

The logo for Oakland Youth Vote is located in the top right corner. It features the word "OAKLAND" in red, "YOUTH" in yellow, and "VOTE" in yellow, all in a stylized, bubbly font. Three blue stars are positioned between "YOUTH" and "VOTE".

OAKLAND
YOUTH VOTE



IMPLEMENTING YOUTH VOTING IN
OAKLAND - AN EVALUATION AND
LESSONS LEARNED



CONTENTS

ABOUT OAKLAND YOUTH VOTE COALITION.....	2
• History of Oakland Youth Vote	
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
• Scope and Goals of This Report	
• Sources	
• Key Takeaways and Recommendations	
CELEBRATING OAKLAND'S FIRST YOUTH VOTE ELECTION.....	7
OAKLAND YOUTH VOTING IN CONTEXT.....	9
• National Movement for Youth Voting	
• About the Oakland Unified School District	
OAKLAND YOUTH VOTE CAMPAIGN TIMELINE.....	11
BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUTH VOTING.....	17
TAKEAWAYS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUTH VOTE IMPLEMENTATION.....	19
• For Youth Advocates	
• For Governmental Agencies, Officials & Stakeholders	
• For Election Officials	
• For Education Officials	
• For Funders	
REPORT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	34
APPENDIX.....	35

A Note from the Oakland Youth vote coalition

In 2020, a coalition of Oakland youth groups and organizations passed a ballot measure to enfranchise 16 and 17 year-olds in school board elections. This report is an assessment of the Oakland Youth Vote Coalition's four year fight to implement that measure and an evaluation of Oakland's first ever youth vote election in 2024. We worked with Lori Shellenberger, a voting rights and election reform strategist, to interview stakeholders, lead the election evaluation, and coauthor this report. This report synthesizes our reflections, highlights successes, uplifts lessons learned, and makes recommendations for improvements to the youth voting system in Alameda County.

As a companion piece, we created a youth vote [toolkit](#) that walks organizers through the phases of a youth vote campaign from conception through a first election cycle and beyond. Our hope is that these resources help other groups successfully implement and institutionalize youth voting and civic education throughout the country.

ABOUT THE OAKLAND YOUTH VOTE COALITION



The [Oakland Youth Vote \(OYV\) Coalition](#) includes youth leaders and adult allies from organizations that were part of a long-standing Oakland youth organizing and leadership development ecosystem: [Oakland Kids First](#), [AYPAL](#), [Californians for Justice](#), the [City of Oakland's Oakland Youth Commission](#), and Oakland Unified School District (ousd)'s [All City Council Student Union](#).



Youth Together was a founding member of the coalition. Groups like the *Justice for Oakland Students Coalition*, *Power CA*, and the *Oakland Chapter of the League of Women Voters* were also valuable partners at critical points over the 5 year push to develop, pass, and implement voting for 16 and 17 year-olds in Oakland school board elections.

History of Oakland Youth Vote



"It's important to remember that at the campaign for youth voting rights was about so much more than the vote. It was about building youth power"

-Oakland Youth Vote Adult Ally



The Oakland Youth Vote campaign emerged out of students' frustrations at the limitations their advocacy had on OUSD's decisions regarding budgeting, staffing, and school closures. Beginning in 2019, youth leaders from Oakland Kids First and All City Council began researching ways to build power that was immune from the type of tokenization and sidelining that had become commonplace in OUSD. They settled on the idea of fighting for youth voting rights in school board elections and pitched it to other youth groups at ACC's annual retreat. The Oakland Youth Vote campaign and coalition was born there.

OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS THE OVV COALITION:

- Built a strong, enduring, youth-centered coalition.
- Partnered with members of Oakland's City Council to codevelop a 2020 ballot measure that would allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections.
- Organized and led a successful electoral campaign to pass Measure QQ with 67% of the vote.
- Worked with election system consultants and community stakeholders to develop the new voting systems with Alameda County's election management system vendor.
- Pressured the Alameda County Registrar of Voters (RoV) office and Alameda County Board of Supervisors to prioritize youth voting implementation, especially after two youth vote elections went by without a usable system in place.
- Created, tested, evaluated, and launched an interactive week-long civic education curriculum to ensure youth are informed on the importance of voting, the responsibilities of the school board, and are registered to vote after completing the curriculum. In support of this effort, Oakland teacher champions were recruited and trained to launch the curriculum at district high schools.
- Hosted three student-led and student-moderated school board candidate forums in the lead up to school board elections in 2022, 2023, and 2024.
- Pre-registered and engaged over 1,500 Oakland 16 and 17-year-olds ahead of the November 2024 election.
- Organized a press conference and community event outside the Registrar Of Voters office to commemorate the first time Oakland youth voters ever cast a ballot.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



"I am excited to vote because it's my first time to have a say in decisions that directly impact them. I'm excited to vote when I turn 16, and I have three younger brothers who will now be able to vote in the future, too."

-Oakland Youth Leader

SCOPE AND GOALS OF THIS REPORT

In November 2020, Oakland voters passed Measure QQ, which authorized the City of Oakland to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections. This report does not detail that initial effort, much of which has been documented in a [video](#) about the campaign (see *Appendix A, Oakland Youth Vote Campaign Short Documentary*).

Instead, this report provides an overview of the four-year fight to implement youth voting; the ongoing work to educate, pre-register, and engage Oakland youth voters; and the experience of youth voters in Oakland's historic first youth vote election. The report shares takeaways and recommendations to improve implementation, institutionalize and strengthen youth voter engagement, enhance the youth voter experience, and ideally help other jurisdictions successfully implement youth voting policies.

SOURCES

The information, takeaways, and recommendations in this report are based on the following:

- Interviews and discussions with 32 stakeholders including: Oakland youth organizers; adult allies; teacher champions; former Oakland Unified school board members and staff; election system consultants; policy experts; and voter outreach staff at the Alameda County Registrar of Voters.
- A scan of available data on pre-registration and youth ballots cast.
- A survey of teacher champions.
- A review of publicly available material on youth voting and the Oakland Youth Vote campaign
- Input and feedback from members of the Oakland Youth Vote Coalition.

Quotes have been anonymized but are from the individuals listed in the Acknowledgements section at the end of this report. Takeaways and recommendations, while based on the interviews and discussions, do not represent the views of all participants.

The report was authored with the assistance of Lori Shellenberger, election policy consultant.



"I personally witnessed the positive shift in perception when adults learned that the person passionately and articulately advocating for youth voting was a 17-year-old student."

-Oakland Youth Phare Banker

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Authentic student voice and leadership fueled the push for implementation and the efforts to engage youth voters.** At the heart of the youth vote campaign were the students who crafted and executed the initial campaign for youth voting, passionately advocated for implementation, and energized their peers and adult allies to educate and pre-register youth voters. Training, logistical support, and strategic guidance from adult allies was an important factor in helping students achieve campaign goals.
- A diverse and enduring coalition of youth organizing and leadership development organizations from outside and within government was critical to sustaining a years-long campaign for implementation.** The Oakland Youth Vote Coalition's five organizational members provided the institutional continuity and memory needed to sustain a campaign amidst the churn of youth leaders graduating and passing the baton to younger leaders, and the inevitable organizational staff changes that mean new adult allies stepped in to support youth.
- Clarity and accountability for implementation among government stakeholders is essential.** Multiple government entities had responsibilities related to Alameda County's implementation of youth voting - the Oakland and Berkeley School Boards, both city councils, the County Board of Supervisors, and the Registrar of Voters. A lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder likely contributed to the extended delay in implementing youth voting. At the outset, jurisdictions implementing youth voting should reach written agreements among all stakeholders detailing the timeline, roles, responsibilities, and funding of implementation, as well as a project lead who will hold all parties accountable to ensure timely completion of implementation steps.
- Cultivate strategic champions within government who are able to help shepherd implementation.** The Oakland Youth Vote campaign had champions within government who played important roles in making youth voting a reality. For example, during the initial fight for implementation, the General Counsel to Oakland Unified School District, with the support of a school board member, spearheaded the hiring of election consultants to map out the technical requirements for youth voting and convened a working group of county stakeholders. Advocates for youth voting should cultivate champions within all levels of government responsible for implementation early on in their campaigns.

"I loved the partnership with the students, who were so key to pulling this off. It was a great opportunity to work with students outside of the usual student-teacher relationship in the classroom"

-Oakland Teacher Champion



- **Schools must institutionalize ongoing youth voter education and engagement.** The OYV Coalition did the heavy lifting to educate and engage youth voters by organizing candidate forums, student-led presentations and pre-registration drives in classrooms and at school events, developing a week-long civic engagement curriculum, and recruiting teacher champions to run the curriculum and promote youth voting within schools. While peer-to-peer engagement is impactful, school districts must play a larger role in institutionalizing ongoing youth civic education and pre-registration of eligible youth voters. School districts should work with the Registrar of Voters to offer voter registration during class registration at all high schools, ensure that all high schools have ballot drop boxes and, where feasible, serve as vote centers where youth can register and vote in person in the days leading up to and on Election Day.
- **The confidentiality of 16 and 17-year-old pre-registration data severely limited the ability to engage and turnout eligible youth voters.** Under current California state regulations youth pre-registration data is private, so campaigns and nonpartisan voter outreach groups did not have access to youth pre-registration information. This meant eligible youth voters did not get the individualized outreach to develop a voting plan in their first ever voting experience that adult voters received through canvassing, phone banking, and text messaging campaigns. Stakeholders should work with the California legislature and Secretary of State to explore ways to change the current regulation to ensure that the pre-registration data of 16 and 17-year-olds who are eligible to vote in their city's elections is made available to the same extent as the data of adult voters.
- **Youth voters should have access to sufficient in-person voting options.** Alameda County failed to complete the software changes that would have allowed youth to vote in person at any vote center in the county. The only in-person voting option for youth was at the Registrar of Voters office. All eligible youth were sent a ballot they could return by mail, drop box, or at a vote center. But importantly, youth who did not receive their ballot in the mail, youth who missed the voter registration deadline and could have utilized the option to register and vote on the same day at a neighborhood vote center, or youth who wanted the experience of voting in person for the first time were deprived of that option unless they could travel to downtown Oakland. Alameda County and any jurisdiction implementing youth voting must ensure that youth voters have the same in-person voting options as all voters.
- **The Registrar of Voters should take on the responsibility of contacting all pre-registered youth voters to get out the vote.** Due to youth voter confidentiality restrictions, the Registrar of Voters (RoV) and VoteCal are the only entities that know which youth have pre-registered to vote. As the election authority in local Alameda County elections, the RoV must play a more active role in contacting prospective youth voters and ensuring they know how to vote and have a plan to do so.
- **Official data of pre-registration, ballots received, and youth voter turnout needs to be consistent and accessible.** Navigating the county website to obtain data isn't a straightforward process. Due to the school board's election cycle where odd districts and even districts are rotated, pre-registration isn't always counted when a 16-17 year old pre-registers in a district that doesn't have an election that year.

