

Date of Hearing: March 20, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
AB 2724 (Reyes) – As Amended March 11, 2024

[Note: This bill was double referred to the Assembly Elections Committee and will be heard by that Committee as it relates to issues under its jurisdiction.]

SUBJECT: High school pupils: voter registration

SUMMARY: Requires, commencing with the 2026–27 school year, the governing board of a school district and the governing body of a charter school to ensure that pupils receive, at least once before the pupil completes grade 11, information on how to properly preregister to vote, and requires the administrator of a high school to appoint one or more pupils who are enrolled at that high school to be voter outreach coordinators. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the administrator of a high school, or their designee, to appoint one or more pupils who are enrolled at that high school to be voter outreach coordinators.
- 2) Requires, commencing with the 2026–27 school year, the governing board of a school district and the governing body of a charter school to ensure that each of its pupils receives, at least once before the pupil completes grade 11, information on how to properly preregister to vote. Requires the manner in which information is provided to be at the discretion of the governing board of a school district or the governing body of a charter school and is authorized to include information dissemination through in-class instruction, an existing program, family information sessions, or group or individual sessions with school counselors. Requires the information provided to include, but not necessarily be limited to, material related to all the following:
 - a) Voting eligibility and guidance published by the Secretary of State (SOS);
 - b) Services provided and materials published by the county elections office.
 - c) The opportunity to register to vote, which is optional and may be completed at any time including by visiting the Secretary of State’s mobile-friendly online voter registration tool at <https://registertovote.ca.gov/>; and
 - d) The Student Poll Worker program.
- 3) Requires the governing board of a school district and the governing body of a charter school to ensure that a paper copy of a voter registration card is provided to each pupil as part of the adopted course of study, as specified by subdivision (b) of Section 51220.
- 4) Requires the governing board of a school district and the governing body of a charter school to ensure that any information shared with parents, guardians, and pupils, as specified, is handled according to applicable state and federal pupil privacy laws and regulations.

- 5) Authorizes the governing board of a school district and the governing body of a charter school to contract with a third-party nonprofit organization, with demonstrated experience providing nonpartisan youth civic engagement to implement these requirements.

EXISTING LAW:

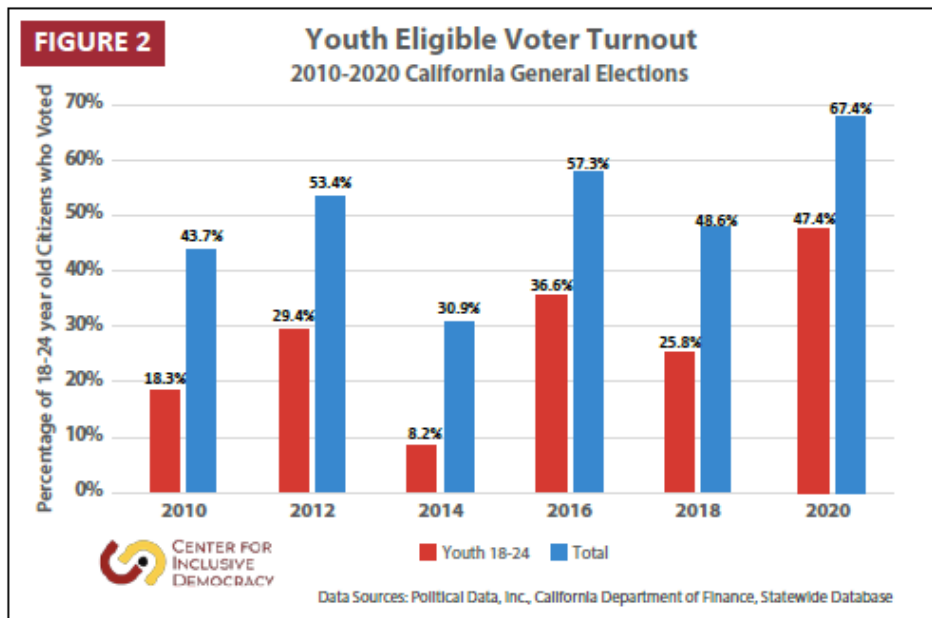
- 1) Entitles a person to register to vote if they are a United States citizen, a resident of California, not in prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony, and are at least 18 years of age at the time of the next election.
- 2) Establishes the last two full weeks in April and the last two full weeks in September as “high school voter education weeks.” During these weeks, requires persons authorized by the county elections official to be allowed to register students and school personnel on any high school campus in areas designated by the administrator of the high school, or his or her designee, which are reasonably accessible to all students. (Education Code (EC) 49040)
- 3) Allows the administrator of a high school, or his or her designee, to appoint one or more pupils who are enrolled at that high school to be voter outreach coordinators. The coordinators may coordinate voter registration activities on his or her high school campus, including: voter registration drives, mock elections, debates, and other election-related pupil outreach activities. (EC 49041)
- 4) Allows students, in grades 6-12, to have one excused absence per year to participate in a civic or political event provided that the pupil notifies the school ahead of the absence. (EC 48205)
- 5) Establishes the Student Voter Registration Act (SVRA) of 2003, and requires The Secretary of State shall annually provide every high school, community college, and California State University and University of California campus with voter registration forms. (Elections Code 2145-2146)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “AB 2724 would provide high school students in California the opportunity and resources needed to pre-register to vote by the end of their eleventh grade. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds in California have the ability to pre-register to vote and subsequently become registered to vote upon their 18th birthday. However, currently only 11% of sixteen and seventeen-year-olds in California are actually pre-registered to vote. This bill would address the low voter pre-registration rate in California by presenting high school students the opportunity and resources needed to pre-register to vote at their schools.”

