, Hmong, Oromo, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese. High school students fluent in other languages are vital to helping Elections & Voter Services meet that goal.

Student Election Judges bring important language diversity to the election worker pool. In 2016, 45% of Student Election Judges reported being bilingual; among all election judges, only 13% were. Just over 40% of election judges speaking Hmong, Somali, and Spanish in 2016 were high school students, while comprising less than 10% of workers. Elections expects that the numbers will be similar in 2017.

Students who are bilingual in targeted languages serve in precincts with needs for interpreters in those languages whenever possible. While they are not specifically trained in interpreting, they provide a much-needed bridge to making the voting experience accessible to those who need language support. Bilingual

students assist with Election Day registration, answering voter questions about the voting process, and assisting voters with low literacy skills in their preferred language.



The Student Election Judge Program recruits specifically among schools with high concentrations of students who speak targeted languages. We've developed partnerships with Cristo Rey Jesuit High School for Spanish speakers, Ubah Medical Academy and Metro Schools College Prep for Somali speakers, and Edison and Patrick Henry high schools for Hmong speakers. Together these five schools provided nearly half of the Student Election Judges capable of providing

language support to voters.

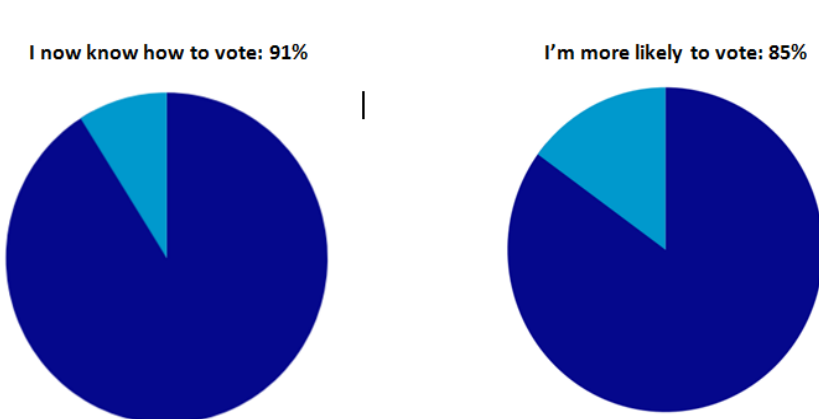
The Student Election Judge Program has become an important strategy in providing language accessibility in the polling place in Minneapolis. Minneapolis seeks to staff 56 of its 132 precincts with election workers who can assist voters in targeted languages: Hmong, Oromo, Russian, Somali, Spanish. High school students fluent in other languages are vital to helping meet that goal.

Program Efficacy

Students, school staff, adult election judges, and voters all speak very highly of the program's efficacy.

Participants Report Benefits

In a post-election online survey of 2016 Student Election Judges (response rate: 150 out of 352), students reported several benefits. Among those are high percentages of students who say that they now know how to vote (91%) and are more likely to vote once they are old enough (85%). Nearly 2/3 of participants also reported that because of the



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program, they will seek more ways to be involved in their community.

One student wrote: “I learned about the great lengths Minnesota goes through to make sure that the voting process is not corrupt and every voter has a chance to vote without discrimination or prejudice.”

Head Election Judges Report Satisfaction

Adult election judges often request that the same students be allowed to return to serve voters in that specific precinct for the next election. Students echo this sentiment and often ask to be assigned to the same precinct—working in familiar surroundings with the election judge team they’ve already gotten to know. A concerted effort is made to honor these requests whenever possible.

Head and Assistant Head Election Judges receive information on working effectively with high school students as part of their training. New guidelines developed in 2017 address issues of safety for youth while working on Election Day, helping to protect adults from unfounded allegations of improper conduct and reducing the possibility of adults having undue influence over individual youth.

Head Election Judges comment on what it’s like to work with a particular student:

- “Friendly and helpful right off the bat.”
- “Performed each job like a pro.”
- “Good attention to detail.”
- “Exceptional meeting voter needs and identifying issues.”
- “Jumped right in and picked up the tasks—was helping other judges who had questions.”

One Head Election Judge who gave kudos to the language support students provide in her precinct said, “Students tend to be very eager to provide the support and very patient, going back and forth from language to language with ease.” The rapport students build with the voters is a key in making voters who need language support feel welcome.

Sustainability

The program has proven sustainable over 25 years, as it has existed in one form or another. Recent changes have been implemented to ensure that even through a leadership transition, the program can remain robust.

Youth require more support than adult election judges in order to be able to participate. Their schools have to cooperate, their parents or guardians have to give express permission and agree to provide transportation, and many have not yet developed the work skills that it takes to communicate professionally with adults outside of school. They have very busy schedules with school, sports, college applications, jobs, and other activities, and are often dependent on others' schedules for transportation. Minneapolis Elections & Voter Services has built in structures in the program to assist with meeting these special needs. The key structure for doing so is to build strong partnerships with schools and youth-serving nonprofits.

Role of Partners

School partners are invaluable in helping to recruit and support the students who participate. We currently work in partnership with 17 Minneapolis-area high schools to offer information and recruiting sessions in the spring and fall. Program staff meet in advance with school staff each year to discuss the requirements and process and provide a variety of materials to assist with recruiting and training.

School staff and elections staff communicate regularly to make sure that students and teachers are aware of program requirements and deadlines. School personnel help guide students individually as needed through the application, permission, and scheduling issues. In turn, elections staff offer regular reports to school partners on student applicants and their progress toward meeting the requirements. In October, the Student Election Judge program staff send detailed reports of qualified student participants for final authorization from the school to participate.

