

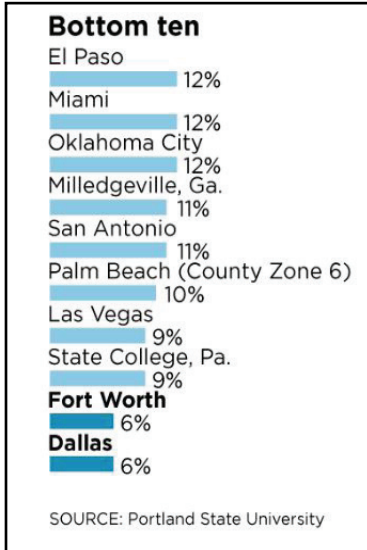
**TJCSGA Region 2  
2019 Community Service of the Year  
Richland College**

**A New Kind of Texas, One Vote at a Time.**

**Richland Votes:  
A Voter Registration &  
Educated Election Initiative**

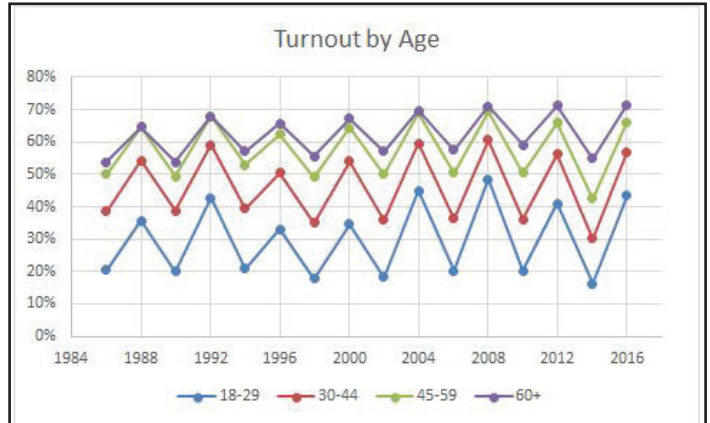


Voter registration and the importance of participating in elections is a huge issue in the country today. With statistics like the Dallas turnout rate being only 6% and the youth voter turnout rate being below 20% in midterm elections the Richland College SGA felt the need to do something about it. They needed to get the word out and help the student and



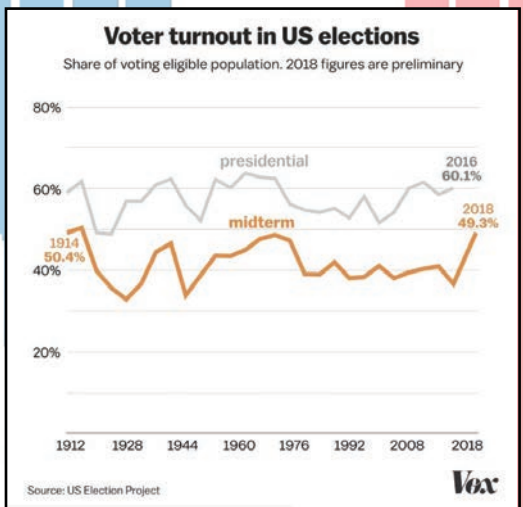
**Worst voter turnout by city**

community members understand the importance of doing their duty. With headlines of the previous year being dominated by political topics like Black Lives Matter, March for Our Lives, and the #MeToo Movement, the SGA officers honestly felt it was their responsibility, as the voice of the students, to educate the students on how to be a responsible and educated voter. Richland Students had seen too many horrible things happen to their peers and they were ready to take action. This initiative took on the role of their annual Community Service Project as they began to see the impact of their efforts. This initiative would be the Richland SGA contribution to developing “A New Kind of Texas.” The challenge was how to take a mundane topic and make it fresh and new. They needed to come up with some creative ways to help the students and the community.