California youth registration and voting rates. California’s youth (ages 18-24) remain underrepresented among California’s voting electorate. Youth consistently have low registration rates compared to older Californians. According to an August 2023, Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) fact sheet, young adults (age 18 to 34) make up 31% of the population but only 18% of likely voters. Only 37% of young adults are registered to vote. A September 2015 fact sheet from the PPIC reported younger Californians cite lack of interest as the top reason for not registering to vote.



According to the California Civic Engagement Project from the University of Southern California Sol Price School of Public Policy and the Secretary of State, in the 2020 general election, the youth (age 18-24) eligible turnout was 47.4%, a rate substantially higher than in the previous general election. The 2016 general election saw

a 36.6% youth eligible turnout rate. The youth registration rate (percentage of citizens 18-24 years who are registered) has steadily increased and reached 66.4% in the 2020 general election. Despite gains in registration, citizens 18-24 years have the lowest registration rate of any other age group. In the 2020 general election, eligible voter turnout of Asian-American and Latino youth was significantly lower than the turnout of youth overall (47.4%). The Asian-American youth eligible turnout rate was 34.7%, with the Latino youth rate higher at 39.3%.

Student Voter Registration Project. AB 593 (Ridley-Thomas), Chapter 819, Statutes of 2003, established the Student Voter Registration Project (SVRP), which requires the SOS to provide every high school, community college, California State University (CSU), and University of California (UC) campus with voter registration forms, and include information regarding eligibility requirements and informing each student that he or she may return the completed form in person or by mail to the elections official of the county in which the student resides.

Preregister to vote at 16. Vote at 18. Online pre-registration for voting is available for eligible 16 and 17 year olds by visiting www.registertovote.ca.gov, and was established by SB 113 (Jackson), Chapter 619, Statutes of 2014. California youth who pre-register to vote will have their registration become active once they turn 18 years old. Pre-registration does not change the voting age, which is 18. Instead, it allows eligible Californians ages 16 or 17 to complete the online voter registration form providing sufficient time and opportunity to get ready to vote. The online pre-registration applies to California youth who are 16 or 17 and meet the following criteria:

- A United States citizen and a resident of California;
- Not currently serving a state or federal prison term for the conviction of a felony; and
- Not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court.

High School Voter Education Weeks. Current law designates the last two full weeks of April and September as “High School Voter Education Weeks.” In partnership with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), the SOS issues a joint letter that encourages high school administrators, staff, and students to host voter registration drives and to participate in educational events all year but especially during these four weeks. This year, the SOS visited high schools and colleges across the state, holding in-person voter education forums and attending college fairs. The SOS also encouraged eligible high school students to engage in the election process by serving as poll workers and celebrating civic holidays such as Poll Worker Recruitment Day. The SOS has created targeted outreach material to support civic engagement participation and shared these materials with high school campuses.

Student Mock Election. The SOS, along with the SPI, promotes the California Student Mock Election prior to statewide general elections. The next Student Mock Election will take place on October 8, 2024. This event provides high school and middle school students with firsthand experience with the electoral process by giving them the opportunity to review election materials and cast a “mock” ballot for the candidates and issues important to them and their families. The SOS plans to continue this outreach effort, as their office has found it to be beneficial for promoting voter engagement and civic learning with students.

2023 Secretary of State Annual Report to the Legislature on Student Voter Registration. The California Secretary of State is required to submit an annual report to the State Legislature on student voter registration efforts pursuant to the Student Voter Registration Act of 2003 (Chapter 819, Statutes of 2003), under the California Elections Code section 2146(d). Selected experts from the 2023 report include:

