

Date of Hearing: July 16, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Gail Pellerin, Chair

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

**As Proposed to be Amended**

**SENATE VOTE:** 28-9

**SUBJECT:** High school pupils: voter registration.

**SUMMARY:** 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 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. Provides that this requirement applies only to school districts, county offices of education, 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 may 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 SOS’s mobile-friendly online voter registration tool at <https://registertovote.ca.gov/>.
  - d) The Student Poll Worker program.
  - e) How to vote, including but not limited to, in-person voting opportunities, vote by mail procedures including the importance of the voter's signature, ballot tracking services, services provided to voters with disabilities, and key election dates and deadlines.
- 2) 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, upon request of a pupil or a pupil’s parent or guardian, to 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 internet website.

- 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 ensure that any information shared with parents, guardians, and pupils is handled according to applicable state and federal pupil privacy laws and regulations.
- 4) Permits 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 the requirements of this section.
- 5) 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 this bill's requirements during the high school voter education weeks established under current law.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Permits a person who is a United States (US) citizen, a resident of California, not imprisoned for the conviction of a felony, and at least 18 years of age at the time of the next election, to register to vote and to vote. (California Constitution, Article II, §2)
- 2) Permits a person who is a US citizen, a resident of California, not imprisoned for the conviction of a felony, and at least 16 years of age, to pre-register to vote. Provides that the person's voter registration will be deemed effective as soon as the person is 18 years of age at the time of the next election. (Elections Code §2101)
- 3) Declares the intent of the Legislature that voter registration be maintained at the highest possible level. (Elections Code §2105)
- 4) Requires the SOS to adopt regulations requiring each county to design and implement programs intended to identify qualified electors who are not registered voters, and to register those persons to vote. Requires the SOS to adopt regulations prescribing minimum requirements for those programs. Requires the SOS, if the SOS finds that a county has not designed and implemented a program meeting the minimum requirements, to design a program for that county and to report the violation to the Attorney General. (Elections Code §2105)
- 5) Permits the SOS to provide grants to local elections officials, non-profit corporations, and unincorporated associations for the following purposes:
  - a. To conduct voter outreach and voter education programs, in accordance with the requirements of the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA), as specified.
  - b. To increase accessibility for eligible voters with disabilities, in accordance with the requirements of HAVA, as specified. (Elections Code §2131)
- 6) Provides that every eligible person be registered or pre-registered to vote when they submit an application for a driver's license (DL) or state identification card, or provide the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) with a change of address, unless the person opts out, as specified. (Elections Code §§2260-2270)

- 7) Expresses the intent of the Legislature that every eligible high school and college student receive a meaningful opportunity to apply to register to vote. Requires the SOS to provide every high school, California community college (CCC), and California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) campus with voter registration forms annually, as specified. (Elections Code §2146)
- 8) Establishes the Student Voter Registration Act (SVRA) of 2003, and requires the SOS to provide every high school, CCC, and CSU and UC campus with voter registration forms annually. (Elections Code §§2145, 2146)
- 9) Declares the intent of the Legislature to establish a State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) to encourage, and create pathways for, pupils in elementary and secondary schools to become civically engaged in democratic governmental institutions at the local, state, and national levels. Requires the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) to recommend to the State Board of Education criteria for awarding a SSCE to pupils who have demonstrated excellence in civics education and participation and have demonstrated an understanding of the US Constitution, the California Constitution, and the democratic system of government, as specified. (Education Code §51470)
- 10) Establishes the last two full weeks in April and the last two full weeks in September as “high school voter education weeks.” Requires persons authorized by the county elections official, during these weeks, 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 their designee, which are reasonably accessible to all students. (Education Code §49040)
- 11) Allows 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. Permits the coordinators to coordinate voter registration activities on their high school campus, including voter registration drives, mock elections, debates, and other election-related pupil outreach activities. (Education Code §49041)
- 12) 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. (Education Code §48205)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, this bill could result in additional Proposition 98 General Fund costs for a local educational agency (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:**

- 1) **Author's Amendments:** After the committee's deadline for pre-committee author's amendments, the author proposed an amendment to specify that the information provided to students on how to properly preregister and register to vote include information about voting options, accessible voting methods, and language assistance. The analysis reflects the author's amendments. Specifically, the amendment is as follows:

Amend the language on page 3, in lines 34 – 35, as follows:

(5) How to vote, ~~how to vote by mail, and the importance of the voter's signature,~~ **including but not limited to, in-person voting opportunities, vote by mail procedures including the importance of the voter's signature, ballot tracking services, services provided to voters with disabilities, and key election dates and deadlines.**

- 2) **Purpose of 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.