**Worst voter turnout by age group over time | Source: VOX**

It began when the SGA President, Haya Qazi, came to visit our advisor, Kelly Sonnanstine, over the summer. Miss Kelly was walking to the campus gymnasium to vote in the primaries for the upcoming midterm elections. On her way, she ran into Haya and they decided to walk and talk at the same time. While on the hike up the hill, Haya mentioned that since she grew up in Saudi Arabia she had never seen anyone vote in an election. She joined Miss Kelly for the experience. “I couldn’t believe how easy it was. All she did was hit a couple of buttons on a computer,” said Haya of the experience. From that moment on, the Voter Registration and Educated Election Initiative began.



**Voter turnout in US elections**

The Voter Registration and Educated Election Initiative can be broken down into multiple stages as the campaign ran from Voter Registration to Election Day. The SGA had three major goals with this service project. The first was to register new voters. The second goal was to make sure those voters were educated about the issues and candidates before they made their selections. Their third goal was to get those new voters and others to actually cast a vote.

**Richland Votes Service Learning Project (Haya)**

Soon after the fateful afternoon when I, Haya, voted with our advisor,

Miss Kelly, we were contacted by two local member of the League of Women Voters, Mrs. Dorit Suffness and Mrs. Kelly Drablos. It started with a simple email.

From that point on, the Richland Votes program was born. These wonderful VDR volunteers were invited to attend

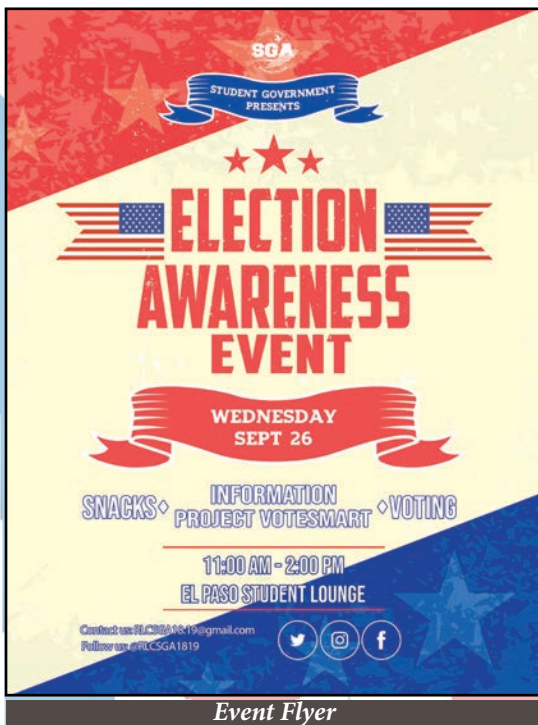
*“We are Volunteer Deputy Registrars (VDRs) interested in helping organize a nonpartisan voter registration effort at Richland College this fall. We are aware of other programs where VDRs help students plan and staff voter registration opportunities. Willing professors, often in government classes, allow ten minutes at the start of class for a brief presentation on the process and importance of voting. VDRs are present to register voters. Students who are registered can vote early on the Richland campus in the November mid-term election. Inspiring young people to participate in our democracy is our goal. We were thinking a Service Learning Program might make sense. To emphasize, all voter engagement activities would be nonpartisan.”*

*Email from Dorit Suffness, VDR*

one of the summer planning meetings to discuss the methods that would be used to enact this program. The SGA assisted the Richland Votes VDRs in contacting and coordinating with professors about doing presentations in the classes. Some of them even did presentations in their summer classes. They coordinated tabling events in which the SGA members could interact directly with the student body members. A few SGA members even checked into becoming VDRs themselves. And finally they began planning their events that would take place throughout the fall semester.

### **Election Awareness Event (Makayla)**

Does our generation care about America’s future? I do not know and I cannot speak for all, but in 2018 the SGA did notice a spark of fire among our students. The SGA held educational events to bring to light the political issues of our generation in the hope that they would then choose to become active in any elections ahead. SGA knew we needed to start somewhere to get students active in politics; therefore, we were on a mission to ignite a political wave of interest among students.