Some schools with particularly vulnerable student populations provide additional support for them to be able to participate: child care, transportation assistance, and even box meals to bring to the Election Day work site.

In our 2016 survey, 78% of student respondents said that they felt supported by their school in being an election judge, with 40% reporting exceptional support.

Role of Technology

Operated initially with dedicated staff to provide the support and attention needed to run the program effectively, the Student Election Judge program has gradually been integrated into the same systems that Elections & Voter Services uses with adult election judges.

Student training was formerly done on site at the schools during the school day to provide convenience, but as schools came under pressure to increase instruction time, students were integrated as participants in the regularly scheduled team election judge trainings. Online scheduling of trainings has proven highly successful, as more students are able to select times for training that fit their busy schedules.

Our Elections Management System streamlines communication, allowing regular messages to groups of students by email and phone, and provides efficient tracking and reporting of student progress. Integrating students into this system and adding features to it to allow for the special reporting functions needed by the Student Election Judge Program have eliminated weeks of manual tracking and reporting.

Integration into Existing Structures

An important factor in making the program sustainable is integrating it into other existing structures within the department. To meet the increased demand for training more student judges without additional staff and training sites, the program started to train student judges alongside the adult judges at regularly scheduled training sessions instead of separate classes in the schools. Students enjoy getting a glimpse of the people they will be working with on Election Day as they prepare for their jobs.

Student compensation was aligned with the regular team election judge pay rate, since they are accomplishing the same work as their adult counterparts.

Outreach

Outreach to schools about the program provides Elections & Voter Services a natural venue to recruit election workers capable of providing language support by meeting them where they naturally congregate. The program's goals and structure mesh well with those of the schools. Being an election judge fosters civic skills and dispositions and in provides students real-world opportunities to build professional skills. Many schools also value helping their vulnerable populations gain real, paid work experience. This makes outreach easier, because teachers provide either direct access for program staff to recruit students or indirect access through their own presentations and advocacy of this opportunity.

School contacts also provide outreach to other schools about this opportunity. The program has long partnered with Minneapolis Public Schools to engage students, but as the face of education changes in Minneapolis, more students are attending charter, alternative, and private programs--particularly those among our target population for language assistance. Educators who value the program assist in reaching out to colleagues at other schools whose students might benefit. Students who have participated likewise reach out to their friends. This has led to new school partnerships in 2017 with Ubah Medical Academy

(initiated by an enthusiastic student), Venture Academy (focused on real-world learning), and Augsburg-Fairview Academy (which includes a focus on American Indian Education and homeless/independent high school students).

Also new for 2017, we have formed partnerships with the League of Women Voters Minneapolis and Civic Youth/Kids Voting in order to cross-promote civic engagement opportunities for youth with our respective programs. We have done two joint presentations so far. Plans for 2018 include exploring partnerships with Youthprise, YWCA, Eastside Neighborhood Services, and other large nonprofits providing out-of-school time youth development programs.

Replicability

The Student Election Judge program is highly replicable, requiring seasonal concentrated staff time for recruitment and supervision, but otherwise integrating with the other election judge systems for tracking, assigning, reporting, and payroll.

The program manual that Elections & Voter Services creates each year for participating schools can serve as the basis of a longer and more detailed guide to the program.

The materials for the program are created and printed internally by Minneapolis Elections staff and designed to be easily updated as needed between election cycles. Below is a list of the materials for the program by audience, ordered roughly chronologically when they are used in the process.

Materials for educators

- Recruitment posters
- Teacher program guide (36 pp) outlining goals, deadlines, requirements, and reporting.
- Presentation (11 slides, 8 minutes) that can be delivered by program staff or educators familiar with the program
- Program overview handouts to distribute to interested students (1 page/two-sided)
- Handouts from partner organizations (League of Women Voters, Kids Voting)

Materials for students

- Recruitment posters
- [Recruitment video](#) (2.5 minutes)
- “Be a Student Election Judge” handout
- Online application
- Parent permission Form (1 page)
- Attendance Report
- Post-experience survey (15 questions, online)

Materials students share with adult election workers

- Election Worker Portal
- Election Judge training
- Minneapolis Election Judge Manual
- www.voteminneapolismn.gov

Continuous Innovation

The Student Election Judge Program has survived for more than 25 years because it is continually adapting to the changing needs of the election ecosystem and the community of families and voters in Minneapolis.

One of the major challenges in the coming years will not be recruiting enough Student Election Judges to maintain the program, but in more targeted recruiting to ensure that the program continues to get the mix of students that it now attracts. Creative partnerships were the key to building the current program, and they will be important in ensuring its sustainability.

As staff look to the future of this program, the vision is for tighter connections to other youth civic engagement programs, adding additional opportunities for high school students to participate.

In 2016-17 the program took several steps to involve students in program improvement:

- a focus group with experienced student judges
- a post-election survey aimed at better understanding the program benefits and students' perception of the support they receive
- usability testing with program materials to identify key places the process could be streamlined and ease the burden on students and staff
- actively engaging students in classroom presentations on being an election judge and other election-related topics
- program overview video featuring students talking about their experience on Election Day

In 2018 and beyond we seek to develop additional improvements and resources, such as exploring a more formal Student Ambassador cohort to help recruit election judges from desired demographics, involving students in presenting at statewide and national conferences on youth civic engagement, providing more formal guidance on providing language support, and offering opportunities for students to provide input and perhaps assist in the program itself beyond Election Day.

Minneapolis voters are well served by this program, in particular voters who require language assistance. Whether they need to register to vote, navigate the polling place, or have a question on ranked-choice voting, Student Election Judges will be there to assist in the language they need.