

I am Sean Waddington and I'm a recent Fairport High School graduate attending Boston University in the fall to study Political Science. It comes as no surprise that I enjoy all things voting and in the summer of 2020 I began to act on that passion. I gave my time to the upcoming election on the local scale and absolutely loved it. I handed out literature at farmers markets, went to new neighborhoods to deliver door hangers, and spent hours phone banking. What felt the most gratifying, however, was having an acquaintance lean over to me in 6th period English to tell *me* he voted for the candidate I campaigned for. 6 months later was the Fairport Board of Education Election and after participating in a "Meet the Candidates" forum with my peers, we decided we had to take what we saw and deliver certain results on Election Day. I was so happy to see my friends filling up cars during their free periods and heading to the Middle School to vote. Again, I relished hearing someone say that seeing our social media posts convinced them to vote for the first time.

As an engaged teen I was thrilled to see New York's pre registration law passed. I filled out my application, printed it, and mailed it in. Of course, not every young person in this state did as I did and it's not because of apathy, but rather a lack of awareness. Generation Z has been on the frontlines of protests in our cities, small towns, and online, but lack the know-how and possibly the will to engage the system before turning 18 has prevented many from taking advantage of this policy. It is one thing to pass a positive, progressive law seeking to engage young people, and another to meet us where we are and take advantage of the law's purpose. It was my experience campaigning that utilizing my own Instagram reached my peers. They saw me repost campaign posts or infographics and read information regarding the candidates positions for the Board of Education. While I like to think I'm persuasive, the effect I actually had was getting my friends and classmates to simply become aware, ask themselves questions, and seek answers to those questions to come to a conclusion on their own. There's an opportunity here for New York to excite an important portion of its electorate. Every few videos on tik tok, millions of people as young as 13 view ads for products marketed to our age. During the pandemic we saw ads funded by the government to promote social distancing, staying at home, and - more recently - getting vaccinated. I believe New York State would be successful in promoting voter pre-registration on social media platforms like Tik Tok, Instagram, and Snapchat. Again, it isn't that young people don't want to be engaged, but we are truthfully too busy at times to navigate websites or call the Board of Elections. We are instead interacting with agencies like New York State Higher Education Services Corporation. While some students qualify for TAP assistance, others - like myself - were required by colleges to fill out and send the TAP application to demonstrate our financial need. The State Senate could find ways to integrate registering or pre registering to vote into applications and agencies like these as more people are going to college now than other generations.

New York state also has laws that allow for students to be engaged in the election system. In taking advantage of these laws, it has been my experience at Fairport High School to vote in student council elections with older voting machines, as well as have nonpartisan agencies come to school and attempt to register high schoolers. However, the degree to which a student engages in opportunities like this is entirely dependent on factors from their busy schedule to their mood. Every high school has stacks of working permits ready to be filled out by students. New York State could make this same effort with voter registration forms and voting informed educational material to engage young people all year long. Every student has to take a

politics and Economics class. Could the State Senate make available the funding to give every social studies teacher the physical materials needed to register, pre register, or inform all of their students on this process?

I discuss pre-registration as a focus to minimize young people running out the clock on registering to vote. New York State lacks same day voter registration, so it is entirely possible for a newly 18 year old to push registering to vote long enough to the point where they miss a deadline. I had a friend nearly as engaged in politics as I am and despite it being at the top of her “to-do after turning 18 list”, she pushed off registering to vote for a couple months. Young people have so many things swirling around us vying for our attention. Teachers, colleges, counselors, extracurriculars, and social media take up so much of our time that sometimes unless it's in front of us, we may not do something. Similarly, you may have noticed that I am moving to Boston. I will be in class 5 and a half hours away on election day Tuesday November 2nd this year. I would like to point out how surprisingly difficult it actually was to decipher what day the election was. By no fault of anyone in particular, the 2021 Political Calendar is rather dense with various deadlines and important dates. I am registered, I am engaged, and I am also confused. I know there are forms I have to fill out and dates to be aware of to vote in the next election, but I am also completing online orientation, registering for classes, creating shopping lists, and wrapping my head around the fact that I am heading to a different state. As important as it is to me, voting has had to be put on the back burner and yet I cannot wait too long or I will miss my chance. The State Senate can use a myriad of methods to help students navigate the absentee process. With social media, linking complex information to clear concise advertisements has never been easier. New York's Instagram and Facebook pages can post graphics to teach students to vote absentee. I also remind you to look at the classroom and place literature there. Can the State Senate give the funding or resources needed to educate students on how to vote absentee? The right to vote is fundamental and young people are craving change, but there is so much noise in our lives. We would appreciate help in navigating the system. New York is better than many states in terms of the laws it has passed that seek to engage young people. These policies require following up, however, to meet young people where they are in some of the busiest times of our lives. People ages 16 to 24 are demanding change in volumes unlike our parents and we acknowledge the ballot box is where that takes place. We need clarity on how to get there and increased exposure to the process.