For centuries the younger generation has not participated in elections for many different reasons. Some will say, “My vote doesn't matter and will not make a difference.” Others might reason, “Why should I vote when you have an invisible hand who dictates the votes anyway?” Finally others will say, “I do not know how to vote and do not care to vote. I do not know what to believe because of biased information.” Reflecting upon those statements helped SGA understand why students were hesitant in participating in elections. It was time for change. Time to put those suspicious reasons to rest. Time to educate our students about voting and what trustworthy resources to use in order to feel comfortable making their selections when they cast their vote.

To bring awareness to this event, in the summer of 2018, we worked





**Voting in the Mock Election**

intensely with Volunteer Deputy Registrars, Kelly Drablos and Dorit Suffness to put together an event that was reminiscent of historical images of election caucuses. The plan was to partner with multiple agencies in order to educate our students and to get as many of them registered to vote as possible before the midterm elections. The Election Awareness Event was going to influence and change the minds of millennials in our community. It would help these students become more knowledgeable about who was running and what they stood for thus determining if the candidates had the same morals, values, and ethics that matched their own. We partnered with the following groups to bring this event together: Richland Votes, Move Texas, National Organization for Women, League of Women Voters, The Dallas County Democratic Party, The GOP of Dallas County, Spread the Vote, the Dallas County Office of

Elections. We also had laptops available so that students could go to the website for Project Vote Smart to learn about the candidates.

Students were given an Election Awareness Bingo card and if they visited every table on the card, they were entered into a drawing to win some SGA swag. There was a mock election held by the Dallas County Office of Elections using actual voting equipment so that students could experience the voting process. They provided both the paper ballot reader and the ADA computer for students to try. The League of Women Voters were stationed at the event and at 4 other locations on campus to register students to vote. In



**Vendors at the Event**

the 2 hour period of the event we were able to register 135 new voters.

As a result of this event, many students would have no more excuses for their lack of participation. They had voters registration cards, knowledge about the candidates, and early election available on our campus; therefore, it was time for students to step up and vote.

### Voter Registration Campaign

The voter registration campaign began with our two amazing Volunteer Deputy Registrars (VDR), Kelly Drablos and Dorit Suffness, who came to campus throughout the summer and fall semesters, helping students at

**Election Awareness BINGO**

Get signatures from all of the tables at our event and be entered into a prize drawing of RLC/SGA Swag

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_  
ID number \_\_\_\_\_  
cell phone \_\_\_\_\_

Look at the squares written in black print below

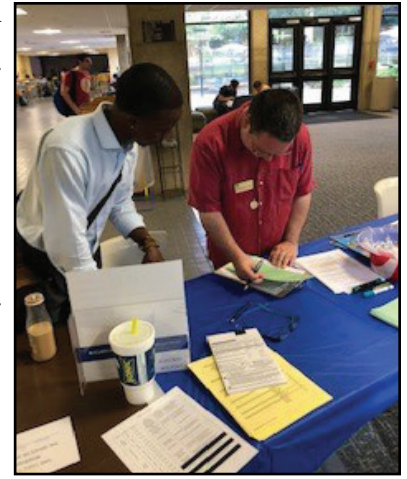
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| <b>V</b>  | <b>O</b>  | <b>T</b>  | <b>E</b>   | <b>S</b>  |
| <b>RICHLAND STUDENT GOVERNMENT</b>                  | <b>Your Vote Matters</b>  | Five Presidents won the electoral votes but lost the popular vote | The 15th Amendment gave minority men the right to vote | <b>LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS</b>                                   |
| When you don't vote you make our democracy very sad | <b>DALLAS COUNTY DEMOCRATS</b>                                  | Young people who are registered to vote turn out in high numbers  | <b>DALLAS COUNTY REPUBLICANS</b>                       | Richland College host a early voting sites beginning October 22 |
| 16 million young people are eligible to vote        | A candidate must earn 270 electoral votes to win the Presidency | <b>FREE VOTING 11.6.18</b>  | U.S. trails most developed countries in voter turnout  | <b>Your Vote is Your Voice</b>                                  |
| In 2016 of all eligible voters 45% did not vote     | <b>MOVE TEXAS</b>   | 39 million seniors are eligible to vote                           | <b>SPREAD THE VOTE</b>                                 | Students can make a huge impact in elections when they vote     |
| <b>DALLAS COUNTY ELECTIONS</b>                      | Each State elects 2 U.S. Senators                               | The 19th Amendment gave woman the right to vote                   | Women have a higher voter turnout than men             | <b>DALLAS N.O.W</b>   |

