

Democracy Doesn't Start at 18: Empowering a New Generation of Civic Leaders

Democracy doesn't start at 18. It begins the moment a young person realizes their voice matters. We must teach every child how to protect their rights, challenge power, and participate with pride in the greatest democratic project the world has ever known. American Exceptionalism isn't inherited—it's built generation by generation. Our Republic faces a critical challenge: ensuring every citizen is an active, informed participant in our democracy. This isn't just about casting a vote; it's about understanding how power works, how to influence it with purpose, and how to safeguard our shared future. We need to cultivate an engaged electorate from adolescence onward, building their resistance to manipulation and reclaiming American democracy as an accessible birthright for every generation. This platform lays out a clear vision to achieve these goals, empowering young people to become the civic leaders our nation needs.

Lowering the Voting Age and Streamlining Registration:

We believe that if young people are old enough to work, pay taxes, and serve our country by being vital contributors to their communities, they are old enough to have a say in its governance. We will propose federal legislation to lower the voting age for all federal elections. To encourage state alignment, we will offer incentives for states to adopt similar policies for local elections. Evidence from other nations clearly shows that earlier voting increases lifelong civic participation building habits of engagement that last a lifetime.

Automatic Voter Pre-Registration in Grade 9 (Age 14). To integrate civic action directly into education, we will implement automatic voter pre-registration for all students at age 14 upon entering high school. Their registration will then automatically activate at age 16, tying this crucial civic step directly to their educational journey and hands-on learning experiences.

Universal Civic Literacy and Hands-On Engagement

A strong democracy requires informed citizens. We must equip every student with the knowledge and practical skills to navigate and influence our complex world.

Universal Civic Literacy Curriculum (Grades 4–12). We will establish a comprehensive, yearly civics curriculum that moves beyond basic government structures. This curriculum will cover: The foundations of our government and the Constitution; the illustrious history of labor movements and social justice efforts; practical skills in writing policy, organizing campaigns, and effective advocacy; advanced media literacy and critical analysis of interest-based power structures, teaching students how to both support and challenge organized interests effectively.

Civic Simulation Labs in Every High School. Learning comes alive through experience. We will fund “Democracy Labs” in every high school, providing hands-on opportunities for students to participate in mock elections, engage in legislative debates, and present

their policy ideas directly to real public officials. These labs will turn abstract concepts into tangible experiences.

Civic Service and Inclusive Design

Empowering young people also means providing pathways for direct service and ensuring our democratic tools are accessible to everyone.

Civic Service and Paid Internships. We'll create meaningful, paid civic internships for 16–18-year-olds, offering them direct experience in government, non-profits, and community organizing. For recent high school graduates, we will launch a “Civic Service Year” program, providing opportunities to serve our communities while earning college credit or relief from student debt. This initiative will foster a generation committed to public service.

Inclusive by Design. A democracy that isn't accessible isn't a democracy at all. We are committed to ensuring all civics materials and civic engagement opportunities are fully accessible to students with disabilities. This includes screen-reader compatibility for digital resources, adaptive models for debate and discussion, and thoughtful design that removes barriers to participation for every student.