CELEBRATING OAKLAND'S FIRST YOUTH VOTE ELECTION



"My experience working on the campaign really opened my eyes to how much youth want to be civically involved and how excited they were about voting."

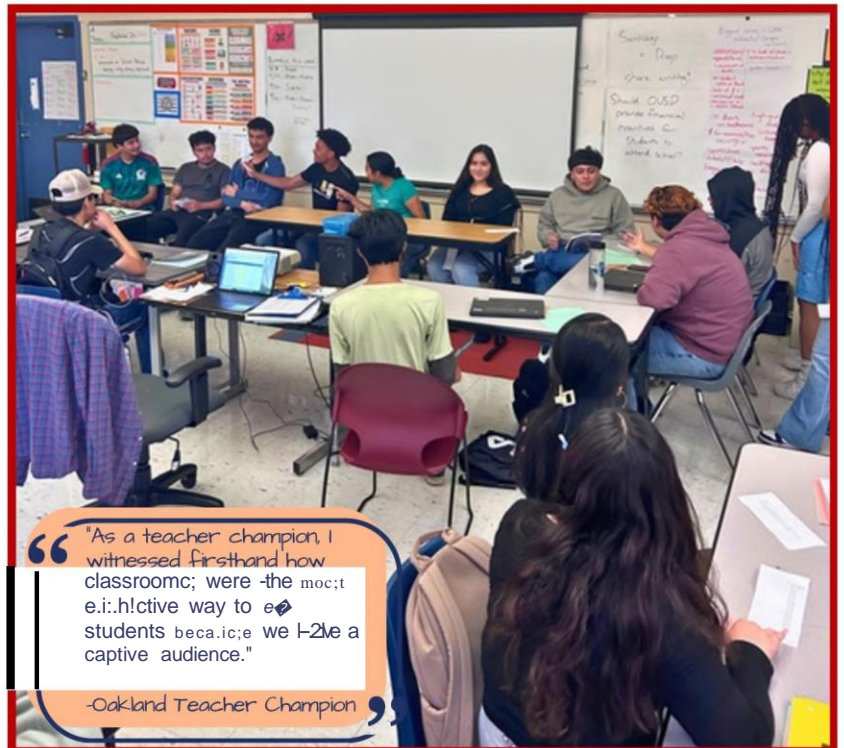
-Oakland Youth Leader

Even though youth voting in Oakland only got the green light to move ahead a couple months before the November 2024 election, organizers with the Oakland Youth Vote Coalition had been actively working on its implementation since the passing of Measure QQ in 2020. In September 2024, youth and adult organizers with the OYV Coalition, with support from teacher champions and the Oakland chapter of the League of Women Voters, quickly ramped up work to educate and engage as many youth across the district as possible. Overall, Oakland's first youth election -the culmination of a 5-year fight for students' right to vote - was a success.

Here are some of the highlights.

Launch of the civic engagement curriculum.

In the hopes that youth voting would be implemented, the OYV Coalition had begun developing a [civic education curriculum](#) unit during the winter of 2023-24. The coalition worked with OUSD teachers to pilot the curriculum in spring 2024, and incorporated feedback from students and teachers that summer to have an improved version of the curriculum at the ready. When word came from the Registrar of Voters that youth voting was a go, the OYV Coalition assembled a network of teacher champions across the district to run the civic engagement curriculum, made time for OYV organizers to do presentations during classes, and facilitated pre-registration of youth voters.



"As a teacher champion, I witnessed firsthand how the classroom was the most effective way to educate students because we have a captive audience."

-Oakland Teacher Champion



Pre-registration of an estimated 1,500 eligible Oakland 16 and 17-year-olds. Although only youth living in odd numbered school districts could vote in the 2024 school board election (OUSD staggers elections for even and odd districts every two years), hundreds of Oakland students felt the excitement of the first youth election and pre-registered to be poised as future voters.

A student organized and moderated candidate forum. OYV student leaders organized and moderated their third consecutive candidate forum since Measure QQ was passed to educate and inform potential voters about each person's platform - but this time the stakes were real with students finally having a voice in who would represent them. More than 160 students and parents attended the forum, and seven of the eight school board candidates participated.



"A lot of people didn't really understand how much power the school board has. The candidate forum really opened people's eyes to the importance of who is on the school board"

-Oakland Youth Vote Leader

"The student-led candidate forum was an incredible opportunity for student leadership and it was a real service to the broader school community."

-Oakland Teacher Champion

A kick-off voting and media event. Dozens of Youth and the media turned out to support students casting the first youth ballots at the Registrar of Voters office.

Youth voted! 244 youth living in Districts 1, 3, 5, and 7 voted in the first ever school board election, despite institutional hurdles that prevented traditional get out the vote outreach. This was a historic victory but this report proposes improvements that will lead to higher voter turnout and engagement.



"All the hard work on the campaign led up to this! At the moment - I'm not too far off! And I'm proud to have an impact on future voters!"

-Oakland Youth Vote Leader

"The youth-led kick-off event was such a great day! So many youth and adults showed up, even those who couldn't vote, and it really showed me the power there is in people coming together"

-Oakland Youth Vote Leader

OAKLAND YOUTH VOING N CONEXT

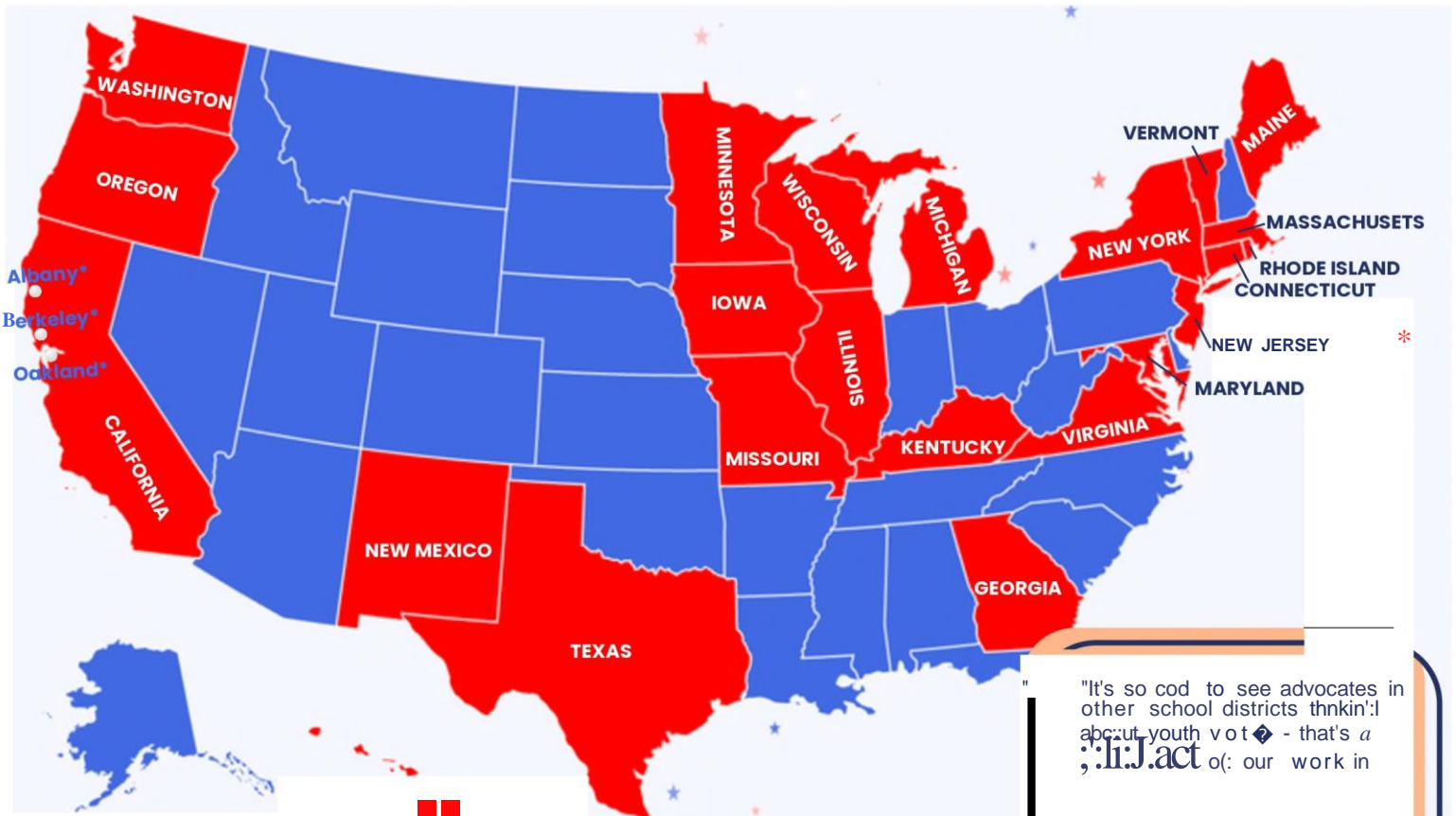
THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT FOR YOUTH VOTING

The movement for youth voting is growing across the country. Since 2014, multiple towns in Maryland and Massachusetts and one in Vermont passed ordinances to **lower the voting age to 16 for all local elections**.

In 2020, Oakland became the first large city in the country to **lower the voting age to 16 for school board elections**. Voters in Berkeley, CA (Berkeley and Oakland are both located within Alameda County) passed a similar measure in 2016, but it wasn't implemented until Oakland youth organizers forced the issue. After a prolonged implementation campaign, Oakland and Berkeley, CA youth voted for the first time in the November 2024 election. In November 2024, voters in Albany, CA passed the first measure on the West Coast to lower the voting age to 16 for all local elections, but it has yet to be implemented. And in 2024, the city of Newark, NJ passed an ordinance lowering the voting age to 16 for school board elections, and youth there voted for the first time in the April 2025 election.

