

High school club gets political

By AMANDA ROGERS
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The home state of a two-term Republican president, a Republican governor and a Republican-ruled state legislature seems like the last place to encourage a group of young Democrats.

But last year, during a heated presidential race, a small group of students at Mansfield High School, many of them not even old enough to vote, stepped forward, announced their liberal leanings and started the Student Democrats.

"Some people questioned if we had any interest in that," said sponsor Denise Stringer Davis, an art teacher at the high school. "We had a lot better response than we all expected."

The political club was actually initiated by the students.

"Two students had seen my (John) Kerry sticker on my van," Davis said. "They started asking around about who owned the van. They found out it was me and asked if I would sponsor a Student Democrat club. I was excited that they approached me."

Principal Steven Gast gave his OK and the group began meeting once a week.

"The first thing we decided to do was a voter registration in the cafeteria," Davis said. "We also had a sign-up sheet for people interested in being in the club."

The group of Democrats did not go unnoticed by their fellow students.

"They would shake their heads and say 'Those



Mansfield High School junior Blake Kincaid (left) and art teacher Denise Stringer Davis challenge the perception that all of Texas is Republican. Davis is the sponsor of the high school's Student Democrats, and Kincaid is president of the club. (Amanda Rogers/News-Mirror)

Democrats," remembered Blake Kincaid, 16, who was elected president for this year. "Usually it was all in good humor."

Wearing his Student Democrats T-shirt drew some attention, he said.

"Half the school doesn't care, then there's the positive and negative attention," he said.

Forming the club did have a chain reaction, Kincaid said.

"I think a lot of people thought it wasn't going to last," he said. "No one talked about politics at all. Suddenly, everyone is talking about politics. There was a rush to see how many more political clubs could be created. The Republican club started not long after, and there was an attempt at Socialist, Green Party and a Whig club."

Mostly, the members of the Student Democrats took the teasing in stride and wel-

comed the political discussions, Davis said.

"I was very proud of my students that they were passionate but they weren't the ones getting into fights," she said. "We did have people say they liked the positive message, Students for Progress."

The perception that the entire state is Republican can be misleading, too, she said.

"I think people think it's a Republican state," Davis said. "They feel like we're the minority. If you look at the numbers, it's not really that way. I wanted the students to know there are others out there. I even have fellow teachers that are Democrats that wouldn't put stickers on their cars because they felt like they were outnumbered."

By the end of the year, the Student Democrats had 15 regular members who met to discuss the issues and their

ideals. They also raised money for Cook Children's Medical Center and did a craft project with the young patients there.

This year the group wants to turn their attention to environmental issues, Kincaid said. And raise awareness of what's going on in Texas, Davis chimed in, including the upcoming gubernatorial primary in March.

"I can't vote but I can voice my opinion and I can convince others," Kincaid said.



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