



***'the way democracy will be'***

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## **High School Voter Registration FAQ**

### **Do you need to be 18 years old to register to vote?**

No. Although laws vary from state to state, all states let at least some 17 year olds register. Most states only require that a person be at least 18 years of age by the next election. Some set more specific deadlines, such as 17 years and six months, and two states, Florida and Hawaii, even allow people to register at 16 years of age.

### **Do some places already use this type of registration system?**

Although the 1993 National Voter Registration Act increased access to voter registration materials, governments in the United States still do little to educate voters or encourage voter participation. While many of these other governments use other government records such as a national citizen registry, basing a registration system in high schools is more practical in the United States due to the decentralized nature of our electoral system.

### **Does High School Registration work at either the state or local level?**

Yes. While it would be great to have entire states using this system, local governments have the authority to implement high school registration at a local level. Local programs would potentially increase participation in local elections, especially ones that directly affect schools, and could also serve as a pilot program for implementation at the state level.

### **I like the idea of helping high school students register to vote; however, I am uncomfortable with making registration a requirement.**

First of all, remember that compulsory registration is not the same as compulsory voting. Requiring everyone to register helps the government create accurate and complete voter rolls and helps ensure the integrity of elections. Therefore, mandatory registration benefits the entire community even if an individual chooses not to vote. Our proposal also recommends an opt-out provision, allowing any student to choose not to register.

### **Are there privacy issues involved with having students register at school?**

Although people may have a variety of privacy concerns, none of them should become a major issue. For those who would register anyway, this system is more trustworthy than registering with a random voter drive at a mall or a grocery store. In addition, the personal information on a registration form is readily available in other places. Simply looking at the advertising already directed at high school students should be enough to

demonstrate this point. If there are still concerns, the opt-out provision mentioned above should be sufficient to alleviate them.

### **How much will this program cost?**

This program will not impose significant costs on either election officials or school districts. This program will be registering only those who are already eligible to register under current law; therefore, election administrators should already have the capacity to print and process this number of forms. The administration of this program within the school will involve a minimal amount of time and should be able to be easily incorporated into existing administrative duties. It will also save money for election administrators not forced to process as many new registrations right near the deadline of an election.

### **Who will administer this program?**

Election administrators will be responsible for distributing registration forms to schools and processing the forms when they are returned. Schools will be responsible for distributing forms to students, collecting them, verifying that students have fulfilled the requirement and submitting the forms to election administrators.

### **Will this program increase voter turnout?**

Although there is no guarantee that high school registration will increase turnout, it certainly has great potential to do so, especially when combined with a “voter ed” curriculum that introduces students to the mechanics of how to vote and to issues important to the first election they will vote in. This provides a particularly good opportunity to increase awareness of local elections. Even though voters have a greater proportionate influence in local elections than in state and national elections and are often directly affected by local government, local elections tend to have much lower turnout than state and national elections. Part of the reason for this is the relatively smaller degree of news coverage and advertising that local elections generate. High school registration program is an opportunity to make many new voters aware of local elections and issues.

### **How does this benefit the community as a whole?**

High school registration is step toward 100% registration and ensuring the integrity of elections through full and accurate voter rolls. A systematic registration program that registers everybody once (and only once) helps eliminate duplications and omissions on the voter rolls and makes it less likely that people will be able to vote multiple times or be unfairly prevented from casting a ballot.

### **What steps other than high school registration are needed to achieve 100% Registration?**

Although registering students who will be at least 18 years of age by the next election is a good first step, this program will not reach young people who leave school prior to reaching the age necessary to register. In some locations, this means a significant percentage of young people would not be registered through this type of high school registration program. To reach these young people, the registration requirement would

ideally take place earlier in high school, for example at the end of students' sophomore year. This would require changing state voter registration laws to make it legal to register at a younger age, perhaps at 16 years old as in Florida and Hawaii. Research also should be done on what other program might best reach such young people.

Over time, a high school registration program would bring a community closer and closer to 100% registration. However, this system would still miss some eligible voters, such as immigrants who become citizens as adults. In some states, these people constitute a significant percentage of the population. Ideally, a high school registration system would be complimented by a system for automatically registering people when they become citizens along with a curriculum introducing them to the mechanics of voting.