Efforts to pass **state laws to lower the voting age** are gaining momentum, too. There is legislation pending in New Jersey's state legislature to lower the voting age to 16 for school board elections statewide, and statewide campaigns are underway in additional states. In recent years, representatives in Congress have also introduced legislation to **lower the voting age to 16 nationwide** by constitutional amendment.

For more information about the above campaigns and the movement for the youth vote, visit www.vote16usa.org.



*California cities that have lowered the voting age

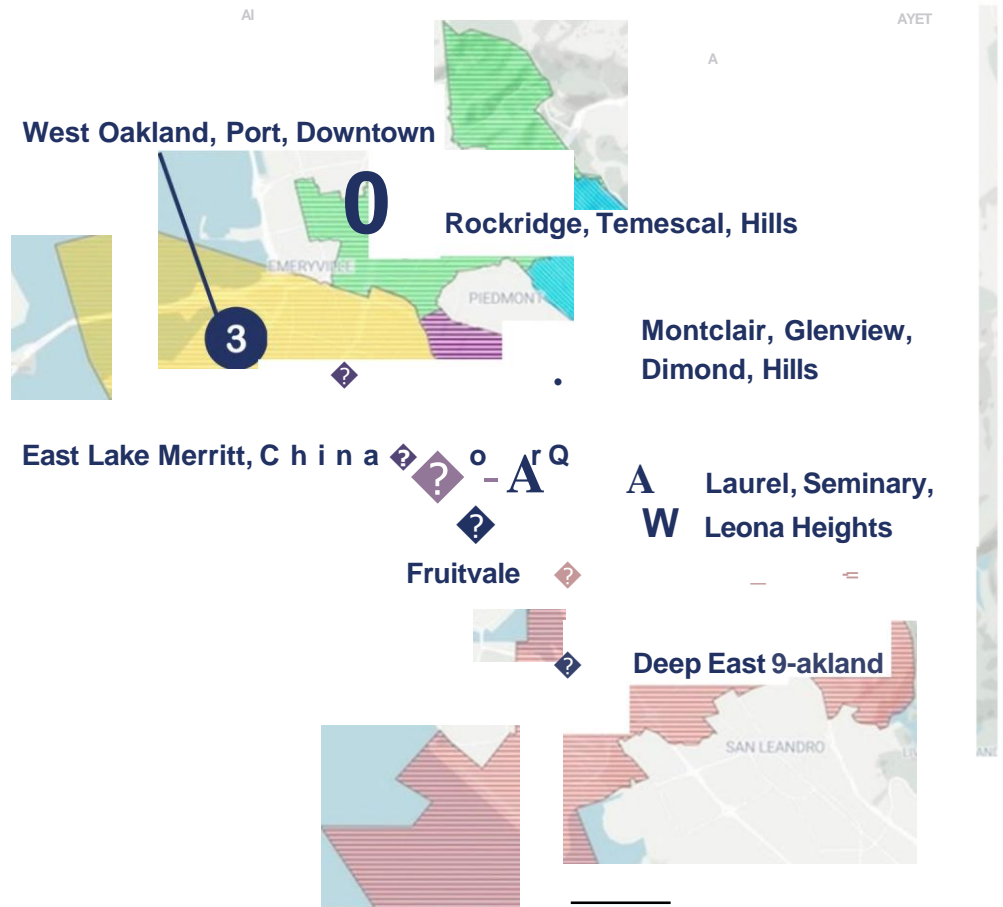
- Denotes states where Vote16US has current campaigns.

ABOUT THE OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

According to Oakland Unified School District's [Fast Facts for 2024-2025](#), total enrollment in district-run schools for the 2024-2025 school year was almost 34,000 students, approximately 86% of whom are students of color. Nearly 50% of households speak one of at least 72 languages other than English at home, and more than 32% of students are English language learners.

Though school board elections mainly impact OUSD students, any eligible 16 and 17 year-old Oakland resident can vote in school board elections whether they attend one of Oakland's [17 compP-rehensive](#) public high schools, [13 charter](#) high schools, five private high schools, are home schooled, or attend school outside of the city. This large number of schools is in sharp contrast to Berkeley, which has just one large public high school. In addition, youth being detained in juvenile detention centers are eligible to vote. Undocumented and non-citizen 16 and 17-year olds are not eligible to vote.

School board directors are elected to four year terms but elections happen every two years. Elections for Districts 1, 3, 5, & 7 (odd districts) were most recently held in 2024 and elections for Districts 2, 4, & 6 (even districts) will take place in 2026. Voters can only vote for the race in their district based on the location of their residence.



One of the challenges of implementing youth voting in Oakland is knowing how many eligible youth voters there are not for each election cycle.

- The RoV doesn't track how many 16 and 17 year-olds live in each electoral district.
- OUSD's public data dashboards track students by grade but not age, making it difficult to identify the total number of eligible voters.
- Information regarding undocumented students is not disclosed for safety reasons, so they are included in enrollment totals even though they aren't eligible to vote.
- Thousands of Oakland youth attend disparate private and charter schools, are homeschooled, or are detained in Juvenile Hall.

This lack of a centralized dataset makes it difficult to set targets for how many potential youth voters need to be pre-registered, civically engaged, and turned out to the polls.

OAKLAND YOUTH VOTE CAMPAIGN TIMELINE

PHASE 1: DEVELOP CAMPAIGN



- Oakland youth leaders, frustrated by the Oakland School Board's sidelining of their concerns about cuts to critical student programs, decide to explore the possibility of youth voting in school board elections.

SPRING 2019



- Youth organizers from Oakland Kids First and Oakland Unified School District (OUSD)'s All City Council Student Union research avenues for enfranchising youth voters.

SUMMER 2019



- Oakland Youth Vote (OYV) Coalition forms and includes independent youth power building organizations and youth governmental advisory groups within the City of Oakland and Oakland Unified School District.
- OYV Coalition youth organizers and adult allies meet with OUSD to generate support and work with the Oakland City Council President to develop a ballot measure to lower the voting age to 16 for school board elections.

FALL 2019



SPRING 2020

- OYV Coalition successfully overcomes opposition to convince the city council to ultimately vote unanimously to place and bring a ballot measure to a vote in the November 2020 election.

1w:1ff1 j18114n11



- OYV Coalition hires a campaign consultant who conducted polling, advised on the formation of a campaign committee, helped prioritize campaign spending, assisted with drafting of ballot arguments, and co-produced a video advertisement.
- OYV Coalition utilizes social media to reach voters, distributes lawn and windows signs, secures additional endorsements, and generates earned media in local and national publications.
- With support from Power CA, the Yes On Measure QQ campaign conducts phone banking in support of Measure QQ and CA's Prop 15.

SUMMER & FALL 2020

NOVEMBER 2020



- Measure QQ passes with 67% voter approval!



PHASE 3: IMPLEMENT MEASURE



- Oakland School Board contracts with election systems consultants to work with the RoV to map out the technical steps and considerations for implementing a youth vote election.

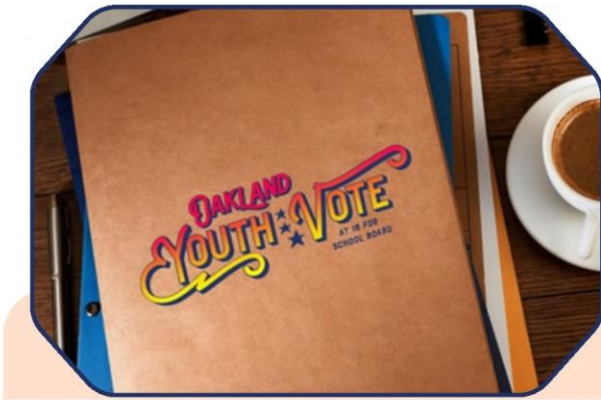
SPRING 2021



FALL 2021



- Elections systems consultants produce a roadmap for implementation of youth voting for the November 2022 election, including detailed use cases that explain the various technical process flows for youth to register and vote, the changes needed to elections software systems, and an explanation of the roles and responsibilities of the relevant government stakeholders to be included in a memorandum of understanding (See Appendix B).



WINTER 2022

- Elections systems consultant releases an updated youth voting use case guide to support collaboration between the Registrar of Voters office and Alameda County's election management vendor RunBeck.

SUMMER 2022



FAL 2022



- OYV Coalition continues to lead student voter education and pre-registration drives across Oakland public schools.
- OYV Coalition hosts a student-moderated candidate forum to engage youth in the school board election despite the fact that Measure QQ will not be implemented in time for the November election.
- OYV Coalition continues to work with Oakland Unified School Board to advocate for implementation of youth voting.

- Elections systems consultant produces a roadmap for implementation of youth voting for the November 2022 election, including updated use cases that explain the various technical process flows for youth to register and vote, the changes needed to elections software systems, and an explanation of the roles and responsibilities of the relevant government stakeholders to be included in a memorandum of understanding (*See Appendix B*).
- OYV Coalition successfully advocates for Oakland School Board to pass a resolution in support of implementation of Measure QQ and directing the Oakland Unified Superintendent to develop a comprehensive plan for raising awareness about High School Voter Education week, providing schools with voter education materials, and encouraging voter outreach events at high schools across the district (*See Appendix C*).
- Despite these efforts, OYV Coalition organizers learned in July 2022 that the Alameda County Registrar of Voters had not taken sufficient steps to implement youth voting for the November 2022 election.



SPRING 2023

- OYV Coalition successfully advocates for Oakland Unified School Board to pass a resolution authorizing the School Board President to send a request to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors requesting support and resources for the Registrar of Voters to complete implementation of Measure QQ (See Appendix D).



SUMMER 2023



- The OYV Coalition pressures the Alameda County Board of Supervisors (Bos) to direct the Registrar of Voters (RoV) to implement youth voting and provide them with the necessary resources to do so (See Appendix G). After initially questioning their ability to direct the RoV, the Bos directs the RoV to ensure voting systems were developed in time to allow 16 and 17 year-olds to vote in the November 2024 election.
- Elections consultants continue to partner with the Oakland Youth Vote Coalition to produce an updated detailed summary of the necessary changes to the county's election management system (EMS) that will enable the RoV to conduct an election that includes youth voters (See Appendix F).

FALL 2023

- OYV Coalition continues to lead student voter education and pre-registration drives across Oakland public schools.
- To maintain a spotlight on youth voting and the need for implementation, OYV Coalition hosts a student moderated school board candidate forum even though youth will again not be allowed to vote in the November 2023 special school board election despite the passage of Measure QQ in 2020.
- OYV Coalition continues to work with Oakland Unified School Board to push other Oakland government stakeholders to prioritize implementation of youth voting, and begins to shift focus to an advocacy strategy with the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.



