

Can You Hear Me NOW?
North Carolina's Pre-Registration Law

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about North Carolina's exciting new legislation that allows 16 and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote (effective January 1, 2010); one goal of this law is to ensure that more young people participate in the political process. Students learn about the many reasons why young people should pre-register/register and vote, as well as write a persuasive essay convincing others of the importance of young people actively participating in our democracy.

Grades

Middle and High School

Essential Questions

- Why is it important to vote?
- What criteria do you have to meet to be able to register to vote?
- What criteria do you have to meet to be able to vote?
- Why do you think many young Americans have chosen not to register and/or vote in past elections?
- What can our community do to encourage 16 and 17 year old citizens to pre-register to vote?
- What can we do to encourage people of all ages to actually vote after registration?

Materials

- "NC's Pre-Registration Law" Power Point, available in the Database of K-12 Resources as a PDF presentation
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click "View" in the top menu bar of the file, and select "Full Screen Mode"
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to cnorris@unc.edu.
- "Giving teens a civic voice," editorial and questions, attached
- Persuasive Essay Assignment, attached

Duration

45-60 minutes (depending on depth of discussion)

Procedure

Warm-Up: Youth, Voting, and Voice

1. Tell students that they are going to be discussing youth voice and voting in today's lesson and that to open the conversation, you are going to project and read some statements (see [Slides 2-3](#) of the "NC's Pre-Registration Law" Power Point, available in the Database of Civic Resources) and you would like them to respond to the statements physically by walking to the side of the room labeled with the word that best represents their opinion ("agree" or "disagree"). Tell students to move from either side of the room silently and carefully as you project each statement for their

response. Encourage students to follow their own opinions rather than choosing sides based on where their friends move. (The statements will appear upon each clicking of the PPT slides.)

- Adults, such as parents and teachers, often don't listen to teenagers.
- Most teenagers don't care about political and social issues.
- There are many ways I can participate in the political process, even though I'm not old enough to vote.
- Federal, state, and local government officials should consult people our age on the decisions they make.
- The voting age should be raised – most eighteen year olds don't know enough to be able to vote.
- Most politicians care very much whether young people (18-22 year olds) vote.

As students move about the room, teachers should make notes regarding what the majority opinion seems to be for each statement, when the group is evenly split, etc., so that this can be discussed further.

2. After going through the statements, thank students for their participation and instruct them to return to their seats. Further discuss their responses and opinions; for example:
 - Almost all of you felt that adults don't listen to young people. Why do you feel this way? What evidence can you note to back this up? Why *should* adults listen to young people?
 - For those of you who felt that teenagers actually do care about political and social issues, what makes you think this? What examples can you note?
 - A vast majority of you agreed that government officials should consult people your age on the decisions being made. Why should they?
 - For those of you who said that politicians don't care whether young people vote, why do you feel that way? Alternatively, for those of you who said that they do care, why do you think this?
3. To culminate this line of thinking, ask students if any of them can think of a way to let their voice be heard by adults *and* to ensure government officials are considering their opinions. Hopefully, a student will note that **voting** is a way to cover both objectives and ensure their voice is heard. Remind students that because we live in a democracy, we get a say in who runs our country, and thus we also get a say about how our country is run through our votes. Acknowledge to the class that while it is very easy to be blasé about one's right to vote, and even easier to have a "whatever, who cares...one vote can't make a difference" kind of attitude, it is imperative to not brush this great honor off so quickly. In a world where people in some countries literally give their lives to be able to cast a ballot and make a difference, we should not take this right lightly.

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4. Next, ask the students who said they feel like adults don't listen, or those who said politicians don't care whether young people vote, to pay close attention. Explain to students that North Carolina recently passed ground-breaking legislation concerning these very issues. Project Slide 4 and discuss:
 - First, does anyone recognize this form? What is the purpose of this form?
 - For those of you who have seen the form before, do you notice anything different about it? Or, does anyone notice anything surprising about this form?

5. Continue on to Slide 5 and discuss the “pre-registration” box located in the top right corner of the NC Voter Registration form. As students respond to the questions, ensure they gain the understanding that 16 and 17 year-olds in North Carolina can now pre-register to vote! Discuss:
 - Have 16 and 17 year-olds always been able to pre-register to vote? Does anyone know when the law changed?

