

Date of Hearing: July 2, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Al Muratsuchi, Chair

SB 316 (Reyes) – As Amended June 23, 2025

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

SENATE VOTE: 28-9

SUBJECT: High school pupils: voter registration

SUMMARY: Requires, beginning with the 2026-27 school year, the governing board or body of school districts, county offices of education (COEs), the state special schools, and charter schools to ensure that each student receives, at least once before the student completes 11th grade, information on how to properly pre-register and register to vote. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires, commencing with the 2026–27 school year, the governing board of a school district, a county board of education, a state special school, 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 and register to vote. Requires this requirement to only apply to school districts, COEs, state special schools, and charter schools that serve pupils in grade 11. Requires the manner in which information is provided to be at the discretion of the governing board of the school district, the county board of education, the state special school, or the governing body of the charter school and authorizes information dissemination through in-class instruction, an existing program, family information sessions, or group or individual sessions with school counselors.
- 2) 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 SOS’s mobile-friendly online voter registration tool at <https://registertovote.ca.gov/>;
 - d) The Student Poll Worker program; and
 - e) How to vote, how to vote by mail, and the importance of the voter’s signature.
- 3) Requires the governing board of a school district, a county board of education, a state special school, and the governing body of a charter school to, upon request of a pupil or a pupil’s parent or guardian, ensure that information regarding where to acquire a paper copy of a voter registration card is provided to that pupil, such as a referral to the SOS’s website.

- 4) Requires the governing board of a school district, a county board of education, a state special school, and the governing body of a charter school to ensure that any information shared with parents, guardians, and pupils under this section is handled according to applicable state and federal pupil privacy laws and regulations.
- 5) Authorizes the governing board of a school district, a county board of education, a state special school, 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.
- 6) Encourages the governing board of a school district, a county board of education, a state special school, and the governing body of a charter school to consider satisfying these requirements during the established high school voter education weeks.
- 7) Authorizes an 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.

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) Authorizes a person who is at least 16 years of age and otherwise meets all eligibility requirements to vote to submit his or her affidavit of registration. Requires a properly executed affidavit of registration to be deemed effective as of the date the affiant will be 18 years of age, if the information in the affidavit of registration is still current at that time. Requires, if the information provided by the affiant in the affidavit of registration is not current at the time that the affidavit of registration would otherwise become effective, for his or her registration to become effective, the affiant to provide the current information to the proper county elections official, as specified. (Elections Code (ELEC) 2102)

- 6) Establishes the Student Voter Registration Act (SVRA) of 2003, and requires the SOS to annually provide every high school, community college, California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) campus with voter registration forms. (ELEC 2145-2146)
- 7) Requires every high school, community college, and CSU campus to designate a contact person and provide his or her address, telephone number, and email address, when possible, to the SOS for the SOS to contact in order to facilitate the distribution of voter registration cards. (ELEC 2148)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee: this bill could result in additional Proposition 98 General Fund costs for LEAs to comply with the bill's requirements and ensure that students receive information on how to preregister to vote and also provide paper copies of voter registration cards, upon request. The extent of these costs would depend on how LEAs elect to comply and the amount of staff time involved, but it could be in the tens of thousands to low hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. If the Commission on State Mandates determines the bill's requirements to be a reimbursable mandate, the state would need to reimburse these costs or there could be pressure to increase the K-12 Mandate Block Grant.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, "SB 316 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."

Key provisions of the bill. This bill requires specified election and voting information to be provided to students, including voting eligibility and guidance published by the SOS, and services provided and materials published by the county elections office. The SOS's website and county elections offices' websites contain information about registering to vote, timelines/deadlines, upcoming elections, and specific information about candidates and initiatives. The SOS's website also contains a High School and Youth Programs portal, which provides information about initiatives to educate and engage youth. This portal includes a pre-registration toolkit with links to pre-register to vote, guidance for school administrators and teachers, and information about High School Voter Education Weeks, student mock elections, and becoming a student poll worker.

The Committee may wish to consider that this bill is nearly identical to AB 2724 (Reyes) of the 2023-24 Session. This bill was vetoed by the Governor, with the following message:

While I support the author's goal of encouraging young people to pre-register to vote and applaud the work of the bill's sponsors, I have concerns about creating an additional school mandate for this purpose at this time. Schools already have the ability to fulfill the requirements of this bill without creating a new mandate. In California, we strive to make registering and pre-registering to vote as streamlined as possible for all citizens.

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 24) 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.

In the 2024 Presidential election, voter turnout dropped among all age groups, but dropped even more among voters ages 18 to 24 (12.7 percentage points), and the decline was more dramatic among women (PPIC, 2025). According to the California Civic Engagement Project from the University of Southern California Sol Price School of Public Policy and the SOS, 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. Despite gains in registration, citizens aged 18-24 years have the lowest registration rate of any other age group. In the 2020 general election, the 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%.

12th grade curriculum already includes information about how to vote. The 12th grade American Government and Civics curriculum, in the History Social Science Framework, adopted by the State Board of Education in 2016, includes content on student voter registration. The Framework states:

As a practical matter, students should know how to register to vote—both online and by mail—what the requirements are for registration; how to request, fill out, and return an absentee ballot; what to expect on election day; how to find a polling place; and where and how to access and understand the voter information pamphlet and other materials to become an informed voter. While this information may vary from county to county, students preparing to vote can go to the Secretary of State’s Web page at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/> as well as to their local registrar of voters to explore these topics.

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, CSU, and 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 encouraging 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. 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.

2024 SOS Annual Report to the Legislature on Student Voter Registration. The SOS 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 2024 report include:

- Since pre-registration began in 2016, a total of 1,319,931 students have pre-registered to vote. Of these, 1,029,492 have since turned 18 and are now registered to vote.
- In anticipation of the 2024 Presidential election, 2024 pre-registrations were higher than 2021-2023, showing a 21% increase over 2023. Pre-registrations were also 12% higher than in the previous presidential election cycle in 2020, when students were enrolled in distance learning due to the COVID pandemic. Distance learning did not allow for the usual on-campus events that schools hold to promote civic engagement and voter registration.
- In 2023, the SOS contacted 3,878 high schools and 154 colleges and universities through the SVRP. A total of 513 schools responded to the mailing, which represents a 13% response rate, despite being required by Elections Code. Of the schools that responded, only 328 requested paper voter registration forms.

Arguments in support. The Inland Congregations United for Change writes, “SB 316 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.”

Related legislation. AB 2724 (Reyes) of the 2023-24 Session would have required, commencing with the 2026–27 school year, the governing board of a school district, a county board of

education, a state special school, 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. This bill was vetoed by the Governor, with the following message:

While I support the author's goal of encouraging young people to pre-register to vote and applaud the work of the bill's sponsors, I have concerns about creating an additional school mandate for this purpose at this time. Schools already have the ability to fulfill the requirements of this bill without creating a new mandate. In California, we strive to make registering and pre-registering to vote as streamlined as possible for all citizens.

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 SOS'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 SOS 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.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Chamber of Commerce
California Environmental Voters
California State PTA
Californians for Justice
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Generation Citizen
Gente Organizada
I.E. United
Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice
Inland Congregations United for Change
Inland Empire United
League of Women Voters of California
Los Angeles County Office of Education
Northern California Youth Policy Coalition
Our Time to ACT
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans — PANA
Power California Action
Public Advocates
Resilience OC

Opposition

None on file

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