Spring 2024

- An appellate court rules on the case of *Lacy v. City & County of San Francisco* (94 Cal.App.5th 238). This case involves a challenge to a local ballot measure that amended the San Francisco City Charter to authorize voting in school board elections by noncitizen parents and guardians of school-age children. The court rules under the home rule provision in the California Constitution, that charter cities have authority over the "manner in which ... the members of boards of education shall be elected." (Cal.Const. Art. IX, § 16, subd. (a), emphasis added.) (See *Appendix N*).
- OVV Coalition student organizers mobilize to speak at Alameda County Board of Supervisors (Bos) meetings to combat conservative opposition to youth vote implementation and encourage the Bos to apply pressure to the RoV, since two elections have now passed without implementation. Youth Organizers and adult allies reference *Lacy vs. City & County of San Francisco* to counter opposition to youth voting rooted in questions of legality and constitutionality. The Bos is convinced and, despite initial hesitance, eventually directs the RoV to implement youth voting in time for the November 2024 election (See *Appendix O & Appendix G*).
- OVV Coalition develops a week-long [civic engagement curriculum](#) and begins to recruit and train teacher champions in Oakland public high schools. Curriculum is tested and improved based on student and teacher feedback.
- The Alameda County Board of Supervisors votes to hire six new unfunded RoV staff to support youth voting (See *Appendix R*).



SUMMER 2024

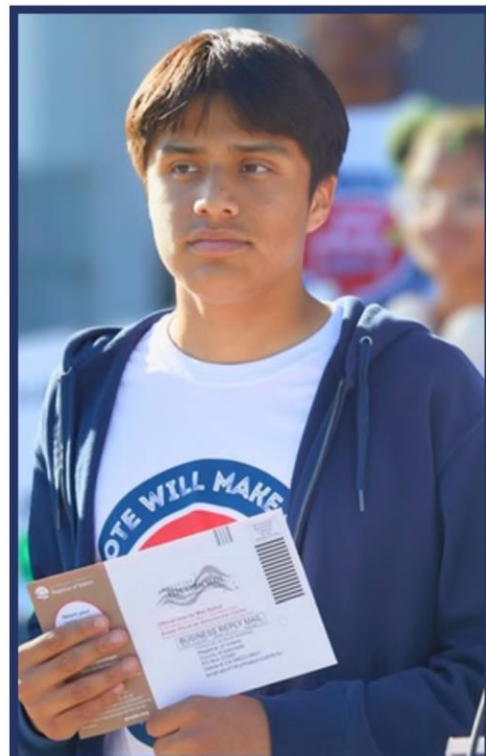
- Formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is signed by cities of Oakland and Berkeley, the Berkeley Unified School District, Alameda County Board of Supervisors, and the Registrar of Voters laying out final youth vote implementation steps, cost sharing, and agreements. Note: the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) was not party to this MOU because the City of Oakland reimburses Alameda County for OUSD elections (See *Appendix H*).
- Oakland City Council passes ordinance to formalize youth voting and implementation (See *Appendix I*).
- OVV Coalition conducts voter pre-registration and education about youth voting at community events across Oakland.
- In August, the Registrar of Voters announces it has completed the steps for youth voting to proceed in the November 2024 election, but with the major exception that youth will be required to primarily vote by mail and will only have the option to register and vote in person at the county elections office, not at the county's vote centers as specified in the MOU.



Fall 2024

- OVV Coalition ramps up student education and pre-registration at community events and schools, sometimes with the support of the League of Women Voters.
- OVV Coalition continues to recruit and support teacher champions to run the week-long civic engagement curriculum developed by coalition members.
- OVV Coalition hosts a student-moderated school board candidate forum with 160 students and parents in attendance.
- OVV Coalition organizes a kick-off voting and media event where the first Oakland youth voters deliver their ballots to the Registrar of Voters.

OAKLAND AND BERKELEY YOUTH SUCCESSFULLY VOTE FOR THE FIRST TIME!



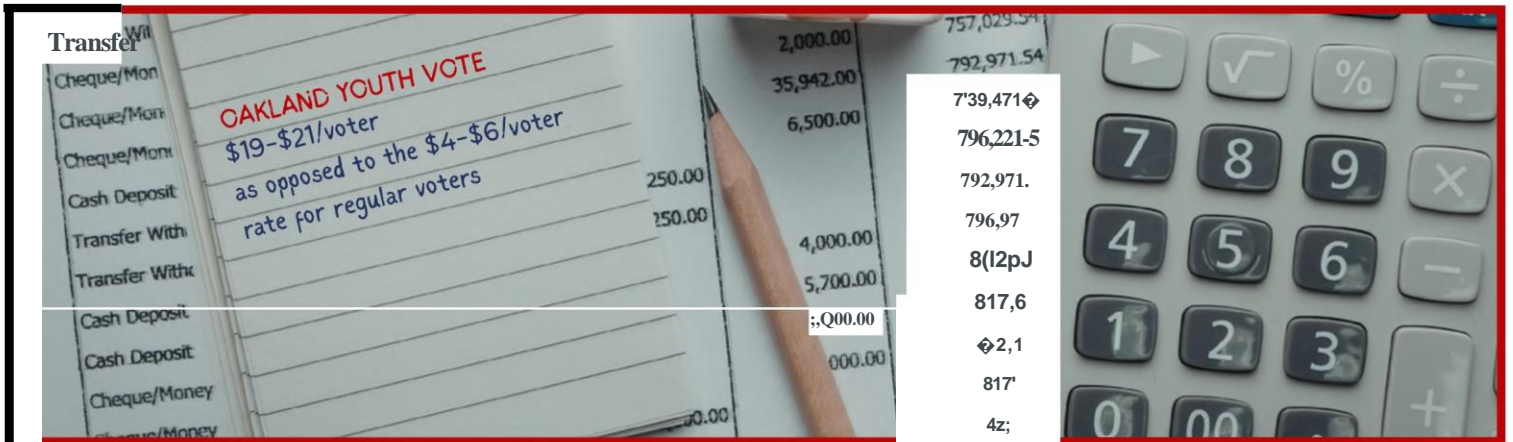
BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUTH VOTING

Other than any initial software changes that may be needed to county elections management systems, the administrative costs and considerations for youth voting are similar to those associated with engaging other hard-to-reach voter populations.

For Alameda County, the largest implementation expenditure was the cost of updating its election management system to accommodate and manage pre-registered youth voters who were eligible to vote in a school board election. At the time of the 2024 election, Alameda County used Data Information Management Systems New Election Technology (DIMS), which was serviced by Runbek Election Services and widely used by California counties and across the country. The total cost for the software changes to DIMS was \$102,920. It took Runbek approximately six months to make and test the software changes in collaboration with the RoV and the election systems consultant hired by OUSD.



Notably, any county implementing youth voting in the future that uses DIMS would not incur the upfront software costs since the system changes are applicable across counties. And for counties that do not use DIMS, elections systems consultants who worked with the OYV Coalition have mapped out process flows and election management systems requirements that can serve as a guide for mapping out potential software updates to other election management systems (see *Appendix B, Use Cases for Youth Voters, and Appendix F, EMS Requirements to Support Youth Voting*).



Beyond software changes, Alameda County estimated the cost of administering youth voting using its per/voter formula for billing jurisdictions for the cost of elections. For the November 2024 election, despite the fact the DIMS upgrades allowed for the seamless integration of youth voters with regular voters for the purposes of mailing, tracking, and counting ballots, the Registrar of Voters chose to conduct youth voting as a standalone special election. This meant that youth ballots were flagged and counted separately, which adds administrative costs. The standalone special election rate was \$19-\$21/voter (as opposed to the \$4-\$6/voter rate for regular voters for the November 2024 general election). Many stakeholders interviewed speculated that the Registrar of Voters was nervous about the first youth vote election in light of the spotlight on the office due to recent elections issues, including [an error in ranked choice voting tabulation in 2022](#) that resulted in a school board race being called for the wrong candidate.

The Alameda County Registrar of Voters' final billing statement for the November 2024 election includes, without further explanation, items such as "Youth Election Services and Supplies." The Alameda County Registrar of Voters did not respond to multiple requests for clarification of the line items. There was no line item for youth voter outreach beyond the standard mailings sent to all voters. The line item for staff time, which totaled nearly \$37,000, was quite possibly a result of the Registrar's decision to mail and process youth voter ballots separately despite the fact youth voters could have been integrated into existing processes for regular voters.

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ITEMS THAT JURISDICTIONS IMPLEMENTING YOUTH VOTING SHOULD CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- **Software changes to e-pollbook to ensure youth can vote in person at polling sites and vote centers.** Oakland and Berkeley youth were denied the opportunity to vote in-person at vote centers because the Registrar of Voters did not work with its e-poll book vendor to make and test the software changes needed to include eligible youth voters. Jurisdictions implementing youth voting should ensure necessary changes to all software systems are budgeted for and completed. As of the writing of this report, Alameda County's Registrar of Voters had not sought an estimate from its e-pollbook vendor on the cost of integrating youth voters into e-pollbooks.
- **Tailored youth voter outreach materials.** Alameda County developed separate voter information materials for youth voters that, distinct from regular voters, explained their eligibility to vote in school board elections only and changed terms like "registered" to "pre-registered," the technical term for a youth voter's status. Jurisdictions implementing youth voting should consider that standard pre-election mailings to voters will need to be customized.
- **Staffing and resources for targeted youth voter outreach and education.** Because youth voter information in California is currently confidential, election officials are often the main source of information about the election. Election officials should be funded to do targeted youth voter outreach and education beyond their normal outreach to voters, similar to the type of outreach that should be done to other marginalized voter populations such as voters with disabilities and voters with limited English proficiency. Consider including youth advisory groups that can work with election officials to help them meet voters where they are.
- **Consultants to assist with technical implementation and timelines.** The Oakland school board hired two elections consultants to demystify and map out the technical software and election administration considerations for youth voting. Although their work is publicly available and useful for implementation planning (see *Appendix Band Appendix F*), jurisdictions implementing youth voting should consider hiring consultants with expertise in election management systems to ensure full and timely implementation.

FL "It was incredibly rewarding to map out the election administration implementation steps for youth voters. I really believe - and evidence shows - that if you let a voter when they are young, you will have a voter for life."

