

Issue: Increased Civic Education in Public K-12

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Strategy Chart

1) Describe the Issue (what is the problem & what is the solution).

Students often do not have access to voter registration or civic engagement before they get to college, if they attend. The overall lack in youth voters is often characterized by access, not apathy, when given the tools to become civically engaged many young people do. Research has also proven that the younger someone becomes engaged with the civic process the more likely that they will be engaged for life. K-12 education currently has a bare minimum of civics requirement that does not fully equip people to understand the political systems they operate under. By having more comprehensive civic education in public schools across the state we can mitigate the access problem that is so prevalent among young voters and instead create a culture where civic participation is the norm.

3) Please explain briefly how/if this issue meets the following qualifications:

1. Is it winnable?

Definitely, the legislature has dealt with issues of K-12 education requirements before and regularly complains of the so called apathy of the millennial generation, these two things should make it relatively easy to at least begin discussions around curriculum changes.

2. Does it directly impact and improve students' lives?

Absolutely, by creating this involvement with political systems at a young age we can lay the tracks for not only more regular but better informed voters. The importance of making the state legislative process more accessible is incredibly visible at the college level, college should not be the first time a student interacts with ways to make legislation and legislators more accessible. In addition this ensures that civic education is available to students who may not have access to a college degree, by enfranchising voters at a younger age we allow their needs to be more accurately represented by the legislators they play a part in electing. Therefore an increase in young voters is intrinsically good for higher education because it means legislators will take students our age more seriously.

3. Does it have a clear target?

Yes, but it may vary throughout the session as we move from targeting a legislator to sponsor a bill, to the committee it will go to and then to the opposition it may face once it gets there.

4. Does it have a clear and realistic time frame?

Yes, so long as we can get a legislator on board we can begin work on language soon and could potentially have a viable bill to be dropped this session.

5. Does it have a state organizing and lobbying angle?

Yes, the legislature regulates what is taught in K-12 schools across the state, this is therefore the most effective place to push for this change right now. It also allows for more outreach to allies in high school programs and could be a way to bring all of Washington State's education components together in support of legislation.

6. Could students build a diverse campus coalition around this issue?

Yes. This is an issue that affects all students, and has the opportunity to educate high school students in our state to better prepare them for civic involvement. We also have potential to ally with different state-wide teacher unions like American Federation of Teachers or the Washington Education Association, these coalitions can be very meaningful and help us to build collective power in Olympia.

7. Is it likely to be debated and acted upon by the Legislature in the next year?

Mandating civic education in classrooms is a longer conversation that won't necessarily be something that is acted upon within a year, but a policy year right before campaign season is a good time to bring up the issue. It has previously received bipartisan support so there is a chance that it will be a big issue this year.

8. Will it strengthen and expand efforts within Western?

This proposal allows us to align ourselves with some incredible actors at the state level. Beyond that it places college students in the context of our experience, we know what we didn't learn and want to advocate to make sure that other students receive more training than we did. It also shows the legislature that we are working on efforts that don't just benefit higher education students and can increase our presence as a force for good in Olympia.

9. Can you provide background information and the current context of the issue?

The conversation around millennial voter turnout is quick to put the blame on the young adult and not the system that actively disenfranchises them. This marginalization is perpetuated for people of color, queer identified individuals, people with disabilities, and others that the current system actively disenfranchises or creates additional barriers for.

10. What creative and/or innovative tactics could we employ to engage the media and excite new students around this issue?

Just collaborating with local high schools would be an incredible amount of outreach to students- working with high schoolers on this issue will not only help to show our power but will also help to prove our argument of access over apathy.