

## HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE

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### PTA promotes civic engagement

*A complete education includes teaching students how to become responsible citizens in a democracy.*

**By the end of their senior year of high school, students will be prepared to enter the adult world of attending a college or university, building a career, and engaging in the broader community.**

**One of the most important ways they can contribute to their community is to become informed citizens and exercise their right to vote.**



**In California, 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds can pre-register to vote. By pre-registering, California youth will have their voter registration become active automatically when they turn 18.**

**In the classroom.** California public schools offer (or require) one semester of American government and civics, and one semester of economics to high school seniors. Local PTAs can work with these social studies teachers to assemble and distribute a voter registration packet to each high school senior using materials and resources provided by the County Registrar of Voters, California's Secretary of State, and the California Bar Association.

Physical packets consist of a large envelope featuring our "Count Me In" theme that contains:

- a paper voter registration form that can be completed and returned by mail;
- a voter registration slip with a QR code that can be scanned by a smartphone to enable the student to electronically (pre)register to vote;
- the publication *When You Turn 18: A Survival Guide for Teenagers* created by the State Bar of California that addresses the legal rights and responsibilities of 18-year-olds; and
- a cover letter signed by California Secretary of State Alex Padilla, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, and California State PTA President Celia Jaffe. Together, they encourage youth to engage in their civic responsibilities. They also mention how to obtain dependable voter information and learn about voting options, such as vote-by-mail or finding one's polling place for Election Day.

These packets can be delivered to the teachers' classrooms along with promotional materials and display stands with additional voter registration forms to post in the school library or the student activities office. Alternatively, schools can opt to provide these materials to students electronically.

Teachers who help distribute the voter registration packets are encouraged to incorporate this activity into their daily lessons, facilitating class discussions with students about voting, the right to vote, and use of an absentee ballot for students who attend a college or university away from home.

These discussions can empower the students, get them excited to vote in upcoming elections, and encourage them to stay up-to-date with the current polls, campaign events, and candidate debates. Teachers may even want to share some of their own first voting experiences with the kids.

Closer to the election, PTAs can follow up with students electronically about important elections dates and deadlines, as well as the value of being a well-informed voter by utilizing resources from the County Registrar of Voters, the League of Women Voters, Voter's Edge, and the California Secretary of State.

**Across the state, PTA's participation and leadership in this program can help to significantly improve voter registration and engagement among California's youth.**

## How to implement this program in your local schools

1. Have your PTA president add “High School Senior Voter Registration Drive” to an upcoming meeting agenda.
2. Prepare an overview and make a motion to have your PTA implement the program, including adding a line item in the budget, if needed.
3. Once approved, your president can appoint a committee to carry out the program.
4. Secure the support of your principal and/or superintendent for this effort.
5. Discuss with the principal and/or social studies teachers how best to bring voter materials and information to the students.
6. Get a count of high school seniors from the school’s registrar or administrator.
7. Obtain California Voter Registration Forms from your county’s Registrar of Voters in the languages needed in your area. These are forms that can be folded and mailed back to the Registrar of Voters, no postage necessary. While you’re there, collect any additional promotional materials that are available, such as pamphlets and display stands for voter registration forms (these can be placed in the school library, student activities office, front desk, and used at school-parent meetings). **Note: PTAs do NOT collect and turn in the forms, nor assist in completing the forms – we only distribute them.**
8. Print copies of useful documents for your students. If your high school cannot support distribution of paper forms, or if you want to follow up electronically, you can conduct a campaign using email and/or links on your PTA or school website. Include these items:
  - *When You Turn 18: A Survival Guide for Teenagers*, created by the State Bar of California to discuss the legal rights and responsibilities of 18-year-olds, including information about laws related to...
    - ✓ alcohol
    - ✓ banking
    - ✓ contracts
    - ✓ credit
    - ✓ employment
    - ✓ hate crimes
    - ✓ the Internet
    - ✓ jury duty
    - ✓ military service
    - ✓ voting
  - Voter registration slips created by the Secretary of State’s office contain a QR code that can be scanned by a smartphone to register electronically.  
(<http://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/outreach/posters/reg-day-flyer-final-4.pdf>)
  - Provide the link to (pre)register online with your local county Registrar of Voters.
9. Distribute these materials to the students, working in cooperation with the social studies teachers.\*
10. Report back to your PTA leaders and members at meetings. Be sure to include an article in your own PTA newsletter or send out a special e-blast about it. If possible, give a short update to your school board as well. If you use social media, post it.
11. Follow up with non-partisan voter information from the League of Women Voters (such as the *Easy Voter Guide*: [www.easyvoterguide.org](http://www.easyvoterguide.org)), Voter’s Edge, your local Registrar of Voters, or the California Secretary of State’s office.
12. Get feedback. Ask the teachers how it went and let them offer suggestions for improving the program. If possible, find out how many students (pre)registered and send out a survey to seniors to find out if they actually plan to vote (and how), whether the packets helped, get their thoughts on the program, and take their suggestions for next time.



**\*Teachers** – Ideally, teachers will support this effort as a natural extension of their daily teaching. Some ideas for what to incorporate into lessons when packets are distributed include: Discuss how 18-year-olds could not vote before the Twenty-sixth Amendment became law in 1971; address how to become an informed voter by depending upon reliable information sources to become familiar with the issues before the elections; consider the new rights and responsibilities of becoming a legal adult; cover current election events and get students’ opinions about the process; study primary voting and political party affiliation; suggest the use of absentee ballots for students going to college away from home; teachers can tell what it was like the first time they voted; and offer extra credit for students who (pre)register to vote or confirm their registration in class.