

## **A civic responsibility to vote in March primaries**

The consequences of the fast-approaching Republican and Democratic primary elections are especially high for those of us who care about public education.

The men and women who serve in the Texas Legislature will make many key decisions affecting our students and our schools. However, many of them will face nominal opposition, or no opposition at all, during the more visible general elections in November, making the March primaries to determine each party's nominees highly significant. The winners of these primaries will be positioned to make decisions affecting students, teachers and parents across this vast state.

In 2022, 46 percent of registered Texas voters turned out for the November general elections. However, just 18 percent of registered voters cast ballots in either the Democratic or Republican primaries earlier that year. Because the primary elections often determine who will end up in elected office, Texans have a civic responsibility to vote in a primary just as faithfully as they vote every other November. In fact, when a broader share of the electorate starts voting in primary elections, our elected officials will put more focus on mainstream issues rather than the highly partisan issues they know they must talk about in order to please what is currently a relatively small electorate in their primaries.

Many Texans may believe that they are registered as either Republicans or Democrats, therefore limiting the primary in which they are allowed to participate. However, we do not register with one party or another in this state, meaning any registered voter can choose to vote in either primary. Even if you have voted in the Republican primary previously, you can choose to vote in the Democratic primary this year — and vice versa.

If no candidate in a primary gets more than half the vote, the top two candidates advance to a runoff election a couple of months later.

Supporters of public education will need to vote in those contests as well. You can vote in a party's runoff as long as you didn't vote in the other party's primary earlier that year.

The onus is on us as voters to do our homework and determine which primary in our community is more likely to determine the winner of the general election. We should also learn as much as we can about the candidates and where they stand on the issues that matter to us.

In 2022, all 150 seats in the Texas House were up for grabs in the November general elections, but only five of those seats were decided by a margin of 10 percentage points or fewer. Due to the way districts are drawn and our growing tendency to sort ourselves into Republican or Democratic communities, one party has a clear advantage in the November general elections.

Primary contests, however, cannot be decided by partisan allegiance, which is why it is so important to research the candidates and their views.

More Texans need to realize that our elections have fundamentally shifted. If you are simply voting in the November general election between Republicans and Democrats, you are only fulfilling part of your responsibility as a citizen. If we want our elected officials to listen to us, we must make our voice heard when given the opportunity to do so. This spring, that means voting in the party primary of your choice. It may be your last, best chance to determine who is making big decisions for our state and communities for the next several years.