**Election Bingo Card**



Richland College to get registered to vote. These kind volunteers along with various SGA members went into classrooms, sat out in the hallways and outdoors for weeks to register students. Countless hours were spent running around campus with clipboards, talking to students, and getting to know their views on our governmental system, which is often overlooked by our age group.

We began our final push for new voters on registration on National Voter Registration Day, September 25, 2018. With the deadline to register quickly approaching on Tuesday, October 9, 2018, we only had 9 school days to meet our goal of registering 800 students. We knew that we needed to have something to draw the students to the



Registering faculty members

tables, so we designed and assembled about 1500 voter buttons. They all read “This is what Democracy looks like” but had different themes in the colors. We also raided the candy reserves for sweets to tempt the students. We already had about 150

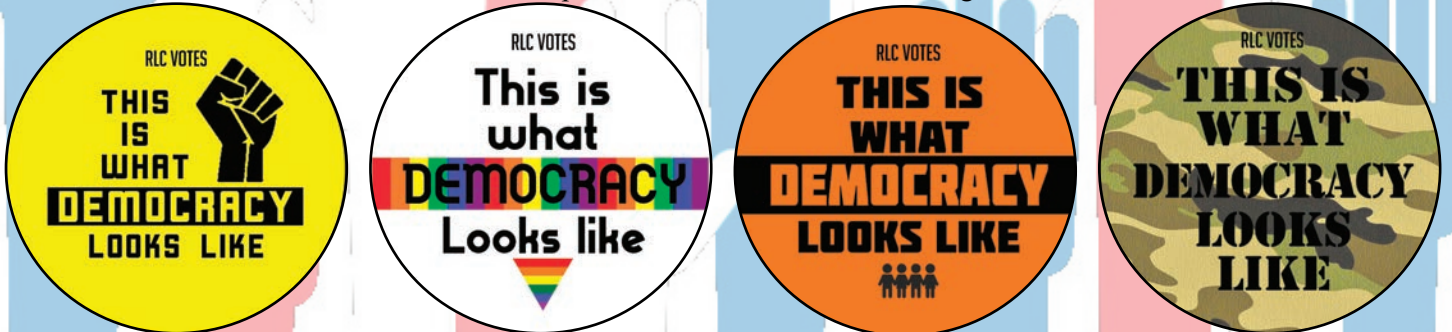


Article in The Richland Chronicle

registrations completed from early classroom visits but that still left us 650 more to go. We estimated that we were about to register about 45 people a day by setting up tables in our student lounge. But at that rate we would never hit our goal. Since we live in “the Big D” we decided to “Go BIG.” We were able to wrangle enough VDR volunteers with the help of the Richland Votes VDRs, to staff tables in 7 locations across campus from approximately 9:00 AM until 4:00 PM. We also got our fellow student clubs involved by having them staff tables with the VDRs so that they could speak

directly to our students. The club that was able to register the most new voters won a \$100 VISA gift card, that was donated to us by MoveTexas. These efforts did not go in vain. With all those people coordinated, we were able to register about 250 more people in just one day. Needless to say, we were excited!

We continued to staff tables across campus, in six locations, in order to register new voters. Over the next 8 school



Sample of Button Designs

days, we were able to raise our total of new voters registered to a whopping 1143! Now the challenge was going to be educating those new voters and getting them to the polls.

