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Thornton Fractional District 215
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Thornton Fractional High School District 215 Encourages First-Time Voters with Voting Kits & First-Time Voter Signs

Lansing, IL- Thornton Fractional High School District 215 students voting for the first time in the 2020 election received voting kits and yard signs this week, delivered by their principal and Superintendent Dr. Sophia Jones-Redmond, along with various Board of Education and district staff members. Despite operating in a remote-only learning environment so far this school year, District 215 encouraged eligible students to get registered and vote, utilizing video announcements, emails, teacher encouragement, and social media posts to continue a tradition of strongly encouraging students to register and vote.

The principals of TF Center (John Robinzine), TF North (Brian Rucinski), and TF South (Jake Gourley) emailed their students who are eligible to vote earlier this month and asked them to sign up to participate in a virtual “March to the Polls.” This initiative included the delivery of a voting kit and yard sign to students’ homes, and students were asked to submit a short video to the school after voting. The voting kit included items such as a mask, hand sanitizer, and pen with stylus to be used on the touch screens at the polls. Thornton Fractional North senior Emily Diaz emailed Principal Brian Rucinski, stating, “Thank you, and all the staff members who came, so much for the Voting Kit! I am so excited to go out and wear the shirt and mask! I really appreciated you guys coming and delivering it to me personally! I cannot thank you enough!”

The videos submitted by students who participated will be combined into a video version of the District’s “March to the Polls” initiative that has become a tradition over the past couple of years. Several recent alumni of Thornton Fractional South High School kicked off the push for student participation by recording videos that were aired in the school’s weekly video announcements over the past month explaining why they choose to vote. In 2018, District 215 began a tradition of organizing a “March to the Polls” field trip, taking eligible students to an early polling location in order to vote during the school day. This year, however, because District 215 is operating in remote-only learning due to COVID-19, the school district did not gather students into a group for the field trip. Instead, March to the Polls was adapted to accommodate COVID-19 concerns.

Funding for part of the March to the Polls initiative was provided by a \$5000 grant through the non-profit, non-partisan organization [When We All Vote](#), chaired by former first lady Michelle

Obama, and in partnership with MTV’s 2020 Prom Challenge. TF North teacher Emily Biegel, along with her student Grace Ogunbowale, applied for the grant, which awarded funding last spring to 20 high schools in the U.S. with the most impactful voter registration programs. Biegel stated, “The grant allowed us to purchase supplies that will support our initiative for years to come in addition to what we were able to do this year.”

In January of this year, [Governor Pritzker visited Thornton Fractional North High School](#) to sign SB 1970 into law, which allows students to be excused for up to two hours in order to vote. The bill was inspired by Thornton Fractional District 215 students who, with the help of Board Member LeeAnn Revis, shared the March to the Polls initiative with state Senator Elgie Sims, advocating for a new law.

Superintendent Jones-Redmond stated, “I’m so encouraged by this initiative and glad to be a part of this tradition. Kudos again to Ms. Biegel for securing the grant, to our principals, Mr. Gourley, Mr. Robinzine, and Mr. Rucinski for organizing the virtual March to the Polls at their schools, and most importantly to our students for using their voices to get out and vote.”

About Thornton Fractional High School District 215: District 215 serves the students of Burnham, Calumet City, Lansing, and Lynwood at Thornton Fractional North High School, Thornton Fractional South High School, Thornton Fractional Center for Academics and Technology, and Thornton Fractional Center for Alternative Learning. The mission of District 215 is to provide diverse learning opportunities that inspire all students to become life-long learners who contribute to their community.

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TF Center student Janiah Caraway with Principal John Robinzine



TF South student Danielle Harrison & Principal Jake Gourley



TF North student Tre'Vontae Gartrell