-Former California county elections official and elections systems consultant,



TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUTH VOTE ADVOCATES

Takeaway: *The development of a strong coalition that centered youth decision making was critical to sustaining momentum and youth engagement in the ongoing work to implement a youth vote policy.*

- The OYV Coalition includes community organizations that are part of a longstanding Oakland youth organizing and leadership development ecosystem, and includes two groups embedded within government: the city's Oakland Youth Commission and the school district's All City Council Student Union. The inclusion of groups that work within government was helpful for navigating city and school district politics and bureaucracy, while the inclusion of community-based organizations was helpful for applying external pressure during implementation hurdles.
- The Oakland Youth Vote Coalition anticipated the path to implementation would be arduous given that Berkeley's successful 2016 youth vote measure (YI) had been passed four years prior and had not been implemented by the RoV. The fight was still longer and more difficult than we expected. Thankfully, the coalition developed a workplan designed to engage in prolonged struggle. After the 2020 Measure QQ campaign to secure Oakland youth voting, it took an additional four years of sustained advocacy by the OYV Coalition to get the Registrar of Voters and Alameda County to implement youth voting in Oakland and Berkeley.
- The OYV Coalition was able to provide the institutional memory and infrastructure needed to survive the inevitable student churn and staff turnover that happened over the course of what became a five-year campaign to pass the Oakland youth voting policy and finally hold the first youth vote election. Even then, the campaign to fully implement youth voting is not over since Alameda County did not provide youth in-person registration and voting at vote centers, and as of the writing of this report, the coalition is unaware if they have taken the steps necessary to do so for the next election.
- Current and former OYV Coalition student leaders consistently lauded their adult allies, noting that students were always in the driver's seat, but could not have realized their vision without the training and logistical support from OYV Coalition member organizations' staff.

Recommendation:

Build a diverse coalition of organizations that center youth leadership, including groups within government if they exist, and be prepared for the need for significant, ongoing advocacy and monitoring to hold stakeholders accountable for youth vote implementation.



"I appreciated that the Oakland Youth Vote Coalition's adult allies placed so much trust in students' training of the advocacy message."

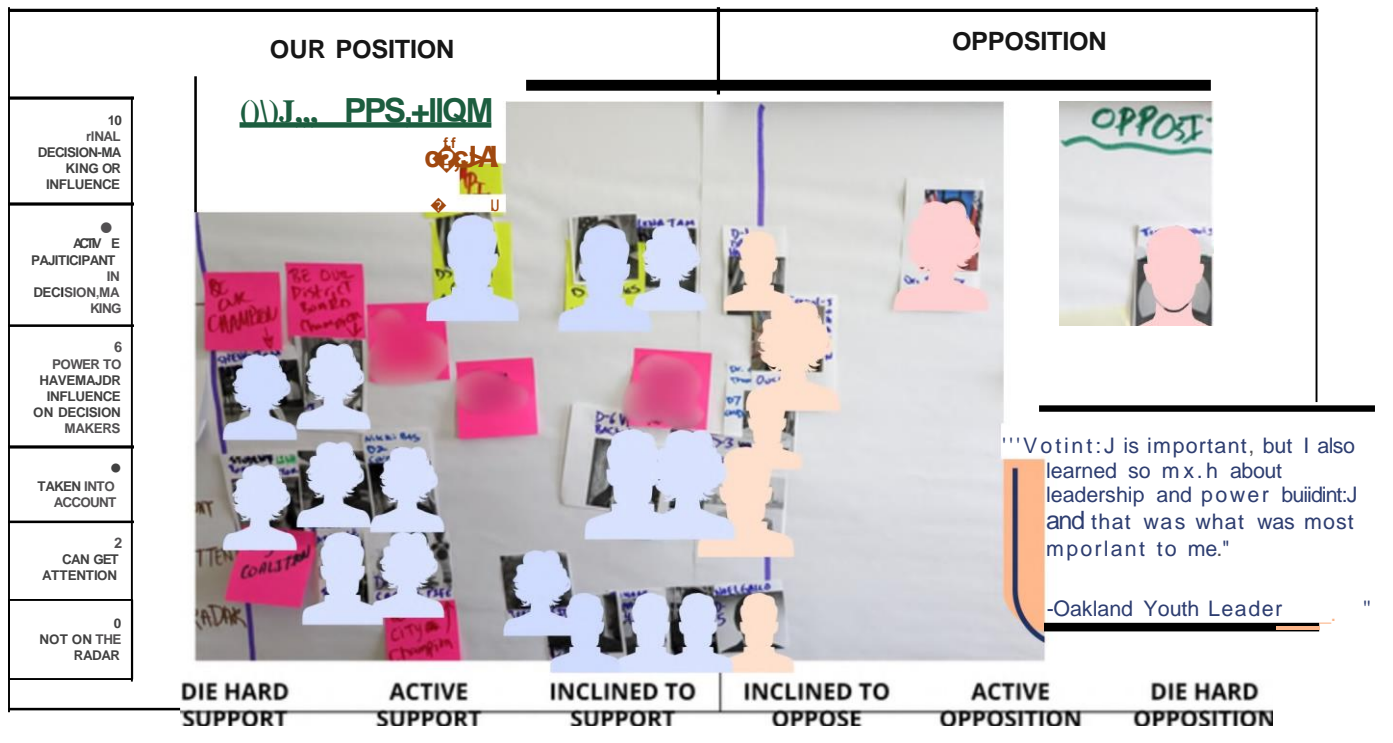
-Oakland Youth Vote Leader

"The campaign for youth voting galvanized the Oakland youth movement by bringing together a diverse set of organizations that had only informally worked together. Having a unified strategy was really powerful."

-Oakland Youth Vote Adult Ally

Takeaway: The OYV Coalition periodically conducted powermapping of elected officials and other stakeholders involved in youth vote implementation to identify and develop allies and potential opponents.

- Prior to the launch of its campaign to get a youth voting measure on the ballot, the OYV Coalition conducted power mapping to determine key decision makers, likely allies, and potential opponents they would need to engage in their fight for the youth vote.
- The power map for implementation, however, ultimately involved more stakeholders and new questions about who is responsible for implementation, who funds elections, and who ultimately holds election officials accountable. Over time, the implementation power map shifted to include the Registrar of Voters and later, the County Board of Supervisors, which oversees the registrar's office. In addition, the OUSD School Board and teachers became important stakeholders as youth advocated for a civic engagement curriculum and more school resources to support youth voter engagement.
- Adult allies in the OYV Coalition reflected that they might have focused advocacy on the County Board of Supervisors earlier in the campaign for implementation had they had a better understanding of the Board of Supervisors' authority over the Registrar of Voters. Similarly, education officials noted that earlier engagement with and support from the Board of Supervisors could have advanced the implementation timeline.
- Adult allies and education officials pushing for implementation noted the importance of understanding and addressing the political will and reservations of government stakeholders. For example, Measure QQ was passed amid a legal challenge to San Francisco's charter amendment that allows noncitizen parents and guardians to vote in school board elections. San Francisco's charter amendment and the right of charter cities to determine how school board members are elected was ultimately upheld in August 2023, (*see Appendix N, Lacy v. City & County of San Francisco*) but this litigation fueled concerns about a legal challenge to youth voting and undermined any sense of urgency to implement Measure QQ in time for the 2022 election.



Recommendation:

Youth vote advocates should engage in power mapping to identify stakeholders across government and school ecosystems who have a role to play in youth vote implementation, as well as the political actors who can influence and hold parties accountable for implementation.

Takeaway: Youth were able to utilize moral power to influence implementation, but also organized alongside adult allies with political power who helped navigate government bureaucracy and other implementation hurdles.

- Youth are passionate and convincing advocates on the issues that impact them. But without a vote, they struggle to achieve political change, as evidenced by the school board's sidelining of youth concerns in 2019 that became the catalyst for the youth vote campaign.
- At every stage of the youth vote campaign, youth and their adult allies cultivated champions within government who had the political power to move the needle: from the city council president who led the effort to put youth voting on the ballot to the school board member who kept youth vote implementation front and center; from the consultants who visualized the steps to implement to the general counsel to the school board who engaged and coordinated the various stakeholders and moved them toward agreement on the roles and responsibilities for implementation; and the teachers who embraced the civic engagement curriculum and promoted it within their schools. Without these internal champions, implementation might have stalled indefinitely.

"students know their own experience better than any adult or school board member. I saw votin'g as one piece of students havin'g the power to fix problems of their schools and beyond."

-Oakland Youth Vote Leader

Recommendation:

Youth vote advocates should cultivate champions within all levels of government involved in implementation, including city council, the school board, district committees/existing communications teams/family engagement departments, the superintendent's office, teachers, election technologists, the Registrar of Voters, the county board of supervisors, and others with relevant expertise and positional authority.

"The support from city council and school board champions was so important and showed us that there were people in office who believed students could do this."

-Oakland Youth Vote Leader

More detailed information about the steps and considerations for the Oakland Youth Vote campaign can be found in this [toolkit](#).



TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES, OFFICIALS, AND STAKEHOLDERS TASKED WITH IMPLEMENTATION

Takeaway: *There wasn't a comprehensive effort to build an implementation working group that included the Registrar of Voters (RoV), election software experts, elected officials from all relevant jurisdictions, youth leaders, and youth adult allies leading to a reactive, prolonged, and piecemeal approach to implementation.*

"Hiring consultants to map out the technical specifications for youth voting was critical to helping us understand the steps we needed to take to implement."

-Oakland Education Official

- In the wake of passing Measure QQ and informed by the four year delay to implement Berkeley's Measure YI, the Oakland School Board hired two election systems consultants to map out the youth voting process flows and the software and election administration changes needed for youth vote implementation (*see Appendix B, Use Cases for Youth Voters and Appendix F, EMS Requirements to Support Youth Voting*). The consultants were critical to addressing the complexity of implementing youth voting in a large city and to guide the RoV through a process that had been deprioritized for years.
- The election systems consultants, OUSD's General Counsel, the RoV, and staff from RunBeck (who ran Alameda County's Election Management System) met intermittently to design and test the vote systems in accordance with the use case studies developed by the consultants.
- The OYV Coalition met with OUSD's General Counsel and the election systems consultants regularly to offer input and receive status updates from their meetings with the RoV and RunBeck, but they weren't included in the meetings with the RoV directly.
- Four years after the initial passage of Measure QQ, a governmental working group is finally convened to develop an MOU to spell out the process, roles, and cost-sharing to implement Oakland's Measure QQ and Berkeley's Measure YI. This working group is composed of representatives from the Oakland and Berkeley school boards, the Registrar of Voters and his Deputy Registrar, Alameda County Counsel, and members from the Oakland and Berkeley City Attorney's Offices. The MOU was finally signed by all parties in the summer of 2024. Notably absent were representatives from the OYV Coalition as well as the Alameda County Board of Supervisors office who should have been included given their authority over and funding of the Registrar of Voters office.