- 3) **Secretary of State Outreach Programs:** The SOS has established a variety of programs to engage voters where they live, work, or go to school. Programs geared towards youths include the California Student Mock Election program, which 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's office provides ballots, student voter information guides, and other materials to participating schools. The SOS, along with the SSPI, promotes the Student Mock Election prior to statewide general elections. In 2022, 321 schools registered to participate in the mock election program and 35,135 students cast ballots. Last year, 71,008 students, representing 235 schools and community organizations, cast their ballots in the October 2024 Student Mock Election.

Additionally, existing law designates the last two full weeks of April and September as High School Voter Education Weeks. In partnership, the SSPI and the SOS encourage high school administrators, staff, and students to host on-campus voter registration drives. Additionally, eligible high school students are encouraged to engage in the election process by serving as poll workers and celebrating civic holidays, such as Poll Worker Recruitment Day.

The SOS also hosts the California Students Vote Project (SVP), a statewide nonpartisan program that aims to increase civic engagement and voter participation among California college students. In statewide election years, the SVP conducts the "California University and College Ballot Bowl," which encourages college campuses to engage their students in the democratic process by participating in a friendly competition for the highest number of student body voter registrations.

- 4) **Pre-Registration and Previous Legislation:** In 2009, the Legislature approved and the Governor signed AB 30 (Price), Chapter 364, Statutes of 2009, which allowed a person who is 17-years of age to pre-register to vote, provided the person otherwise meets all eligibility requirements. In 2014, SB 113 (Jackson), Chapter 619, Statutes of 2014, was signed into law which lowered the pre-registration age to 16-years-old. The implementation of these policies was contingent upon the certification of the statewide voter registration database (VoteCal). In September 2016, the SOS certified VoteCal thereby rendering these policies effective and allowing 16-and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote.
- 5) **California New Motor Voter Program and Previous Legislation:** AB 1461 (Gonzalez), Chapter 729, Statutes of 2015, established the California New Motor Voter (NMV) program. AB 1461 provides for every eligible person to be automatically registered to vote when the person submits an application for a DL or state identification card, unless that person opts out, as specified. Additionally, in 2018, the Legislature approved and the Governor signed AB 1407 (McCarty), Chapter 4, Statutes of 2018, which expands upon AB 1461 by automatically pre-registering an eligible 16- or 17-year-old to vote when the person applies for a DL or state identification card, unless that person opts out, as specified.
- 6) **Tracking Student Voter Registrations:** Data provided in the SOS's 2023 Student Voter Registration Report only includes those student voter registrations that are trackable. Student voter registrations that can be tracked include: 1) paper voter registration cards the SOS has provided to schools for which affidavit numbers are directly associated with student registrations, and 2) online voter registration links with unique URLs assigned to schools that make them accessible via college class registration databases. This does not include registrations by students that submitted through external voter registration systems outside of California's online voter registration system. For example, students can also register to vote online using other tools such as Turbo Vote or Democracy Works. Additionally, as mentioned above, voter registration is offered at the DMV and a number of social services agencies throughout the state.

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 from 2018 through 2023, the number of pre-registration forms submitted each year declined by 27% from 2018-2021. Many factors have likely contributed to this decline, such as the implementation of automatic pre-registration through NMV program at the DMV in 2018, and COVID and distance learning and the lack of usual on-campus civic engagement and voter registration events in 2020 and 2021.

- 7) **Youth Voter Registration and Turnout:** According to the Center for Inclusive Democracy's (CID) March 2021 report on the youth (age 18-24) vote during the 2020 general election, the youth eligible turnout was 47.4%, a rate substantially higher than in the previous presidential general election. The 2016 general election saw a 36.6% youth eligible turnout rate. The difference in the eligible turnout rate between youth and the total population (67.4%) stayed about the same in 2020 compared to 2016 – approximately 20 percentage points. The youth share of California's 2020 general election voters increased to 10.2%, up from 8.9%, which was the highest youth share of California voters for a statewide general election since 2002. Yet, at 10.2%, youth still remained underrepresented at the polls, given

their share of the state's eligible voter population at 14.5%, a representation gap of more than 4 percentage points.

