



# High School Voter Registration:

## Facts for Education and Civic Engagement Organizations

[www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org)

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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, implementation of this project would also help schools by teaching students the importance of civic participation and the benefits of local action.

**Problems with current voter registration systems:** Under existing laws, governments provide access to voter registration materials but do little to educate new voters or encourage citizens to participate in elections. Consequently, a large percentage of voter registration is performed by private organizations such as community groups, political advocacy organizations and political parties in the months preceding major elections. Moreover, schools face several problems that could be addressed by registering all high school students, such as:

- A lack of civic and political participation among youth
- A need for meaningful community service
- A lack of education about our democratic process
- A lack of political and budgetary support for civic education
- A lack of youth outreach, especially in non-swing states

The 100% Registration Project proposes a structural change in our voter registration system that will educate students concerning the importance of electoral participation while also facilitating student involvement with their communities and a healthier democracy.

**The Solution:** Register all students and educate them about the voting process before they leave high school.

This will address problems with the current system by:

- Increasing political participation among youth
- Benefiting the community by creating healthier democracy and better voter rolls
- Introducing students to issues facing their school district

**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 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.

**How it 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

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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.

**What school officials can do:**

- Create a program that can serve as a model for other places
- Help convince your community and others of the benefits of this system