Recommendation: Immediately after passage of legislation, a youth vote implementation project lead within government should convene a working group of election process experts, youth leaders, the Registrar of Voters, and government stakeholders from relevant jurisdictions to map out implementation steps, monitor progress toward implementation, and continue to meet after implementation to assess youth voting and determine where improvements can be made.



Takeaway: A multi-party agreement outlining government roles, responsibilities, timelines, funding, and accountability are essential to timely implementation, but a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) wasn't developed and signed until four years after Measure QQ passed and 8 years after Measure YI passed.

- Although the Registrar of Voters has the biggest lift in the implementation of youth voting, several county and local government entities play critical roles. When multiple entities are involved, there can be a lack of clarity about who plays what role in implementation and who holds all parties accountable.
- OYV organizers anticipated an uphill battle given that no progress had been made to implement Berkeley's Measure YI. As a result, the general counsel to the Oakland School Board stepped in after the passage of Measure QQ to hire election systems consultants and convene stakeholders to map out the steps to implementation.
- Nervousness about potential legal challenges to youth voting lingered and may have contributed to slowing implementation until August of 2023, when a California appeals court upheld San Francisco's charter amendment to allow noncitizen parents and guardians to vote in school board elections. However even after that court ruling, implementation continued to stall and no formal agreements about youth voting implementation had been reached.
- Finally, in July of 2024, government agencies and stakeholders executed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) laying out the specific roles and responsibilities for implementation (see *Appendix H, Youth Vote Implementation MOU*).
- Executing a MOU earlier in the process could have ensured all parties were held accountable to implement youth voting for previous elections and ensured the inclusion of full in-person registration and voting at vote centers, which are yet to be implemented.



Recommendation:

When a youth voting ordinance or ballot measure is passed, all government entities involved in the administration of local elections should immediately execute a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that clearly delineates roles, responsibilities, funding, and a timeline for implementation. Election official accountability and regular reporting on progress should be included in the MOU. In Oakland, where full implementation remains incomplete until youth can vote in-person at vote centers, stakeholders should execute a follow-up MOU to ensure the necessary steps are taken before the 2026 election.

Takeaway: Ambiguity around budget, costs, and who had responsibility for covering those costs likely contributed to the delays in youth vote implementation and the failure to fully implement youth in-person voting at vote centers.

- The Oakland School Board shouldered the cost of election consultants to map out implementation steps. Berkeley Unified School District and City of Oakland split the proportional costs of the initial software changes to the election management system and the per voter cost of their respective school board elections.
- Because the City of Oakland had been covering the school district's election costs since the district was placed in receivership in 2003, there was some dissension over which entity would cover the cost of youth vote implementation. The parties ultimately agreed that youth vote implementation should proceed and the matter would be resolved outside of youth vote discussions. But this ambiguity was likely another factor in the ongoing implementation delay.
- A budget for youth voter outreach and education was not directly discussed, beyond the cost of the usual mailers that the Registrar of Voters sends to all voters. The Alameda County Board of Supervisors voted to hire six new unfunded RoV staff to support youth voting, but there was ambiguity as to what role they would play, who would shoulder the cost, whether they were ever hired, and, if so, whether they were exclusively working on youth voting (see Appendix R, Recommendations from the RoV to the Bos).
- The Registrar of Voters Office outreach team did registration events at high schools across the county as part of its annual high school voter outreach efforts, including some in Oakland. The registrar's office also conducted voter registration at Berkeley High School's class registration day. We suspect these activities weren't line items in any youth vote implementation budget and not directly funded by the county or school districts in part because these comprised typical voter pre-registration and outreach rather than tailored outreach to accommodate actual youth voters. The OYV Coalition worked with teachers in Oakland High Schools to launch a civic engagement curriculum and, with support of the local League of Women Voters, to pre-register as many youth as possible ahead of the election.
- Implementation delays meant that youth voting was not greenlighted until less than three months before the November 2024 election. This meant the Registrar of Voters, schools, and the OYV Coalition had just weeks to educate, pre-register, and engage youth voters.



Recommendation:

The Registrar of Voters, and any additional jurisdictions involved in the implementation of youth voting, should develop budgets that realistically account for the hiring of election administration and systems consultants to map out steps for youth vote implementation and should include funding to staff intentional youth voter outreach by the Registrar of Voters, to conduct youth media outreach campaigns, and to formalize a civic education curriculum and voter registration events in city schools.

TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ELECTION OFFICIALS

Takeaway: *Youth voters did not have access to sufficient in-person voting options.*

- While the first youth vote election was a success, it had limitations. Oakland and Berkeley youth were not allowed to vote in person at neighborhood vote centers, despite parity with adult voters being a requirement in the implementation MOU (see *Appendix H, Youth Vote Implementation MOU*). If they wanted to vote in person, the only option was at the Registrar of Voters office located in downtown Oakland. In addition, because California allows voters who miss the voter registration deadline to register and vote on the same day at any vote center, youth who missed the registration deadline and did not receive a ballot in the mail were only allowed to vote if they could travel to the Office of the Registrar.
- Convenient, accessible same day registration and in-person voting options for youth voters are critical to youth voter turnout. Studies show that access to same day registration increases turnout of young voters (see *Appendix J, Rock the Registration: Same Day Registration Increases Turnout of Young Voters*). In addition, a [recent survey of California voters](#) showed that nearly half of voters would prefer to vote in person, with higher shares of Black, Latino, and youth voters aged 18-24 preferring in-person voting.
- The same study showed that 25% of first-time voters in California voted in person in the 2022 election (see *Appendix K, Voting Methods in California: Voter Awareness and Reasons for Disparate Use*). In contrast, less than 7% of first-time Oakland youth voters cast their ballot in person, likely due to the limited in-person options available to them.
- There were many moving parts to implementing youth voting, including multiple vendors that service the various technological aspects of election administration. For youth to vote in person at the county's vote centers, three-poll books the county uses needed the capability to look up a youth voter's pre-registration and voting status. According to the Registrar of Voters, which many stakeholders noted is understaffed and under-resourced, they did not have sufficient time to engage three-poll book vendor to make and test the necessary software changes.
- Upon learning the county would not be able to accommodate youth voters at vote centers for the November 2024 election, the youth vote implementation working group decided to proceed with a primarily vote-by-mail election for youth voters rather than have youth sit out yet another election while waiting for full implementation.
- Installing ballot dropboxes at each OUSD public high school would have been a great way to boost voter turnout given that in-person voting at vote centers wasn't an option and because many 16 and 17 year-olds don't correspond by mail. We believe this would be a value add for all future elections, especially since shifting from a poll station model to a vote center model reduced the number of places for people to vote in their communities.
- As of the writing of this report, the vendor that services Alameda County's e-poll books (KnowInk) had not been contracted to make the necessary changes to enable youth in-person voting at vote centers for the 2026 election, and the registrar's office had not yet sought an estimate of the cost to make those changes.

Recommendation:

When a youth voting policy is enacted, election officials should immediately begin working with all vendors involved in the county's election administration process to confirm the steps, timeline, and costs for integrating youth voters into all election process flows, including in-person voting and same day registration options. If staff capacity is an issue, election officials should be proactive in seeking additional financial support, since early engagement with vendors will be key to ensuring timely implementation.

Takeaway: Pre-registration data for 16 and 17-year-olds is confidential until they turn 18 (2 California Code of Regulations§ 19089). Political campaigns and nonpartisan get out the vote groups did not have youth voter contact information, so they could not engage youth voters in jurisdictions where they are eligible to vote. This means the RoV is the sole holder of this information and therefore should lead more outreach, which could incur additional costs.

- The current California regulation on youth pre-registration, adopted before local jurisdictions in California began enacting youth voting, requires that pre-registration data for 16 and 17-year-olds remain confidential until they turn 18 (2 California Code of Regulations§ 19089).
- The confidentiality of youth voters means that eligible youth are not recognized as voters in the state's voter database (VoteCal) even when they are eligible to vote in local elections. Instead, the data necessary to ensure that eligible youth voters can vote in a local election lives in the county's database and is not shared with VoteCal. Youth voters are not included in the state's voter lookup tool that adult voters can use to find voting locations, request voting materials in another language, and track their ballots. Youth voters also do not receive the Secretary of State's automated messages about upcoming elections that promote voting, even though election officials are often the sole source of information about the upcoming election and the importance of voting. The Alameda County Registrar's office therefore had to bear the cost of developing a youth voter profile portal so that youth had the same opportunities to get information about their pre-registration status, their ballots, and their options for voting. (Note that youth leaders, their adult allies, and teachers interviewed did not seem to be aware of the youth voter lookup tool, so resources should also be devoted to the promotion of the tool.)



- The Oakland Youth Vote Coalition members shared that the confidentiality of pre-registered youth voters resulted in a lack of access to youth voter contact information that hindered their ability to do targeted outreach to encourage and remind eligible pre-registered youth to vote. This impact was particularly pronounced because it prevented get out the vote outreach to prospective voters who had never voted before.
- The Registrar of Voters recognized the significance of the first youth vote election and that many pre-registrants, some of whom may have pre-registered to vote outside of the Oakland Youth Vote campaign, would be hearing about their right to vote for the first time through mailings from the registrar's office. The Office of the Registrar did dedicate staff resources to carefully customize the four mailings they send to voters ahead of an election, all of which include information about the upcoming election, voter registration, and how and where to cast a ballot. The materials were customized to use different terminology (for example youth voters are still considered pre-registered, even if they are eligible to vote in the school board election); to introduce the idea of voting, explain Oakland's use of ranked choice voting, explain that youth are only eligible to vote in the school board election; and to explain that, at least for the November 2024 election, youth could only vote in person at the Registrar of Voters office. Unfortunately, student organizers reported that most youth are not used to receiving mail and are less likely to read mailed voter education materials. Texts and phone calls sharing how to vote and helping youth to develop a voting plan would have been particularly helpful.