### Parade to the Polls (TC and Hazem)



The early voting polling place at Richland College was located near the Guadalupe Hall which is sometimes hard for some people to find. The SGA believed that this might also indirectly affect voter turnout at Richland. Helping people to find the exact place as well as give out detailed instructions was the main goal for Parade to the Polls Event.

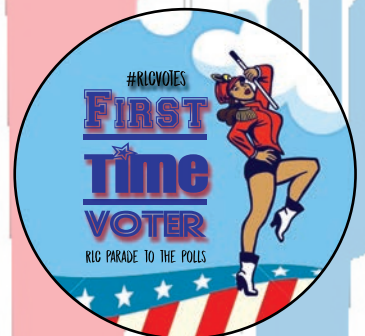
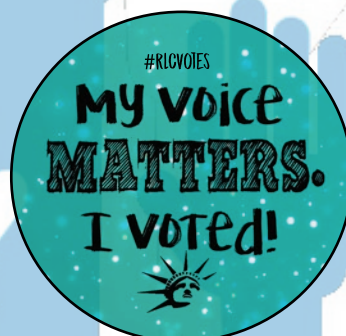
On the first day of early voting, October 22, the SGA held their Parade to the Polls. Students were selected to be Parade Leaders and then they were trained by our advisor, Kelly. The parade led by these well-trained students happened every hour, and people could join the parade on the way to the polls.

Before the parade left the student lounge, the leaders made sure that each voter had what was necessary to vote that day. Did they have a photo ID? Did they know what races were in their district? Did they know who they

were going to cast their vote for? The student leaders would walk the voters through the preparation before they headed to the polls. These parade leaders showed students how to see their ballot BEFORE heading to the polls. Since voters can NOT take/use their phones into the voting booth, the SGA provided a paper ballot that voters could use. Students were encouraged to use the League of Women Voters Voting Guide and the VoteSmart.com website to make their selections ahead of time. If a student did not know what district they were in, the SGA students were able to help them look up this information. The final step of the process was to grab some noise makers (quackers), buttons, and swag and head to the polls. Once again we were tempting our students into participating by using candy and more/different voter buttons. Yes, that means that we designed and assembled another set of buttons. This time



Student looking up ballot information



Sample of Button Designs for Parade to the Polls



the buttons read “My Voice Matters and I Voted.” SGA students were even able to help others get to the polls without going outside on this gloomy rainy day. A dry voter is a happy voter. Our final touch, was to have students posted outside in the East Breezeway to help local community members find their way to the polls.

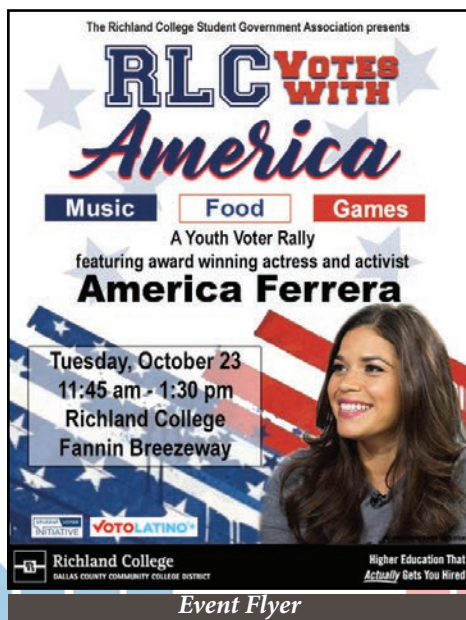
In order to encourage interclub engagement, SGA decided to turn it into a fun competition among clubs on campus. Each club could have maximum two members attended the event and recruit others to join the parade and vote that day. The club that had the most voters join the parade by checking-in won a pizza party. We also offered a lot of volunteer opportunities

for students who were willing to help us out. On that day, we had more than 150 people at the voting machine.



