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Student Voter Registration Day Comes to NYC Schools

Pilot program organized by Council Member Helen Rosenthal and NYC Votes brings civic education and voter registration to 25 schools across all five boroughs

Council Member Helen Rosenthal and NYC Votes (the nonpartisan voter engagement campaign of the New York City Campaign Finance Board and its Voter Assistance Advisory Committee) are leading a coalition of elected officials and voting organizations to hold the first ever Student Voter Registration Day (SVRD) on Friday, March 20, 2015. The pilot program will comprise a day of civic education and voter registration for 17- and 18-year-olds. 15 Council Members and 25 schools across all five boroughs will participate in the day's activities.

SVRD is the product of a partnership between the City Council, led by the office of City Council Member Helen Rosenthal, NYC Votes, the Department of Education, the Board of Elections, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (CSA), voter registration and civic engagement organizations, and school administrators, principals, and teachers.

New York City residents between the ages of 18 and 30 have the lowest voter turnout and are less likely to be registered to vote relative to any other age or socioeconomic group. Currently, 80,000 voter registration forms a year are delivered to high schools across the city, but there is no system of follow-up to

ensure that the forms are filled out correctly by eligible students or mailed to the Board of Elections.

SVRD aims to counter low youth voter turnout by giving students the opportunity to register to vote in the classroom. The pilot program is designed to build upon the great work already happening in NYC schools to educate students about the importance of voting and civic engagement, and to bring that message to more students in multiple schools across the City. For those students who are not eligible to vote, there will also be information about Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The overarching message of the day is that all people – and particularly young people, whether or not they are eligible to vote – can and should be involved in their communities, because politics and elections affect their everyday lives.

The event is scheduled for the third Friday of March to commemorate Democracy Day, when 18-year-olds earned the right to vote on March 23, 1971. This year's events will be held on Friday, March 20, 2015.

“This generation was lucky enough to be born with the right to vote, regardless of race or gender. Our next challenge is to raise awareness of the value of voting and civic participation. Every voice matters, and Student Voter Registration Day gives students the opportunity to understand the impact they can make through civic participation – both in and out of the voting booth,” said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal**.

“Voting is foundational to our democracy and further engaging our students in that process is an invaluable part of their education. We are committed to empowering our young people to participate in our democracy and to deepen their understanding of our civic life. I want to thank the City Council and other partners for their leadership on this important issue,” said **NYC Department of Education Chancellor Carmen Fariña**.

“NYC Votes is always pleased to be able to support and provide assistance to innovative voter-themed programming,” said **Onida Coward Mayers, Director of Voter Assistance, NYC Campaign Finance Board**. “We look forward to co-hosting the first-ever Student Voter Registration Day with NYC Councilmembers and our NYC Votes partners.”

“We’re so excited NYC’s students are getting their very own voter registration day! We need to get more young people on the voting rolls and into the polls. This is a great first step. Voting is a habit. The earlier we get our young people to pick it up the better,” said **Chyann Sapp, Youth Voter Coordinator, NYC Campaign Finance Board**.

“The responsibility to engage our youth in the Democratic process is essential to ensuring that all voices matter and is one the Board is committed to,” said **Michael J. Ryan, Executive Director, NYC Board of Elections.**

“We are proud to take part in a pilot program that not only teaches high school students valuable civic lessons but also enables students to put this knowledge to use by getting eligible students registered to vote,” said **Michael Mulgrew, President, United Federation of Teachers.** “It is a chance to show young people Democracy in action.”

Ernest Logan, President, Council of School Supervisors and Administrators, CSA said: “Democracy Day and the anniversary of the 26th Amendment, which gave 18-year-olds the right to vote in 1971 is celebrated this week. CSA joins with the New York City alliance of advocates to encourage voter registration and civic engagement amongst youth. 12,000 Americans turn 18 each day and it is crucial that young people are inspired to make their voices heard in elections. Student Voter Registration Day will protect voting rights, rally the millennial vote and stimulate a voting process that supports the 21st century electorate.”

“Student Voter Registration Day is a great way to get students involved in the democratic process,” said **City Council Education Committee Chairperson Daniel Dromm.** “Engaging our youth and making sure they have a voice in shaping our city is an important teaching tool for eligible and non-eligible student voters. Bringing the materials needed to register to vote to our schools will eliminate some of the deterrents for our students. I applaud Council Member Rosenthal for advocating for this day.”

