

Democracy North Carolina

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YOUNG VOTERS: A MIXED PICTURE OF SUCCESS AND UNDER PERFORMANCE

Schools Urged to Implement Governor's Citizenship Awareness Month

Young adults are registering and voting in record numbers in North Carolina, but a new report says that about one fourth of the state's citizens age 18 to 25 are still not registered and two out of three have not voted in a state election.

The Young Voters Index points out that 90,000 more young people are registered today than in January – a 16% gain and the biggest increase among any age group.* But it also says that at least 200,000 young citizens are still not registered and 560,000 have not voted in a NC election.

“A school teacher looking at the numbers would say our young adults are ‘underachievers,’” said Bob Hall, executive director of Democracy North Carolina, the nonpartisan voting rights and campaign reform group that prepared the report. “Young people are participating more than they did four year ago, but they have tremendous potential to do so much more.”

To illustrate the point, Hall noted that 134,000 of the state's young adults voted in the May 2008 primary, four times the 34,000 who cast ballots in the 2004 primary. That four-fold jump is the biggest increase for any age group, but the rate of participation for 18-25 year olds is still the lowest of any group: Only 21% of registered youth voted in the 2008 primary, compared to 37% of all registered voters.

The new Index says about 670,000 of the state's 875,000 young citizens are registered. (The state has 1.1 million adults ages 18 to 25, but as many as 235,000 may not have citizenship rights.)

Hall said that high schools and colleges, which are beginning classes across the state, should make a special effort to inform students about their voting rights. “Educators should heed Governor Easley's call to turn September into *Citizens Voter Registration Awareness Month*. Schools can hold ‘Democracy Day’ forums, plan registration drives, use their email and other systems to teach students about voting rights and responsibilities, and help campus groups with nonpartisan get-out-the-vote drives.”

He pinpointed four topics for education:

- Teach 17 year olds who will be 18 on November 4 – an estimated 20,000 teenagers – that they can register now. “That's more people than live in nine tenths of our cities,” Hall said, “but who's going to tell them they can get involved now?”

- Teach students who moved from another community to go to school that they can register in their new community, using their new address.

- Teach students who have a criminal record (from any jurisdiction) that they can vote like any other citizen if they have completed their sentence, including probation.

- Teach students (who are notorious procrastinators) that if they miss the regular deadline to register (Oct. 10), they can go to a One-Stop Early Voting center between October 16 and November 1, show proper ID, register, and vote – all on the same day. Same-day registration and voting is not available on Election Day itself. “Students who live on campus may need help from the school to provide a document with their addresses, which is another reason why the school’s involvement is important,” said Hall.

Democracy North Carolina has been working with election officials in several counties to locate Early Voting sites on or adjacent to college campuses. It has also prepared guides, such as “A High School Student’s Guide to Voting,” and helped administrators coordinate arrangements with election officials so a large group of students going to a voting site can have a positive rather than a frustrating experience.

Colleges that have Early Voting sites on or adjacent to campus – most of them for the first time – include Appalachian State University, Cape Fear Community College (North Campus, Wilmington), Central Piedmont Community College (2 campuses, Charlotte and Huntersville), Duke University, East Carolina University, NC Central University, NC State University, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Charlotte, and Winston-Salem State University.

Election officials are adding more Early Voting sites in anticipation of the expected large turnout this year. North Carolina is typically among the 15 worst states for voter turnout in a presidential election, Hall said.

“Many people, including young folks, will fill out a registration form, but they just don’t make it to the polls,” Hall said. “They need to think of the issues that affect them, like the cost of student loans or equitable funding for schools, and then speak up through their vote.”

The Index shows that young adults who are registering this year are among the most reliable to follow-through by casting a ballot, but the modest rate leaves plenty of room for improvement.

Young voters who registered this year in six large counties where Democracy North Carolina worked to add Early Voting sites in the primary or coordinate rides to those sites for students had a turnout rate in the primary of 40% – almost double the overall rate for that age group.

Students in those six counties (Cumberland, Durham, Forsyth, Rowan, Mecklenburg, and Wake) and in Guilford, Pitt, and several others are planning voter education and mobilization activities.

For example, Democracy North Carolina is helping coordinate an innovative voter education program for the 14 high schools in Cumberland County and a joint project with Generation Engage and administrators at the six-campus complex of Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte/Mecklenburg.

“Research shows that if a young adult doesn’t vote before they reach age 30, they will likely never vote in their lives,” Hall said. “This is the year to help North Carolina turn the corner and prevent another generation from becoming civic dropouts.”

** 167,000 young adults have registered this year, but 77,000 have been removed from the registration rolls because they moved, etc., for a net gain of 90,000.*

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YOUNG VOTERS INDEX

Total number of young adults, age 18 to 25, August 1, 2008: **1.1 million**

Estimated number of young adults with citizenship rights: **875,000**

Number of young adults who are registered, August 1, 2008: **670,000**

Number of young adults not registered as of August 1, 2008: **205,000**

Percent of young adults not registered: **23%**

Number of young adults registered, Jan. 1, 2008: **580,000**

Number of young adults registering from Jan. 1 to August 1: **167,000**

Number of young adults removed from rolls from Jan. 1 to August 1: **77,000**

Net gain in number of young adults registered since Jan. 1, 2008: **90,000**

Number of all registered voters, August 1, 2008: **5.9 million**

Percent of all registered voters who are young adults, August 2008: **11%**

Number of all registered voters, January 1, 2008: **5.6 million**

Percent of all registered voters who are young adults, January 2008: **10%**

Number of young adults registered for May 2008 primary: **637,900**

Number of young adults who voted in May 2008 primary: **134,100**

Percent of registered young adults who voted in 2008 primary: **21%**

Percent of all registered adults who voted in 2008 primary: **37%**

Number of young adults who voted in 2004 primary: **34,000**

Percent of registered young adults who voted in 2004 primary: **7%**

Percent of all registered adults who voted in 2004 primary: **16%**

Number of young adults who registered from Jan. 1 to May 6 in 6 counties: **43,900**

(Cumberland, Durham, Forsyth, Rowan, Mecklenburg, and Wake):

Percent of newly registered young adults in 6 counties who voted in primary: **40%**

Number of young adults who registered Jan. 1 to May 6 in 100 counties: **124,300**

Percent of newly registered young adults in 100 counties voting in primary: **37%**

Number of young adult citizens who have not voted in NC election: **560,000**

Percent of young adult citizens who have not voted in NC election: **64%**

Number of 17 year olds who will be 18 on November 4, 2008: **20,000**

Percent of North Carolina's 550 cities with population below 20,000: **92%**