

SANTA FE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oct 2, 2025

The Clerk's Office Brings Clerk Clark's Democracy 101 Program to ECO High School

Santa Fe County, NM — The Santa Fe County Clerk's Office is working hard to make sure young people feel empowered at the ballot box. On October 1, about 70 students at Early College Opportunities (ECO) High School received a hands-on lesson in democracy during a Democracy 101 presentation and mock election.

Led by Rosangela Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk of the Bureau of Elections, alongside Margaret Gouws, Voter Outreach Coordinator, the session introduced students to civics, the upcoming Regular Local Election, and how Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) works. Students marked sample ballots and cast them on certified voting machines, with lighthearted contests such as “favorite ice cream flavor” and “favorite day of the week.”

Santa Fe County Clerk Katharine E. Clark said programs like Democracy 101 are about more than just voting mechanics—they're about creating lifelong voters. “Research shows that if someone votes in three elections, it becomes a habit.” Clark explained. “We want to show young people that government cares about what they think and their ideas.”

Youth voters have historically had the lowest turnout of any age group in Santa Fe County, something the Clerk's Office is determined to change. In addition to Democracy 101, the office runs initiatives like [KidsVote](#), the [“I Voted” Sticker Design Contest](#), and outreach at schools and community events to engage students early and often.

For the students, the lesson resonated. Juan Portillo-Batista, an 11th grader, said he learned the importance of voting in local elections and thought “it was pretty neat to get a glimpse into adult life.” His classmate, 11th grader Jiali Gonzalaz, agreed, calling the mock election “a great opportunity to open our eyes to the world of voting and that our opinion matters.”

Johnathan Hernandez, a senior, said the experience helped break down some of the barriers young people feel toward voting. “Many kids are put off from voting because it feels too intimidating and out of reach,” he explained. “We can improve their polling numbers and implement change the youth want.”

Hernandez went one step further and pre-registered to vote at the event. He'll be eligible to participate in the Nov. 4 election since he turns 18 just two days before. With a smile, he said, “My birthday is just two days before so it will be just in time.”

For the Clerk's Office, moments like these highlight the importance of building confidence and excitement in the next generation of voters—one mock election at a time.

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