6. Move on to Slide 6 which shows a portion of the original NC House Bill. (Teacher Note: While this legislation was introduced and passed the NC House as H-1260, it was later rolled into an omnibus election bill, H-908.) Discuss:
 - Where did this bill originate and how do you know that?
 - According to what you see here, what does it this bill entail?
 - How does this bill apply to you or your classmates? (Remind students that even if they are not 16 yet, they soon will be; not to mention the bill also involves better access to voter registration at their school.)

7. Go through Slides 7-8, which offer details regarding the bill:
 - What makes this bill ground breaking? (i.e., the fact that NC is only one of three states that allows 16 and 17 year olds to pre-register, the fact that the bill passed with the goal of making it easier for youth to register, etc.)
 - Why do you think this law may have been passed? (to encourage youth to register - and when they turn 18, to vote!)

8. Discuss with students how this bill was largely passed into law due to various state organizations and our state legislators’ desires to get young people more involved in the political process. Create two columns on the board, one titled “Adults” and the other titled “Youth (18-24).” Take a quick poll and ask students to estimate the percentage of adults in North Carolina who are registered to vote, noting their various guesses in the adult column. Next, ask students to estimate the percentage of youth they think are registered. Compare the two columns of estimates and discuss:
 - For those of you who think more adults are registered, what evidence makes you think this?
 - Alternatively, some of you thought more youth are registered. Why do you think this?

9. Project Slide 9 to further the conversation and compare this information with student estimates:
 - Why do you think so few young people register to vote?
 - How might the pre-registration bill raise the number of youth that register?
 - In addition to the pre-registration bill, what else should be done to encourage youth to register and to vote once they turn 18?

Why Should YOUTH Pre-Register/Register & Vote?

10. Students noted in Step 9 why they think youth don’t register to vote. Further discuss with students that of the youth that do register, many do not then follow through and actually cast a vote. Display Slide 10 and ask students to share their thoughts on why it’s important to register and vote. Continue on with Slides 11-16 which offer youth tailored reasons for registering and voting. (Source: <http://teenadvice.about.com/od/teenlifefaqsandqas/a/youthvote2004a.htm>)

11. Handout the attached editorial, "Giving teens a civic voice," from *The Fayetteville Observer*. Instruct students to read the editorial (either individually or in partners) then discuss and/or answer the questions that follow. Once students have completed their reading and considered the questions, discuss the article as a whole class.
12. As a culminating assignment, pass out the attached "Why Should YOUth Pre-register and Vote" persuasive essay assignment and go over the details with students.

Teachers are encouraged to provide class time for students to share their essays on the due date. Teachers can divide their class into groups of five or less and instruct students to read their essays. After each reading, instruct students to participate in mini-feedback sessions in which they share what they liked about the essay with the author and what they felt the most convincing parts of the essay were. Once all students have shared, each group can vote on which essay in their group was most convincing. Teachers may want to have each group's "most convincing essay" winner then read her or his essay to the class at large.

Additional Activities

- For an additional or alternative exploration of North Carolina's pre-registration law, see the Consortium's lesson, "How Do I Pre-Register and Vote in North Carolina," available in the Database of K-12 Resources or by sending a request to cnorris@unc.edu.
- Develop and implement a campaign at your school to encourage voter pre-registration and registration. Consider all the creative ways you can get the word out about NC's new pre-registration law as well as encourage students to pre-register/register and vote (i.e. create posters and banners, include messages in your school's verbal and written announcements, contribute speeches or performances to assemblies, etc.)
- Contact your local Board of Elections and arrange a pre-registration/registration voter drive at your high school!

Resources

For additional information about North Carolina's new pre-registration law, go to <http://www.democracy-nc.org/>.

Fayetteville Observer, Sunday, Sept. 27, 2009

Giving teens a civic voice, by Ashley Holloway Foxx

"Can you hear me now?"

Remember that commercial for a popular cell phone company? The network traversed the country to ensure that everyone who spoke could be heard.

In our democracy, your voice is your vote, and beginning in January, a chorus of teenagers will be given a greater opportunity to find their civic voices in North Carolina.

How? For the first-time ever, 16- and 17-year-olds will be allowed to "pre-register" to vote. They will automatically become full registered voters when they turn 18.