- Since pre-registration began in 2016, a total of 1,141,476 students have pre-registered to vote. Of these, 877,917 have since turned 18 and are now registered to vote. While the number of pre-registrants waiting to turn 18 remains fairly consistent across the period, the number of pre-registration forms submitted each year declined by 27% from 2018-2021. California Motor Voter went live in April 2018, at which point 16- and 17- year-olds were automatically pre-registered to vote when they applied for a driver’s license at the Department of Motor Vehicles, which included a larger pool of eligible pre-registrants than in the following years.
- COVID had a negative impact on pre-registrations with students enrolled in distance learning in 2020 and 2021, which did not allow for the usual on campus events that schools hold to promote civic engagement and voter registration, including tabling, rallies, mock elections, and other related activities. With students now back on campus, a rebound in pre-registrations is anticipated leading up to the 2024 Presidential Election cycle. A decline in pre-registrations is also typically seen in nonelection years due to the lack of publicity and excitement that occurs with each election cycle.
- In 2023, the SOS contacted 4,256 high schools, and 340 colleges and universities through the SVRP. A total of 642 schools responded to the mailing, which represents a 14% response rate, despite being required by Elections Code. Of the schools that responded, 450 requested paper voter registration forms, representing 10% of the total number of schools contacted.

Recommended Committee Amendments. *Staff recommends the bill be amended* as follows:

- Extend the requirements of the bill to also apply to county boards of education and State Special Schools for the Deaf and the Blind.
- Authorize, rather than require, the administrator of a public or private high school, or their designee, to appoint one or more pupils who are enrolled at that high school to be voter outreach coordinators.
- Require the governing board of a school district, the county board of education, state special schools for the blind and deaf, and the governing body of a charter school to, upon request of a pupil, parent or guardian, ensure that a paper copy of a voter registration card is provided for that pupil.

Related legislation. SB 955 (Leyva), Chapter 921, Statutes of 2022, allows students in grades 6-12 to have one excused absence per year to participate in a civic or political event provided that the pupil notifies the school ahead of the absence.

AB 773 (Gonzalez) of the 2019-20 Session would have required the SOS, in coordination with the SPI, to develop educational programming for pupils in grade 12 on voting registration and participation, and would have required each public high school to implement the educational programming for students in grade 12 at each high school during a presentation or assembly at the school campus. This bill was vetoed by the Governor with the following message:

The State has already made a significant investment to increase turnout among young voters, and there is evidence that these efforts are working. The Secretary of State's Office reported that in 2018 there was a significant increase in turnout for voters ages 18-22. Rather than imposing a prescriptive requirement that imposes a one-size-fits-all requirement on each high school, I would prefer that the Secretary of State and the Superintendent of Public Instruction continue their coordination to help register and preregister young people to vote.

SB 113 (Jackson), Chapter 619, Statutes of 2014, expands pre-registration for voting by authorizing a 16-year-old to pre-register to vote once pre-registration is in effect, provided they meet all other eligibility requirements.

AB 1817 (Gomez), Chapter 131, Statutes of 2014, established the last two full weeks in April and the last two full weeks in September as “high school voter education weeks,” instead of “high school voter weeks,” and expanded the individuals, from deputy registrars of voters, to people authorized by the county elections official, who must be allowed to register students and school personnel on any high school campus in areas designated by the administrator of the high school, or their designee, which are reasonably accessible, during high school voter education weeks. Authorizes the administrator of a high school, or their designee, to appoint one or more pupils who are enrolled at that high school to be voter outreach coordinators. Authorizes the coordinators to coordinate voter registration activities on their high school campus.

AB 593 (Ridley-Thomas), Chapter 819, Statutes of 2003, makes numerous changes to the voter registration process and establishes the SVRP. Requires the SOS to provide every high school, community college, CSU, and UC campus with voter registration forms. Requires the SOS to provide a written notice with each such registration form describing eligibility requirements and informing each student that he or she may return the completed form in person or by mail to the

elections official of the county in which the student resides. States the Legislature's intent that high schools and colleges provide students with voter registration forms.

Arguments in support. Californians for Justice writes, “The Secretary of State’s 2023 Annual Report notes that approximately 1.1 million students had pre-registered to vote since the service began in 2016. However, between 2018-2021, the number of pre registration forms submitted declined by 27% every year. Although this pre-registration service is available, its engagement and usage has not reached its full potential. Only 11% of 16 and 17-year olds are pre registered to vote in California. AB 2724 seeks to increase voter registration for young Californians. High School voter registration is a greatly untapped resource that can be used to increase participation in our elections. Every high school student in California deserves the opportunity to register to vote. We urge you to support AB 2724 to ensure that we strengthen the infrastructure of our Democracy and increase voter registration across California.”

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California High School Democrats

Californians for Justice

Center Against Racism & Trauma Inc.

Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice

Centro Del Inmigrante, Inc

Chords Academy of The Arts

Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE)

Faith in The Valley

GenUp

I.E. United

Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice

Inland Congregations United for Change

Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective

Inland Empire Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Inland Empire Prism Collective

LA Voice

Orange County Congregation Community Organization

Partnership for The Future of Learning California

Pico California

Power CA Action

Public Advocates

San Bernardino Community Service Center, Inc

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Marguerite Ries / ED. / (916) 319-2087