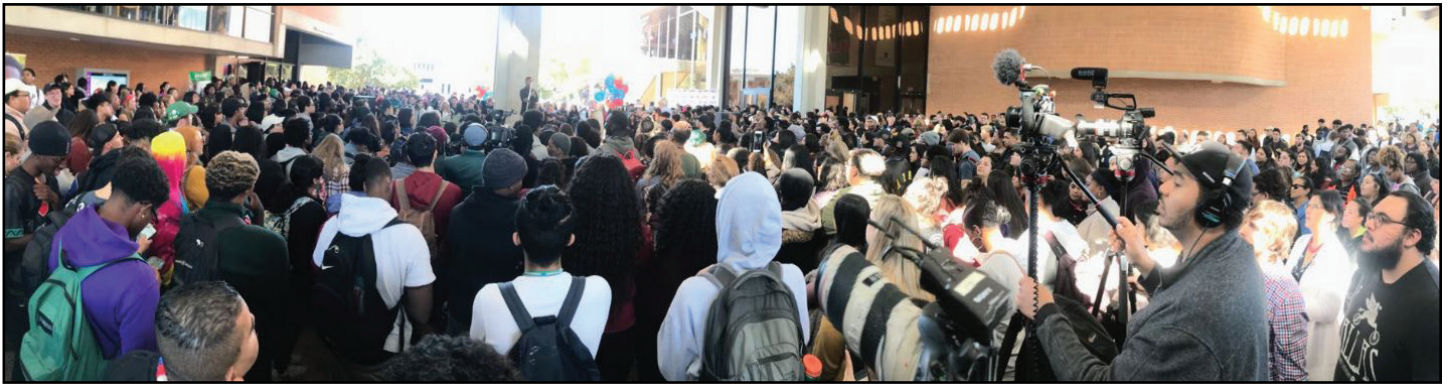
Students made and carried signs to the polls

### RLC Votes with America (Kimberly and Edward)



The Richland Votes with America Rally allowed students to come together to celebrate the importance of voting. Actress and activist, America Ferrera along with Grammy winning artist, Alicia Keys and internet sensation Liza Koshy came to campus to pump up the students. As part of the Rally, our celebrity guests also did a Chronicle TV Live Event called the Round Table Talk. They were joined by students from different organization on campus to discuss their views on political issues and how we should come together as a nation. This event was going to influence and change the minds of the Millennials in our community and possibly around the world. Our goal was to rally all the students to vote in these elections.

At this point you may be asking yourself, how did Richland get handed this huge event? And we don't blame you for wondering. As it was all happening, we were wondering the same thing. Let us explain. There are two sayings that truly fit this situation. The first being, “It is not what you know, it is who you know.” And the second being, “Hard work pays off in the end.” The SGA had been working closely with two wonderful ladies who serve as Volunteer Deputy Registrars (VDR) for Dallas County to get the Richland Votes service learning program set up. As you have already seen, in their efforts to register new voters, the SGA worked with the Richland Votes VDRs to set up tables, hold events, speak in classrooms, and basically do everything they could to get people registered and educated. These ladies, in turn, were working with the Student Voter Initiative (SVI) in gathering and tracking data for all those new voters. Therefore, when Terry Bermea from SVI contacted Mrs. Drablos to inquire about which college they should approach about holding a rally, she immediately said Richland. She told them that Richland has the space to hold a rally and early voting on campus for 2 weeks plus then they were an election day



*Panoramic view of the Richland Votes with America Rally*

polling location. **Most importantly, Mrs. Drablos told the SVI that Richland had an SGA that was hard working and passionate about students voting. She told them about all the events that they had done up to this point for voter registration and education.** Then before we knew it SGA had the opportunity to host the “Richland Votes with America” Youth Voter Rally on October 23, 2018. Of course that was just the start. The event did not come all wrapped up with a pretty little bow on top, there was a ton of work to be done.

Here is how it all came to be. It was a Thursday afternoon at about 4:30 PM when Miss Kelly noticed the message light blinking on her phone. Upon checking, she found a message from the Student Voter Initiative (SVI) asking if Richland College was interested in hosting a voter rally with America Ferrera, activist and actress, the following Tuesday. Miss Kelly immediately called back to get the details and arrange for administrative approval. After multiple phone calls and texts, it was finally confirmed that Richland College and the SGA would indeed host the “Richland Votes with America” Rally featuring America Ferrera and friends.

Miss Kelly immediately contacted the executive board of our SGA to get feedback on how we could make this event extra special for both our students and our guests. We knew that it was a lot of work to do in a very short period of time, but we divided and conquered to make it happen. Together the eboard and our advisor put together a schedule of events. They wanted to get as many people/students as possible involved. This was a huge opportunity for the SGA to make an impact on the students and community. We had flyers and posters up around campus before 6:00 PM.



*Feed them PIZZA and they will come!*

On Friday, Our Vice President spoke with the Student Media Department to see if they would cover the event as well as host a roundtable discussion featuring our guests and a diverse variety of student leaders. The Speaker of the House, Makayla Logan, contacted Club advisors to secure speakers from different constituencies on campus. The Police Department was contacted to

arrange for extra security. The Richland Communications Team was contacted to help with publicity and sending out official press releases to the local news agencies. Facilities assisted with event logistics and set up. Our Treasurer worked with the Office of Student Life to secure to provide food and drinks for those attending. By Friday afternoon, 99 percent of



the event was ready to go, but then at about 4:30 PM, Miss Kelly's phone rang again. It was Terry from SVI with some more news. Alicia Keys would be joining America Ferrera for the event. In a mad rush, the SGA each contacted their designated departments again to spread the news and make adjustments.

By 7:00 AM on Tuesday morning, Miss Kelly and the members of the SGA were outside setting up the event. The first of the soon to be 3,500 students attending the event began to arrive at about 8:00 AM. We started serving the first half of the 108 large pizzas at about 11:30 AM with the 2 sheet cakes following right behind. That equaled 1296 slices of pizza and 468 slices of cake. The plan was to have student leaders from about ten different clubs on



*Kimberly, ASA, addresses the crowd*



*Zairia, BSA - speaks to the crowd*

campus participate by addressing the crowd prior to our guests arrival.

At approximately 11:45 AM, Sinbad, a local radio personality and director for social media for the Latino Voter Empowerment Coalition (LVEC) took the stage. The crowd also heard from special guests Dr. Shannon Cunningham, Executive Vice President for Richland College and Eric Cedillo, the Founder of the LVEC. At approximately 12:30 PM student leaders and representatives from the Black Student Association, the Asian Student Association, the Male Achievement Program, the Women's Initiative Network, Pride at Richland College, TJCSGA, and the SGA each took the stage to address the audience

about why voting was important to their particular group. The black limos arrived about about 12:45 PM and Emmy winning actress, America Ferrera, YouTube sensation, Liza Koshy, and Grammy winner, Alicia Keys emerged from the cars to the cheers of "Richland Votes."

America Ferrera opened the event by acknowledging the importance of the midterm elections. "We are up here at Richland talking to you all because we know and believe in our hearts that there's nothing more important going on in our country right now than you all on this campus." She reminded students that the outcome of this election was in the hands of the younger generations and that this is an opportunity to decide who will be the leaders of this country. "Texas matters. Texas is a model for the entire country. What you all decide to do in the next 13 days will affect every single American," Ferrera said.

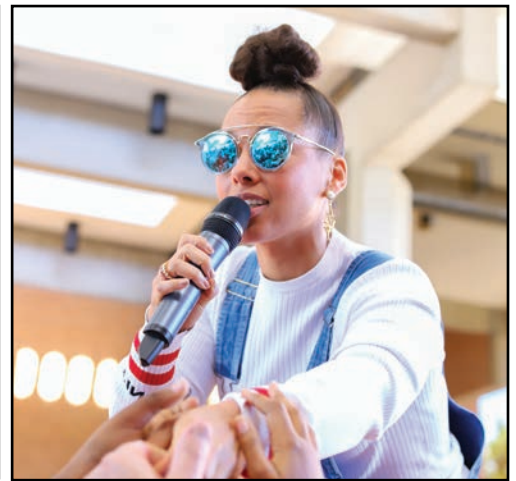
"Are you on fire? Are you a first time voter?" Alicia Keys asked when she got on stage. She was answered with a massive roar of the crowd. In reference to first time voters, Keys said, "We need you. We need you so badly because everything that has happened before has not been good enough for us. And we don't have to tolerate the things that we don't want to go on in our democracy."