During these uncertain times, the most important way to ensure our country's continued success is through the education of our youth. For years, North Carolina schools have taken the time to educate young people on the importance of civics. However, with most civics education occurring in the 10th grade, the process of voter registration and voting remains abstract and something for the distant future.

Voter pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds changes that. It provides a clear and practical way to draw the youth of our state directly into the voting process.

Inclusive democracy

Studies show that the earlier citizens take part in the democratic process, the more likely they will become voters for life. Under North Carolina's new voter pre-registration and education law, local boards of education and boards of elections are encouraged to creatively work together to empower youth by pre-registering them and educating them on the voting process. In addition, the N.C. Department of Motor Vehicles will be required to ask new drivers, ages 16 and 17, if they would like to pre-register to vote. This agency alone can add thousands of teens to the rolls of voters once they reach voting age. The information they provide also must be verified just as it is for all first-time voters.

North Carolina already does many things to encourage youth voting. For example, we are one of the few states that allow 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections as long as they will be 18 by the date of the general election. Also, college students are allowed to register and vote at their college addresses if they choose to do so. Now, we are only the third state to allow voter pre-registration (the others are Hawaii and Florida). This speaks well of our state's desire to create a more vibrant and inclusive democracy.

In Cumberland County, turnout for municipal primary and general elections is dismal. Low turnout trumpets the voices of a few over the masses. By encouraging 16- and 17-year-old citizens to pre-register, we engage them in the voting process early on. Greater youth involvement will strengthen our democracy for decades to come.

Voter-owned elections

With young adults across the state getting more involved in the political process, we must re-evaluate another part of our system that unfairly hinders their success. The increasing cost of national, state and even local campaigns prohibits many people from running for elected office. We need a publicly funded "voter-owned elections" option for qualified candidates without access to wealth. Most young adults couldn't even consider raising \$70,000 to run for mayor or \$150,000 for a state legislative race.

We say that we want the young people of this country to be responsible and give back to our community. Are we not being hypocritical by telling those same youths that they cannot run a viable campaign because they are

too poor? Voter-owned elections programs help young voters and other underrepresented segments of our society gain greater access to the political system.

Starting in January, at the young age of 16, citizens across the state can embark on a pathway that will empower them for a lifetime. Let us encourage North Carolina's teens to pre-register to vote, become involved in reform efforts and find their voices so that we can hear them loud and clear.

Ashley Holloway Foxx is a graduate of Terry Sanford High School and UNC-Chapel Hill. She lives with her husband, Brian, and her daughter, Madison, and works as a field organizer in the Fayetteville area for Democracy North Carolina (democracy-nc.org).

Questions

1. The author writes that “your voice is your vote.” What do you think she means by this? Do you agree or disagree?
2. What steps has North Carolina taken to ensure young people’s voices will be heard?
3. What attitude does the author exhibit towards young people?
4. Do you plan to pre-register? Why or why not?
5. The author states that “Greater youth involvement will strengthen our democracy for decades to come.” Do you agree or disagree and why?
6. What do you think is the most important point this editorial makes?
7. How does knowing that NC is only one of three states that allows 16 and 17 year-olds to pre-register make you feel and why?

Name: _____

Persuasive Essay Assignment: Why Should YOUth Register & Vote?

Assignment: "In our democracy, your voice is your vote, and beginning in January, a chorus of teenagers will be given a greater opportunity to find their civic voices in North Carolina. How? For the first-time ever, 16- and 17-year-olds will be allowed to 'pre-register' to vote. They will automatically become full registered voters when they turn 18."

Young people listen to one another more readily than they listen to adults. Given this, write a persuasive essay in which you convince teens to pre-register/register and vote. Make sure you pose convincing reasons/arguments as to why people your age should take the time to participate in our democracy. (Make your arguments good...think of how hard it is for people to convince *you* to do something!)

Be prepared to share your essay in class on its due date:

Grading Criteria	
Focused subject/argument	States why it is important that youth pre-register/register and vote
Reasons in support of the claim	Gives clear and accurate reasons in support of argument
Organization	Writing has a compelling opening, an informative middle and a satisfying conclusion.
Voice and tone	It sounds like the writer cares about the argument; the reader is persuaded based on the voice/tone
Word choice	The words used are striking but natural, varied and vivid.
Sentence fluency	Sentences are clear & complete.
Conventions	Correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Begin brainstorming your essay here: