

Legislation Text

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Encouraging the Philadelphia Board of Education to adopt and implement a civic participation and voter registration program, as proposed by PA Youth Vote.

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Department of Education declares that “Pennsylvania learners will be prepared... to be responsible, involved citizens”; and

WHEREAS, Civic participation and problem solving are foundational goals of our education system, and the School District of Philadelphia has committed that 100% of students will graduate ready for college and career, and that it is critical to the transition to adulthood to foster a culture of voting and to encourage and support the civic participation of students; and

WHEREAS, Increasing civic participation and voter turnout by the people of Philadelphia are critical in bringing resources and funding into our City, the poorest big city in the United States, and securing 100% of funding for great schools with zero deficit; and

WHEREAS, In 2019, the Philadelphia Board of Education acknowledged that voter registration is a critical component of the civic education of our students, and designated September 24, 2019 as “Voter Registration Day in the School District of Philadelphia,” and encouraged all schools to use that day to educate students about the importance of voting and to support eligible students in the process of voter registration; and

WHEREAS, As approximately 8,000 students in Philadelphia public high schools become eligible to vote each year out of approximately 20,000 voters turning 18 in Philadelphia, and 175,000 in Pennsylvania, youth voters will have a significant impact on the future of the City and state; and

WHEREAS, It is not possible to register 8,000 students in a single day, and Pennsylvania law restricts registration of 17-year-olds until after the last election before the first election that they are 18 years of age; and

WHEREAS, It takes a permanent, organized, and concerted year-round commitment in every school to identify, register, and educate eligible students to become informed voters; and

WHEREAS, According to a 2017 Pew Research study, only 6% of people nationally were asked to register to vote in school; and

WHEREAS, Research shows that if young voters cast a ballot in two consecutive elections they are far more likely to become habitual lifetime voters, and that if they fail to register or vote in their first election, they are likely to disengage for another decade, only possibly beginning to vote in their 30s; and

WHEREAS, 25 Pa. Stat. § 1327 (c)(2) requires voter registration materials be distributed in every public school; and

WHEREAS, 25 Pa. C.S.A. § 1101 et seq. requires that to comply with the National Voter Registration Act,

Pennsylvania schools must provide voter registration as part of transition to adult life to students with IEPs that are 17 years of age or older. Schools may also comply with this requirement by providing general school-wide registration programs affording voter registration opportunities, registration forms and assistance in completing the form to all students approaching voting age, whether or not identified as exceptional pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (“IDEA”), as well as timely transmission and coding of completed forms to the Philadelphia Board of Elections; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Department of State presents the Governor’s Civic Engagement Award to any school and student in the Commonwealth that participates in registering at least 65% of eligible voters for the Silver Award, and 85% for the Gold Award; and

WHEREAS, Because of COVID-19, voter registration efforts aimed at young people have been especially challenging due to closures of schools and government offices and the cancellation of public events; and

WHEREAS, The spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories have led to racist acts of domestic terrorism, attacks on the United States government, and on the institution of democracy itself; and

WHEREAS, The 41 organizations and almost 400 individuals that signed a letter to the Philadelphia Board of Education for a student voter education and engagement policy in 2019 still await a policy to be enacted; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Does hereby encourage the Philadelphia Board of Education to adopt and implement a civic participation and voter registration program, as proposed by PA Youth Vote.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to representatives of PA Youth Vote as evidence of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.