“In this, the 50th year since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, which remains under attack, it is more important than ever that our children understand the impact of voting and being civically engaged,” said **Council Member Robert Cornegy.** “Young adults can impact their community by engaging the politics and elections that influence their everyday lives. Student Voter Registration Day provides a way for them to find their voice and influence the change needed to make our democracy even stronger. I am happy to join my colleague, Council Member Helen Rosenthal, NYC Votes, the Department of Education, Dr. John Flateau, and the teachers, principals, and administrators of Boys and Girls High School in getting our youth involved in the democratic process.”

“Civic engagement has no age requirement. It is simply a means for men and women-of all ages-to positively impact their community through collaborative effort. Our public life is poorer for every voice that does not speak and our youth have too often missed opportunities to be heard, even on issues which impact them directly: access to healthcare, financial aid assistance, and the interest rates on their student loans. Student Voter Registration Day lets their voices be heard and is

integral to connecting with the future leaders of our city, state, and federal government,” said **Council Member Laurie A. Cumbo**.

“It is vitally important that young men and women in this country register to vote, because, as research has shown, it is the first step to a lifelong participation in our democracy and toward becoming empowered and engaged citizens,” said **Minority Leader Vincent Ignizio**.

“Registering our High School Seniors before they graduate is one important step we can take to promote a lifetime of voting,” said **Council Member Ben Kallos, Chair of the Governmental Operations Committee with oversight over the Board of Elections**. “Following my years of registering high school seniors throughout the city with the support of the United Federation of Teachers and Council of School Supervisors & Administrators, I am proud to be a part of the expansion of this program into a citywide pilot by the Department of Education with Council Member Helen Rosenthal and the support of the Progressive Caucus.”

“Our youth today have strong voices and opinions. Through Student Voter Registration Day we are encouraging this group of future leaders to learn how to harness the power of expression through voting on our City, state and nation’s legislation. The first step to being heard is registering to vote and we are all proud to be here today to encourage participation in our government,” said **Council Member Mark Levine**.

“We are constantly seeking opportunities to engage our young people and this voter registration drive is a perfect chance. In hosting this drive and promoting civic education, we are addressing our future constituency,” said **Council Member I. Daneek Miller**. “I am proud to partner with Council Member Rosenthal in this effort and thank her for the leadership she has displayed.”

“I am excited to bring Student Voter Registration Day to Grand Street Campus in Williamsburg. I think this is a great opportunity for students to learn about the importance of participating and voting locally. I look forward to continuing and expanding this program in future years as well,” said **Council Member Antonio Reynoso**.

“Martin Luther King aptly stated; ‘Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.’ Today we are reminded that for the next generation of New Yorkers, being silent about voting and remaining civically engaged, is a risk that society cannot afford to take. The Student Voter Registration Day is a critical reminder to students, their teachers and administrations that our voices- exercised through voting matter,” said **Council Member Donovan Richards**.

“This year, we mark the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, a historic piece of legislation that was signed after countless lives were lost in the struggle to expand

access to the polls. A half century later, it saddens me to see so few young people exercising their right to vote, especially when elected officials impact the personal lives of young people by making decisions on issues as far ranging gun violence, health care access, campus sexual assault, education and student debt. The best way to honor the sacrifices of the past and address the pressing needs of our lives and of our communities is to vote. A true, healthy democracy includes the voices of all, and I am proud to join my colleagues in calling on New York City teachers to discuss in the classroom the value of civic engagement and give students the opportunity to register to vote," said **Council Member Debi Rose**.

"As the youngest member of the City Council, I have a unique interest in educating our youth on the importance of voting and civic engagement. I know firsthand that our communities grow stronger when young people vote, get involved in their local community boards, and otherwise participate in the democratic process. I'm thrilled to bring Student Voter Registration Day to my district, and I thank Council Member Rosenthal for her hard work in making this day possible," said **Council Member Ritchie Torres**.

"Helping our youth to understand the importance of voting and civic engagement is paramount," said **Council Member James Vacca**. "We need to increase young people's interest in the politics and elections that have real-life consequences. We can use Student Voter Registration Day to encourage each generation to be engaged, and, in the process, we can strengthen the fundamentals of our democracy."

