

A Tool for Youth Empowerment: Voter Pre-Registration & Education

Overview: The NC pre-registration law does not change the voting age but allows 16 and 17 year olds to pre-register to vote. Most students are 16 when they take Civics or go to the DMV for a driver's license, so it's a great time to sign up as future voters.

More than 160,000 teenagers used pre-registration from Jan. 2010 to Sept. 2013, when it was stopped as part of a far-reaching voter restriction law (HB 589). However, a federal court reinstated pre-registration in July 2016, and it is currently in effect.

Verification Process: People who pre-register must still have their information verified – in the same way, and at the same time, as the normal process for a newly registered voter. *See Point 3 in “How It Works” in next column.*

Pre-Registration Helps Civics Education: Pre-registration provides a relevant and practical context for teaching civics. Students take American History: Founding Principles, Civics and Economics in high school to “prepare students to become responsible and effective citizens in an interdependent world.”

Bipartisan Support: The original pre-registration law passed by wide margins. It had four main sponsors, two Democrats and two Republicans, including the youngest Democrat and youngest Republican in the NC House of Representatives at the time. In practice, a plurality (39%) of the 160,000 who used the law from Jan. 2010 to Sept. 2013 chose no party, 30.6% signed up as Democrats, 29.3% as Republicans, and nearly 1% as Libertarians.

Basic Facts

- Registration among youth is much lower than for other age groups. While more than 85% of citizens over 40 are registered, only about 60% of those 18 to 25 are registered.
- The DMV generates more voter registration applications than any other method in NC. Data from DMV forms is more legible than on many other applications.
- 16 and 17 year olds change addresses less often

than older teens (source: DMV).

- Studies show that voting, like good driving skills, is habit-forming. Early experience with the process of voting increases the chances of life-time participation.
- The NC School Board Association urged schools to appoint teams to make the process of holding registration drives in high schools work well. The associations of principals, school boards, and educators all endorsed the pre-registration law.
- Pre-registration helps develop accurate, more comprehensive voter registration rolls and will shorten Same-Day Registration lines.
- A pre-registration law in Florida adds more youth where it is tied to civics education.
- The State Board of Elections has stated that pre-registrations via DMV and schools can improve the accuracy of registration files.

How It Works

1. You can use a regular voter registration form to pre-register 16 and 17-year olds, even if the form does not have a pre-registration checkbox. Enter the pre-registrant's DOB on the appropriate line, and their registration will be processed once they reach the age of eligibility to vote. If the form does not have a pre-registration checkbox, make sure pre-registrants check the box indicating that they will not be 18 by the General Election.
2. The forms are sent electronically by the DMV and county elections boards to the State Elections database to hold in a queue until the time for the verification process (see next).
3. When *pre-registered* teenagers become old enough to *register*, they'll be automatically registered to vote by the Board of Elections and the normal verification process for all new first-time voters will take place at that time, including verification of the ID number and residential address. See Section 7(a) of Session Law 2009-541, which says the teenager “shall be automatically registered upon reaching the age of eligibility following verification of the person's qualifications and address in accordance with G.S. 163-82.7.”