

## Issue: Civic Participation

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 is when they become 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. 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 public school programs across the spectrum of education. This could be a way to bring all of Washington State's education components together in support of legislation. Specifics around the goals of democratic/civic education should include:

- 1) students considering social issues in relationship to the public good,
- 2) students using democratic decision-making processes in the classroom,
- 3) teachers embedding content in critical thinking about real issues,
- 4) teachers engaging students in multiple perspectives and multiple funds of knowledge,
- 5) schools affording all students access to high-quality education, and
- 6) students' cultural and linguistic identities being supported and viewed as legitimate aspects of citizenship" (Christine E. Sleeter, 2008).

From these practices and the existing graduation requirements, schools ought to equip students with the ability to:

- 1) Identify the districts they live in and which elected officials represent them
- 2) Understand which level of government (city, county, state) handle various issues and resources
- 3) Access the mechanisms of decision making that operate at each local level of government
- 4) Understand impacts of grassroots organizing
- 5) Identify how to demand transparency from elected officials as well as hold elected officials accountable for their actions

More comprehensive civic education in public schools across the state can mitigate the access problem that is so prevalent among young voters and instead create a culture where civic participation is the norm. Cultivation of involvement with political systems can lay the tracks not only for more regular voters, 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. 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 for whom the current system creates barriers or actively disenfranchises. In addition, increasing civic education ensures that this knowledge 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.

This is an issue that affects all students, and has the opportunity to educate students throughout the K-12 system 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.

In order to organize around this issue, students on our campus might collaborate with local high schools in order to find out what students are currently learning and how to be more effective when working with high schoolers on this issue. This will not only help to show our power but will also help to prove our argument of access over apathy.