

SANTA FE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

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Santa Fe County Clerk's Office Partners with THRIVE Community School for Student Mascot Election

Santa Fe County, NM – The Santa Fe County Clerk's Office recently partnered with THRIVE Community School to conduct a student-led mascot election, giving K–8 students and staff the opportunity to participate in a real mock election using official voting equipment.

THRIVE Community School, a newer school in Santa Fe, reached out to the Clerk's Office as the school community works to select its first official mascot. Teachers who have been with the school since its opening nominated six mascot candidates — Bisti Beasts, Buffalo, Bumblebees, Mariposas, Phoenix, and Tortugas — and students cast ballots to help determine the winner.

With technical support from Liberty Vote, which generously waived ballot programming fees to make the experience accessible to the school, ballots were customized with images of each mascot candidate to support younger students who are still developing reading skills. The Santa Fe County Clerk's Office outreach team worked for weeks behind the scenes to prepare voting equipment, ballots, signage, and materials to ensure the election ran smoothly and reflected real-world election processes.

On election day, 300 students and staff cast ballots at the school's mock polling site. Students who were absent on election day were able to participate through "absentee" voting, with ballots hand tallied the following day — allowing all students the opportunity to take part in the process.

After ballots were cast and securely tabulated, Buffalo was selected as THRIVE Community School's first official mascot. The results were revealed to students in a fun schoolwide announcement led by the principal, with staff members dressed as the two top finalists—Buffalo and Bisti Beast—who playfully "faced off" before the winner was announced. The moment brought the mock election to life for students and provided a memorable, celebratory conclusion to their first hands-on voting experience.

Events like the THRIVE mascot election provide students with early, positive experiences with civic participation. Research shows that voting is a learned, habit-forming behavior — early exposure to the voting process can make individuals more likely to remain engaged in civic life as they grow older. By introducing students to voting in a hands-on, accessible way, the Clerk's Office aims to help build those habits long before students are eligible to cast a real ballot.

The election also introduced students to basic concepts of election security and integrity, including the privacy of the ballot, the role of election workers, and how votes are securely cast and counted. Teachers throughout the day reinforced messages about the importance of voting, the right to a private ballot, and civic pride, sparking meaningful classroom conversations about participation in democracy.

“I can’t thank you all enough for coming today and giving our students a wonderful first voting experience,” said Erika Gallegos, Community School Coordinator and 5th grade teacher at THRIVE Community School. “They were so excited and proud to be able to vote.”

Each student received an “I Voted” sticker designed by local students as part of the Clerk’s Office’s youth engagement efforts. The kid-friendly designs helped reinforce the excitement and pride students felt about participating in their first election.

“Elections are a team effort, and that’s something the public doesn’t always get to see,” said Santa Fe County Clerk Katharine E. Clark. “From outreach and planning to ballot programming, equipment testing, and on-site support, it takes months of preparation and coordination to deliver a smooth voting experience. Events like this give students a window into how elections really work and the many people involved in making them happen.”

The THRIVE mascot election is part of the Santa Fe County Clerk’s Office’s broader voter education and outreach initiatives, including KidsVote: Democracy Delivered, which bring interactive election demonstrations into classrooms and community spaces across the county. These efforts aim to build trust in elections, promote transparency, and support long-term civic engagement.

The Santa Fe County Clerk’s Office thanks its community partners who supported this event.

Liberty Vote was honored to support this meaningful initiative alongside the Santa Fe County Clerk’s Office. By providing technical assistance and waiving ballot programming fees, we were proud to help make this hands-on civic experience accessible to the school community. Customizing ballots with mascot images ensured younger students could confidently participate, even as they develop reading skills. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to an event that promotes civic education and gives students a real-world introduction to the voting process.

THRIVE Community School is a K-8 free public charter school serving Santa Fe and our surrounding communities. The school opened in 2022 and has an innovative educational program that embraces social emotional learning and evidence-based teaching. We currently serve 325 students and plan to grow over the next 5 years to serve 600+ students. We are

humbled to have the opportunity to teach a diverse group of students across our community and appreciate all of the parent and community support that has made our first four years of operation so successful!

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