- 8) **Paper Voter Registration Forms and Previous Legislation:** AB 593 (Ridley-Thomas), Chapter 819, Statutes of 2003, created the SVRA of 2003, which among other things, requires the SOS to provide every high school, CCC, CSU, and UC campus with voter registration forms, and include information regarding eligibility requirements and informing each student that they may return the completed form in person or by mail to the elections official of the county in which the student resides. According to the SOS's 2023 Student Voter Registration report, the SVRA was passed in response to a need for students to be provided with additional opportunities to participate in civic culture. The goal was to ensure that every eligible high school and college student received a voter registration form with their diploma, allowing a meaningful opportunity to register to vote.

SB 854 (Ridley-Thomas), Chapter 481, Statutes 2007, which became effective in 2008, changed the law to reduce the number of forms the SOS was required to provide by limiting their distribution to voting age students only. Additionally, SB 854 permitted CCC and CSU students attending a school that operated an automated class registration system to receive a voter registration form that was pre-printed with personal information relevant for voter registration during the class registration process, which further reduced the number of paper forms the SOS was required to provide to schools. According to the SOS's 2023 report, in 2008, the SOS's office printed and mailed over 2.5 million student voter registration applications to high school and college campuses. Of the over 2.5 million student voter registration applications mailed, less than one percent were completed and returned to the SOS. Consequently, that approach was deemed costly and ineffective.

AB 1446 (Mullin), Chapter 593, Statutes of 2014, updated the SVRA and deleted requirements for the SOS to send every high school, CCC, and CSU voter registration forms that are consistent with the number of students enrolled at each school who are of voting age or will be of voting age by the end of the year. Additionally, AB 1446 updated the SVRA to reflect the advent of online voter registration and deleted provisions of law that permit students, during the class registration, to elect to receive a voter registration form that is preprinted with personal information relevant to voter registration, and instead permits students, during class registration, to apply to register to vote online by submitting an affidavit of voter registration electronically on the SOS's Internet Web site.

According to the SOS's 2023 Student Voter Registration Annual Report, in 2023 the SOS contacted 4,256 high schools, and 340 colleges and universities through their Student Voter Registration Project (SVRP). A total of 642 schools responded to the mailing, which represents a 14% response rate. Of the schools that responded, 450 requested paper voter registration forms, representing 10% of the total number of schools contacted.

The report summary states that the percentage of schools that responded to SOS outreach as part of the SVRP during 2023 has increased over 2022, but remains low at 14% of schools contacted despite it being required by law. While the number of paper voter registration forms submitted during 2023 has increased significantly over 2022, the percentage of forms returned remains below 10%. As a result, the SOS will continue to evaluate the costs and benefits of contacting all schools by annual mailings as part of the SVRP.

- 9) **Arguments in Support:** In support of this bill, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, writes:

This bill recognizes that providing access alone is not enough—students need clear, timely information and encouragement. By ensuring voter education is delivered in schools and offering paper voter registration forms upon request, SB 316 empowers students to take meaningful action. The bill also allows schools to partner with nonprofit organizations experienced in nonpartisan youth civic engagement to implement its provisions, ensuring flexibility and expertise in program delivery...SB 316 teaches students about their voting rights, providing them with accessible resources, and creating a school culture that promotes civic engagement are critical investments in our collective future.

- 10) **Previous Legislation:** AB 2724 (Reyes) of 2024, is substantially similar to this bill. AB 2724 was vetoed by Governor Newsom, who stated in part that “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.”

- 11) **Double Referred:** The bill was heard in the Assembly Committee on Education on July 2, 2025, where it was approved by a 9-0 vote.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

Inland Congregations United for Change (co-sponsor)  
 Inland Empire United (co-sponsor)  
 Power CA Action (co-sponsor)  
 California Chamber of Commerce  
 California Environmental Voters  
 California High School Democrats  
 California State PTA  
 Californians for Justice  
 Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)  
 Disability Rights California  
 Generation Citizen  
 Gente Organizada  
 Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice  
 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  
 Public Advocates  
 Resilience Orange County

### **Opposition**

None on file.

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