



High School Voter Registration: Facts for Students

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The 100% Registration Project: The goal of this project is to create a system for educating all students about the voting process and registering them to vote before they leave high school. In addition to addressing the problem of low voter registration and turnout in the United States, especially among young people, this project will also help young people gain a greater voice in shaping and directing politics.

The problem: Low voter turnout among young people: Voter turnout among young people has steadily declined over the past thirty years. For this reason, politicians pay little attention to the opinions of young people, even on issues that directly affect them, such as funding for public schools and federal college loan and grant programs. Despite positive signs during the 2004 Presidential election that this trend is reversing, it is still too soon to tell whether or not this momentum will continue in future elections. Even if it does, current efforts need to be expanded beyond the swing states in which they currently operate.

The Solution: High School Registration: We need a system to register all students and educate them about the voting process before they leave high school. This will address the problem of low youth voter turnout by:

- Making politicians pay attention to young people and their issues
- Giving students a greater voice in local elections, especially on issues facing their school district
- Making sure that all young people are prepared to vote when they reach 18 years of age
- Allowing the youth mobilization movement to take place nationally instead of only in swing states
- Registering young people every year so they can participate in every election, not only the Presidential elections every four years
- Benefiting the community by creating healthier democracy

How High School Registration works: Under current laws in most states, 17-year-olds are allowed to register to vote as long as they will be 18 years of age by the next election. Therefore, most high school seniors are able to register before they graduate. It is a simple matter for schools to create an ongoing program that would register eligible seniors each year. Here is how it works:

- High schools will distribute voter registration forms to students
- Students will be required to return a completed registration form. This requirement can be included as a small part of a current community service requirement or as a graduation/advancement requirement
- The school will be responsible for submitting these forms to local election officials

We also need to work with state officials to lower the registration age in order to allow this program to reach younger students and those who leave school before their senior year.

Why it Matters: Given that fewer than three in four eligible voters are registered to vote, high school registration is an important step toward cleaner and more complete voter rolls. Equally importantly, it is an important framework for youth political engagement. Recent research suggests that voting is a habitual behavior. Young people who develop a habit of voting regularly are likely to remain frequent voters, while those who don't are likely to remain non-voters. The effect of current participation habits will be felt for decades, not just years. One key to increasing turnout rates over the long term is to engage more young people in the political process.

Studies show that simply showing young people how to vote provides a turnout boost. Because high school is one of the few experiences common to most citizens, it is an ideal place to educate young people on local election procedures and issues, something that large-scale voter registration and mobilization organizations

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are not always able to do. A high school voter registration and curriculum program also provides the framework for additional civic education efforts that school might wish to pursue, including introducing student to the role of local and state governments in making policy affecting the lives of young people.

What students can do: FairVote's Right to Vote Initiative is working with election administrators and school officials to make the 100% Registration Project a reality. However, this is a program for students and it will not get anywhere without student support. We are looking for students to work with FairVote to:

- Help organize a grassroots network of students representing each high school in the school district who will work to build support for this project
- Participate in outreach efforts to school administrators, election officials, teachers, parents and the general student population
- Help us tailor the project to fit the needs of each school and school district

