



Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, 80th Assembly District

Assembly Bill 773 – Voter Education for High School Pupils

IN BRIEF

Assembly Bill 773 would require school districts – in coordination with county election officials – to develop and implement voter education programming for 12th grade students.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the California Legislature has passed several pieces of legislation that aim to increase voter turnout and make it easier for citizens to cast their ballot. In particular, there have been a number of efforts that attempt to address registration and turnout among young voters.

In 2003, the Legislature passed the Student Voter Registration Act, which required the Secretary of State to send voter registration applications to every high school, California Community College, California State University, and University of California campus based on the number of voting age student enrolled.

In 2015, the Legislature has expanded efforts to register and pre-register students to vote during designated “high school voter education weeks” by allowing vote outreach coordinators to conduct voter registration drives, if approved by campus administrators.

More recently, upon certification of the Secretary of State’s VoteCal database in 2016, 16- and 17-year-old were allowed to pre-register to vote. These pre-registered individuals would become converted to registered voters on their 18th birthday. Beginning in 2017, pre-registration was made available online through the Secretary of State.

THE PROBLEM

While the Legislature has made efforts to increase voter registration and participation among younger voters, very little has been done to enhance new voter education.

For many young Californians, voting education is acquired through two primary avenues: learned voting behavior from their household, or via their civics education curriculum in high school.

While the high school History & Social Science curriculum framework includes a civics and voting

education component, there is no mandated or specified instruction model that teachers must implement in the classroom. This results in instruction modules that vary from classroom to classroom, and in some instances, can be glossed over in a lesson plan.

The lack of uniform instructional modules for civics education results in a young adult population that is unfamiliar and uncertain with how to participate in the electoral process. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, some of the commonly stated reasons eligible individuals do not register or turn out to vote include unfamiliarity with the election process and time constraints associated with the act of voting.

THE SOLUTION

AB 773 would equip young adults with the skills and knowledge needed to become electorally engaged citizens. In particular, school districts would be required to develop educational programming – in coordination with county election officials – that covers the following:

- Eligibility and process on how to register to vote;
- Acquiring official, nonpartisan election and voter information;
- How to complete a submit a ballot through existing methods, including but not limited to voting in-person and vote-by-mail;
- Information on their rights as a voter.

School districts would be required to implement the programming for all students in grade 12 during an assembly or presentation to occur during high school voter education weeks. Additionally, schools would be required to offer students the opportunity to pre-register to vote as part of this programming.

SUPPORT

Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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