America Ferrera



Liza Koshy



Alicia Keys

“There are no dumb questions,” was Liza Koshy’s rally cry when the topic of being an educated voter came up. She continued, “You need to go online and educate yourself. I see y’all using Twitter. I want you to use that same voice to vote and I want you to vote early. Vote today.”

While the celebrity guests pumped up the crowd to go vote, the student leaders waited downstairs in the TV studio for their round table discussion with our guests. The roar of the crowd could be felt in chairs. After the conclusion of the rally itself, our guests were able to sit down with a group of student leaders representing many walks of life at Richland College. Each student group was able to ask the celebrity guests questions while this was all being filmed for KDUX WebTV. Although there has been a renewed interest in getting young people out to vote, Ferrera believes there are still people who think their vote doesn’t matter. In response Keys said, “One reason that you know that your vote matters and your voice matters so much is because they are literally trying to stop you from voting.” Koshy emphasised that status and popularity have very little to do with the power of your voice. “No matter how big or how small your platform may be, voting is a lot easier than marching.” At a march, you have to yell and scream to have your voice heard. But in an election, all you have to do is vote. Keys followed up with “There is power in all votes. Let no one take your power away.”

The rally itself was a huge success and covered by multiple news outlets including local radio stations, the local



Round Table Discussion with campus guests available on KDUX-TV online



NBC, CBS, and ABC affiliates; print media was also present. The following morning Richland College was on the front page of *The Dallas Morning News*. If people in Dallas didn't see the paper, they may have seen the headline on Alicia Keys' Instagram. Her caption read "We gonnn be alright!!!" Richland also got a mention on America Ferrera's SnapChat where she, Alicia Keys, and Liza Koshy did a live stream that lasted for about 45 minutes. "Richland was LIVE... Like potentially the livest spot in the world. Like, It was LIVER than LIVE," said Alicia in the video.



*L to R: America Ferrera's Snapchat, NBC WFAA News, Dallas Morning News/ Alicia Keys Instagram*

**Conclusion (Hazem)**

After the entire campaign ended, and after running the numbers, we were pleasantly surprised by our results. They are a direct correlation to our community impact. We registered 1143 new voters in the span of 9 school days. We put in approximately 300 volunteer hours just during the registration process. We designed, assembled, and distributed over 3,000 buttons and stickers. We estimated that 3,200 people were in attendance at the rally. We integrated at least 10 on campus clubs into our campaign. We helped about 150 people make their way to the polling location. Finally, we doubled the new voter turn out rate at Richland College. All in all our new voter turnout rate of 74%, surpassed the turnout rate of Dallas County which sat at 54%, and especially the voter turnout rate for the age group (18-25) we were targeting, which sat at a low 37%.

But just because the midterm elections are over, it does not mean that we are ready to rest. There are local municipale elections in May of 2019. Those races, though not as exciting and glamorous as a presidential race, will directly affect many of our students. The DCCCD has a bond on the ballot that would help make improvements throughout the district but specifically would add some much needed building and classrooms to Richland. We are continuing to work with Richland Votes and our friendly neighborhood VDRs in registering new voters. We worked with the Dallas County Office of Elections to replicate actual ballots for our SGA elections. This gave students a chance to navigate the process before the upcoming local elections. We are also working with MoveTexas and their new office in Dallas to put together some mayoral election debates/forum events geared toward young voters. We will continue to work toward developing a New Kind of Texas, One Vote at a Time.