- The Alameda County Registrar of Voters addressed all youth voting materials to "Youth Voter" and included no personal identifying information other than an identification number generated by and known only to the elections office. The Registrar's office shared that for the November 2024 election, there were no households with more than one youth voter. However, if there is in the future, eligible youth in the same household would have no way of knowing which ballot is theirs. If the youth in that household sign and return each other's ballots, the only solution currently would be for the election's office to contact the voters and let them know they need to vote and return a new ballot, which adds administrative costs and headaches to ballot processing.
- The registrar's office conducted some voter outreach at Oakland high schools in the lead up to the November 2024 election, but multiple stakeholders reported that it was insufficient for the first ever youth vote election. Each year during the state's designated High School Voter Education week in September, the RoV's outreach team conducts some voter pre-registration at high schools across Alameda County, including a couple in OUSD. This brand of outreach has historically helped youth think about voting in their futures, but now that 16 and 17 year-old Oaklanders can vote in the present, a more robust voter engagement effort is needed from the RoV. They did turn out to the most recent Student Led Candidate Forum that OYV students hosted and conducted a few ballot pick-ups from targeted high schools, but students reported that those visits from the outreach team were too brief and not conducted at enough schools. In Berkeley, the registrar's office did voter registration and education during the school registration process at the city's one high school, but because Oakland has 17 public high schools (not including charter and private), a more comprehensive strategy must be developed between the RoV's outreach team and OUSD.
- The registrar's office spearheaded public media outreach targeting youth voters, including ads on billboards, the sides of AC Transit buses, and at BART train stations. Though this outreach was conducted, it was insufficient in scale as none of the Oakland Youth Vote youth leaders and only one of the adult allies reported they saw the advertisements from the registrar's office.



Recommendations:

- **To streamline election administration and youth vote implementation, election officials should work with the Secretary of State's Office and the California legislature to explore ways to ensure that the data of pre-registered youth voters eligible to vote in local elections is publicly available. This would also address the challenges election officials, campaigns, and voter engagement groups face in reaching youth voters whose information is confidential.**
- **In light of the outreach void created by youth voter confidentiality requirements, election officials should provide additional communications to youth voters that meet youth where they are, including social media and more targeted approaches such as text messaging and phone calling to promote youth voting and share the ways that youth can vote.**
- **Counties implementing youth voting should create and staff a youth voter outreach advisory committee to inform youth voter engagement strategies.**



Takeaway: *The Registrar of Voters opted to run a standalone youth vote election alongside the general election, which kept youth votes separate and increased cost.*

- For the November 2024 election, despite the fact the DIMS upgrades allowed for the seamless integration of youth voters with regular voters for the purposes of mailing, tracking, and counting ballots, the Registrar of Voters chose to conduct youth voting as a standalone special election. This meant that youth ballots were flagged and counted separately, which adds administrative costs. The standalone special election rate was \$19-\$21/voter as opposed to the \$4-\$6/voter rate for regular voters for the November 2024 general election.

Recommendation:

The Registrar of Voters should consider incorporating youth voting into the general election in order to reduce costs.

TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION OFFICIALS

Takeaway: *In-class civic engagement curriculum combined with class discussions and pre-registration activities were the most effective way to engage youth voters.*

- The Oakland Unified School District does not have a formal civic education program. It was up to the Oakland Youth Vote (OYV) Coalition to write a week-long [civic education curriculum](#) to educate youth about what a school board does, who the candidates running for school board were, the history and context of the OYV campaign, why student voting is important, ways that noncitizen students can become civically engaged, and how voting works. The curriculum was first piloted by a group of teachers in OUSD high school classrooms in the Spring of 2024, and was then improved after receiving feedback from teachers who ran the curriculum and students who engaged with it.
- OYV Coalition adult allies recruited and trained teacher champions to promote and run the improved curriculum in the fall of 2024, with a focus on 11th and 12th grade social studies classes. Teacher champions combined the curriculum with in-class voter registration opportunities (*see Appendix S, Getting Youth Involved In Democracy*). They also supported OYV Coalition student leaders who organized classroom presentations and pre-registration events at schools. The OYV Coalition provided small stipends to teacher champions in recognition of their time and commitment to youth civic education.
- Both teachers and student leaders consistently reported that they received higher numbers of completed pre-registration forms when voter registration opportunities were provided in-class, especially when combined with facilitated civic engagement curriculum and discussion about youth voting and elections. While tabling during lunch and at school events raised awareness about youth voting, it did not result in many completed pre-registration forms.
- Because youth voters often don't have state identification or know their social security numbers, online registration doesn't work as well for them. When people register online, they are then mailed a form to sign and return to formalize their registration. This additional step was confusing and it's a generational reality that most youth didn't grow up checking the mail. Using paper registration forms is the best way to make sure youth get registered. When paper registration forms are filled out, there is a 72 hour window in which they are supposed to be submitted to the Registrar of Voters office.

"The Oakland Youth Vote campaign gave me an opportunity as an educator to connect with community partners that support students and develop a school-community partnership that could extend beyond youth voting."

-Oakland Teacher Champion

"As a teacher champion I witnessed firsthand how classroom were the most effective way to engage students because we have a captive audience."

-Oakland Teacher Champion

- Teacher champions and student leaders reported that their schools were supportive of their efforts to promote youth voting, providing library space for voter registration events and making regular announcements about youth voting. Their fellow teachers were receptive to the curriculum but given the short notice, most were only able to devote one day to discussion of youth voting and primarily focused on pre-registration and the mechanics of voting.
- While there was generally positive feedback about the week-long civic education curriculum, teachers noted that students, not unlike many adults, struggled to understand how they could differentiate between candidates and decide how to vote. One teacher hosted a journalist from Oaklandside, an independent nonprofit newsroom, who taught a lesson on investigative journalism techniques that can be used to find trusted and accurate sources of information about candidates and their positions.
- OYV Coalition student leaders and adult allies all shared that while they were excited to engage students in the first youth vote election, it is not sustainable for their coalition or individual organizations to bear the burden of pre-registering students, recruiting teacher champions, and promoting and running a civic engagement curriculum on a school-by-school basis each election cycle.



Recommendation:

School districts should formalize a curriculum that pairs civic education with in-class voter registration activities across grade levels. Schools should designate administrative and/or department leads responsible for curriculum implementation, teacher professional development around civic education, and should explore ways to teach students practical, investigative skills for learning more about candidates on the ballot.

“Having teacher champions at the high schools was critical to promoting the civic engagement curriculum and... In-class, in-depth teacher-led presentations were the most effective way to get students pre-registered.”

-Oakland YouthVote Adult Ally

Takeaway: OUSD's superintendent didn't create a comprehensive plan to support youth voting as directed by a School Board resolution, which meant schools didn't have sufficient direction or accountability.

- The Oakland Unified School District passed a resolution directing the superintendent to create a plan to promote youth voting, including identifying staff responsible for coordinating voter registration efforts, encouraging schools to plan student voter outreach events, staff voter registration stations in high traffic areas during non-class times, and developing communications strategies to promote youth voting. Despite this commitment by the board, there is no evidence that the superintendent or their office followed through in the creation of a plan that provided direction to schools (see Appendix C, Oakland Unified School Board Resolution Supporting the Implementation of Measure QQ).
- OYV student leaders and teacher champions reported that while schools were supportive of their efforts to organize student education and registration activities, such as hosting a student-moderated candidate forum to engage youth in the school board election, they did not recall school-wide youth voting events that were organized and helmed by the schools or district, despite the passage of a resolution backing such efforts.
- Representatives from OUSD's communications department did regularly attend meetings hosted by youth vote campaign representatives from Oakland, Berkeley, and Albany and they amplified messages as requested by the OYV campaign. This included sending out Parent Square messages, promoting youth voting on district social media channels, and allowing KTOP to produce promotional youth vote content.

"We had such a tight turnaround trying to register and educate youth ahead of the November 2024 election, and it was the coalition and student leaders who did the heavy lifting. We need the school district to own and embed civic education on an ongoing basis, including literacy about what the school board does and how to hold them accountable."

-Oakland Youth Vote Adult Ally

"Even though I live in an underserved district so I couldn't vote [in the 2024 election], I loved educating my peers about the importance of voting and watching them go to vote"

-Oakland Youth Leader



Recommendations:

- The school board should direct the superintendent to develop a comprehensive plan to increase voter education and registration among OUSD high school students. The school board should also ensure targeted civic engagement curriculum is developed and vetted, and hold school administrators accountable to ensure it is implemented at scale at each high school.
- School board candidate forums should be conducted in collaboration with OUSD and school sites to ensure students across an open-enrollment district are able to easily access and vet candidates.
- OUSD's communications department should continue to employ all avenues of communication to promote youth voting but proactively develop their own messaging in conjunction with the RoV's office.

Takeaway: There was not an effective partnership with Oakland Unified School District and the Registrar of Voters to promote pre-registration and voting.

- The Alameda County Registrar of Voters has outreach staff who do their best to go to as many high schools as possible during California's High School Voter Education weeks in the spring and fall. But there is no formal partnership between the registrar's office and the Oakland Unified School District that would facilitate the registrar's office to host registration events at all Oakland high schools.
- The Registrar of Voters conducted voter registration at Berkeley's one comprehensive high school during class registration in the fall of 2024. Conversely, the RoV made a few stops at Oakland public high schools but some Oakland teacher champions reported they were not even notified about the Registrar's visits to their schools.
- As long as youth voter data remains private, it will be challenging for traditional get out the vote organizations to reach 16 and 17 year-old Oaklanders and encourage voting. Schools can play an important role in encouraging youth to vote.
- OYV adult allies attended trainings held by the Registrar of Voters on how to conduct voter registration, as required to receive paper registration forms in bulk.
- There was no coordination between the RoV's office and OUSD high schools to pick up completed voter registration forms within the allotted 72 hour window, meaning that volunteers had to do so. There was an ask for the RoV's office to pick up completed ballots at school sites, but the pick-ups were brief and poorly coordinated.

"I appreciated the assistance we got from the Registrar of Voters - we coordinated for them to be there on dates that the students were doing registration, and they also came to the school to pick up ballots."

-Oakland Teacher Champion

Recommendations:

- **The school district and election officials should work together to: promote voting, including incorporating voter pre-registration of eligible youth voters into the school registration/enrollment process and ensuring that every high school has a ballot drop box.**
- **The RoV should increase the number of OUSD high schools it visits to promote voting, pre-register voters, and collect ballots in keeping with the new youth vote reality.**
- **Where feasible, have as many high schools as possible serve as vote centers where youth voters can turn in their ballots or register and vote in person in the days leading up to and on Election Day.**



TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

Takeaway: *Dedicated funding was needed for youth vote organizations to engage in a multiyear implementation campaign.*

- The OYV Coalition was composed of three community-based organizations and two government groups committed to youth power building and leadership development. None of them are democracy organizations and therefore are not well-funded to engage in such work. The OYV Coalition received some funding from dedicated foundations to support the prolonged implementation work after Measure QQ passed, but it wasn't enough to sustain a multiyear fight.