"Having served on my local Community Board for a few years prior to being elected, I know firsthand how engaging in civic discourse early on can prepare you for a lifetime of opportunities," said **Assemblywoman Nily Rozic (D, WF-Fresh Meadows)**. "Youth civic engagement will only continue to decrease unless we address the heart of the issue and this pilot program does exactly that by focusing on civic education and voter registration. I commend Council Member Rosenthal, NYC Votes, and all of the participating organizations for their leadership on this issue and hope that these efforts will give a stronger voice to our students."

"Over 90% of eligible voters participated in the NYC mayoral election of 1957. In 2013, less than 25% participated. We need to engage young people and foster civic mindedness among them through events like these or we will see that participation continue to slide until democracy is a faint memory," said **Assemblyman Joe Borelli**.

"Citizens Union is excited to take part in Student Voter Registration Day and hopes that this pilot becomes a permanent civics education program in all New York City high schools. By registering students, educating them about the importance of becoming active citizens, and helping them understand how to use their political voice; this program establishes healthy civic habits that will last a life time. We

commend all of the effort that has gone in to making SVRD a reality in our city," states **Dick Dadey, Executive Director, Citizens Union.**

"This crisis of low voter participation calls for all out measures to bring young people into the democratic process," said **Lauren George, Associate Director, Common Cause/NY.** "Student Voter Registration Day is a great way to engage young New Yorkers early on the issues that matter to their lives and communities. We applaud the City Council, Department of Education and Campaign Finance Board for working to make this day happen, and look forward to it growing in years to come."

"Dominicanos USA (DUSA) is thrilled to be a part of Student Voter Registration Day because we understand that initiatives such as this one are central to the development of civic engagement among New York City's youth. As a new organization, we have learned how to educate and mobilize new and young voters that in turn, has resulted in upwards of 40,000 registered voters in less than a year all while empowering the Dominican-American community of New York," said **Eddie Cuesta, New York Director, Dominicanos USA.**

"The habit of voting takes root when students see how government affects them personally, which is the aim of Student Voter Registration Day," said **Linda Donn, Every Vote Counts.**

"Universal education in America was founded with the purpose of creating informed and active citizens in order to guarantee that the people governed themselves. Student Voter Registration Day is an opportunity to revitalize this vision, ensuring that all students are equipped with the motivation and means to drive their own ideal version of their communities. Generation Citizen is relentlessly dedicated to creating space for the youth of today to become the voters, advocates, and activists of tomorrow, and we're proud to contribute to Councilmember Rosenthal's efforts to bring Student Voter Registration Day to fruition," said **Drew Lombardi, Generation Citizen.**

"Since the passage of the 26th Amendment allowing 18 year olds to vote, The League of Women Voters of New York City has reached out to our public high schools in an effort to help 17 and 18 year students register to vote. In addition, we urge all our citizens to engage in our democratically elected institutions and become informed about important issues," said **Mary Jenkins, Co-chair of the Education Committee, League of Women Voters.**

"Student Voter Registration Day (SVRD) presents an important opportunity for eligible New York youth to register to vote and become powerful decision-makers who influence who our leaders will be on the city, state, and national level," said **Steven Choi, Executive Director, New York Immigration Coalition.** "In New York, nearly half of our youth come from immigrant backgrounds; for some of these youth

their vote represents not just themselves but their families who may not be eligible to vote. In addition to getting these youth to register and vote, SVRD also includes resources on immigration relief programs such as DACA and DAPA for students who are not citizens, building a more inclusive youth civic engagement day. This is part of the critical work of building civically-engaged communities and we are proud to support this day."

"As a student-directed organization, NYPIRG is excited to celebrate Student Voter Registration Day. Civic participation is a habit best begun early -- we look forward to registering scores of students to vote, and connecting youth across New York City to democracy," said **Aileen Sheil, Board of Directors Chairperson and Queens College student, New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG).**

"Schools have an important role to play in preparing the next generation of active and engaged citizens. Through the TurboVote program, we work with schools to make electoral participation a default for every student. We are extremely proud to support SVRD this year and are excited continue working with this coalition in the future to help institutionalize voter education in the academic experience," said **Adrienne Lever, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Democracy Works.**

"Student Voter Registration Day is a great initiative being proposed by the office of NYC Council Member Rosenthal. We need more initiatives like this being fostered to draw the attention to the involvement of young adults in the community and local government. If we educate them properly, the youth can play a major role in future state and local elections," said **Wilson Thomas III, Head of Youth Employment, Community Board 13 Youth and Education Committee.**

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