Recommendation:

Funders should provide sustained financial support to organizations for all phases of organizing campaigns. This entails the initial development of a measure or policy, the campaign to pass it, the work to develop systems and political will to implement the win, assessment of implementation, and subsequent organizing to improve upon the win are all critical to making sustained change and must be resourced accordingly.



concluding Statement from the OY Coalition

We launched the Oakland Youth Vote campaign because we believe in democracy and the power of voting. But we do not equate voting with power building. Instead, we see youth voting as one component of building viable youth movements that ensure youth voices are no longer tokenized and youth needs are no longer sidelined.

While we were excited to pass Measure QQ in 2020 and finally get it implemented in 2024, the right and ability to vote were never the ultimate goal. We believe our work is not done until all the institutional barriers impeding their ability to vote are struck down and they are using voting to develop their own demands, platforms, and campaigns to improve the material conditions of Oakland public schools.

While data from the Alameda County Registrar of Voters about the number of youth who pre-registered, received ballots, and ultimately voted remains a bit inconclusive, we are clear that not as many 16 and 17 year-olds voted as we had hoped-for a variety of reasons. As this report details, this reality is a reflection of the limitations of existing state policy, the utilization of newly developed voting systems, the need for more robust civic engagement implementation, and more. This report seeks to illuminate these shortcomings and explore the system level improvement that can increase youth voting in subsequent elections.

The Oakland Youth Vote Coalition hoped to not only hold the school board accountable to OUSD's primary constituency, but also to bring more people into government by building voting habits at an age that is more likely to lead to lifelong voting according to studies. Too often organizers rest on their laurels after a policy win, but we view our work as far from over. The recommendations in this report are designed to improve upon the 2024 implementation of youth voting because our elected leaders and government systems must do a better job of working together to ease the path to meaningful civic engagement and it is the role of the people to hold them accountable.

Thank you so much for reading our evaluation report! Our only ask is that you use your positionality to help improve youth voting in Oakland and support other youth vote campaigns across the country. The work we do together will transform Oakland youth's relationship to voting and civic engagement and help model what is possible for youth organizers eager to build power all over the country.

In solidarity,
Oakland Youth Vote Coalition
Youthvote@oaklandkidsfirst.org

"Youth have great ideas from their lived experience and add value that wouldn't be there if they weren't in the room. Voting is just one of the ways that we can show up."

-Oakland Youth Leader

"Working on the campaign and seeing the impact voting has had on my peers has motivated me to do more activism."

-Oakland Youth Leader



REPORT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following people generously participated in interviews and discussions that informed this report:

CURRENT & FORMER OAKLAND YOUTH LEADERS

Sam Adeyeye
Edamevoh Ayaji
Allyson Chen
Mia Hatfield
Natalie Gallegos
Diego Garcia
Linh Le
Tommy Lemasney
Katie Liang
Malia Liao
Mi Luong
Gema Quetzel

OAKLAND TEACHER CHAMPIONS

Chloe Erskine
Dewey High School
Ericka McCoy
Castlemont High School
Rachel Reinhard
Oakland High School
Jah-Yee Woo
*Oakland Tech High
School*

OAKLAND YOUTH VOTE ADULT ALLIES

Lukas Brekke-Miesner, *Executive Director
Oakland Kids First*
Domenichi Morris, *Organizing Specialist
Oakland Kids First*
Stanley Pun, *Co-Director
AYPAL*
Sara Tiras, *Director
Oakland Youth Commission*
Adriana Villegas, *Director
All City Council Student Union*

OAKLAND EDUCATION OFFICIALS AND CONSULTANTS

Josh Daniels
*Former Governance Officer
and General Counsel to OUSD*

Sam Davis
*Former OUSD School Board
Member*

Deborah Seiler, *Consultant
Former San Diego Co.
Registrar of Voters*

Ross Underwood, *Consultant
Software Election Specialist
and Former Monterey Co.
Registrar of Voters*

RESEARCH AND POLICY EXPERTS

Erin Heys, *Deputy Director
Democracy Policy Initiative at
UC Berkeley*

Karin MacDonald, *Director
Statewide Database at UC
Berkeley*

Eric McGhee, *Policy Director &
Senior Fellow Public Policy
Institute of California*

Laura Wray-Lake, *UCLA
Luskin Professor of Social
Welfare*

ALAMEDA COUNTY ELECTIONS STAFF

Cynthia Comejo
Deputy Registrar of Voters

Ashley Reed
Director of Community Engagement

Betty David
Community Engagement Coordinator

We want to give a huge shout out to election policy consultant **Lori Shellenberger** for interviewing all the people mentioned above, helping us evaluate the first ever youth vote election, developing our recommendations for improving youth vote systems, and co-writing this report. We appreciate you!

This report was made possible with support from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund and the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation

evelyn& ,walter
HAAS JR. fund W.Clement& Je
ie V.Stone
FO 'D TIO



APPENDIX

All Appendix references are linked below:

Appendix A: [Oakland Youth Vote Campaign Short Documentary](#)

Appendix B: [Use Cases for Youth Voters](#)

Appendix C: [Oakland Unified School Board Resolution supporting the Implementation of Measure QQ](#)

Appendix D: [Oakland Unified School District Board Resolution and Letter to Alameda County Board of Supervisors](#)

Appendix E: [Oakland Unified School District Board Resolution Offering Seal of Civic Engagement to OUSD Students](#)

Appendix F: [EMS Requirements to Support Youth Voting](#)

Appendix G: [Alameda County Board of Supervisors Resolution Directing Registrar of Voters to Implement Measure QQ](#)

Appendix H: [Youth Vote Implementation MOU](#)

Appendix I: [Oakland City Council Ordinance Formalizing Implementation of Youth Voting](#)

Appendix J: [Rock the Registration: Same Day Registration Increases Turnout of Young Voters](#)

Appendix K: [Voting Methods in California: Voter Awareness and Reasons for Disparate Use](#)

Appendix L: [Alameda County Youth Vote Mailers and Media](#)

Appendix M: [Test Cases](#)

Appendix N: [Lacy v. City & County of San Francisco](#)

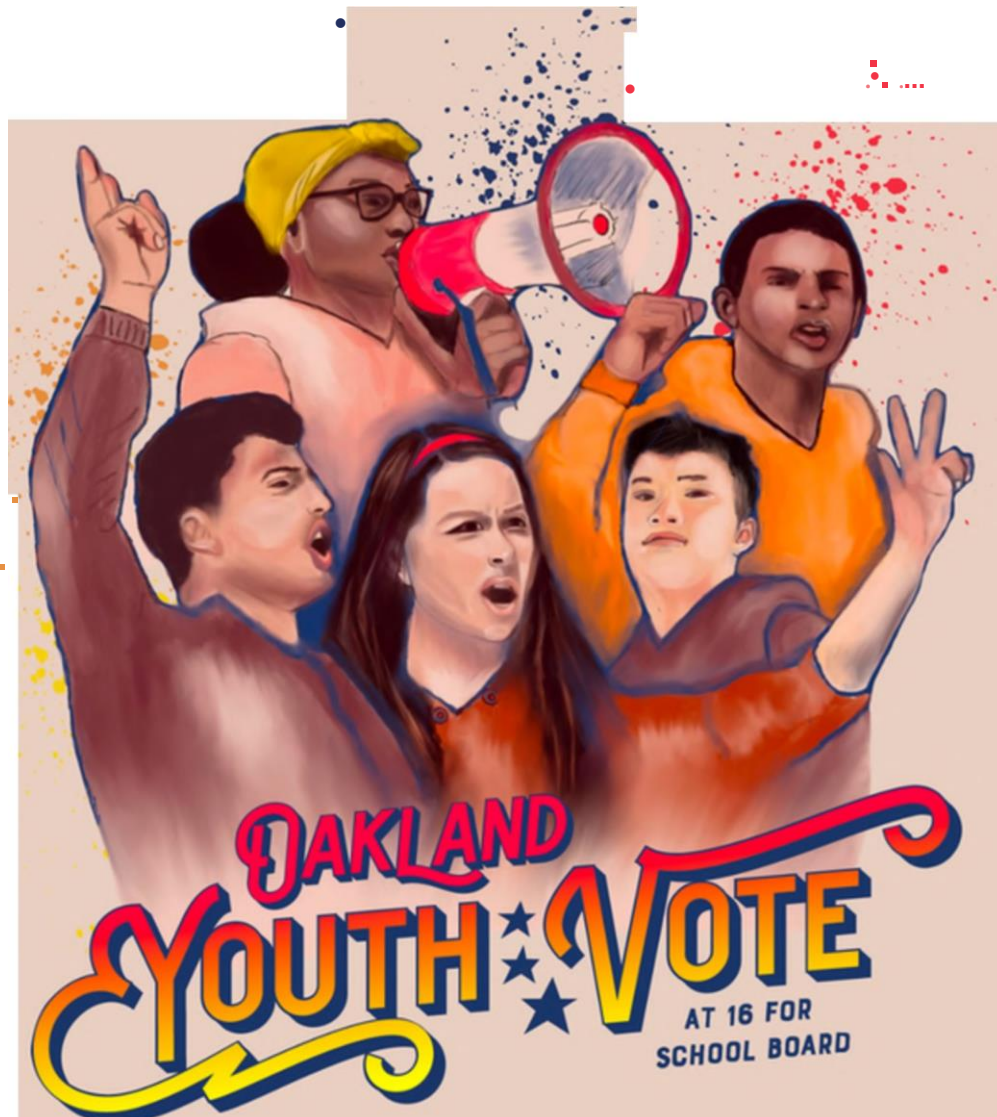
Appendix O: [Letter from former General Counsel of OUSD to Bos on SF appellate court decision](#)

Appendix P: [Civic Engagement Curriculum](#)

Appendix Q: [Youth Vote Toolkit](#)

Appendix R: [Recommendations from the RoV to the Bos](#)

Appendix S: [Getting Youth Involved In Democracy](#)



SCAN HERETO
ACCESS THIS
REPORT DIGITALLY