

Submitter: Aishiki Nag
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure: HB3206

When reviewing footage for the TTSD Interim Committee to fill a vacant board position, all interviewees were asked one question; who is the school board ultimately serving? Nearly all of the applicants had answered that the school board ultimately served the parents, citing concerns that had seemed foreign to enrolled students within the district. One of the interviewees had gone as far as referring to students as “cockroaches”.

When it comes to lowering the voting age for school board elections, it would force those applying for school board positions to mold their policy strategies to match those of the district they are serving. It would force those who are running to actually serve the students, and those in the community, not just potential voters. It would create accountability within the school system to ensure that we have a representative system.

I have personally been advocating for this bill for the last two years, and during that time I have had the chance to learn more about the specifics. One of the most popular counterarguments for this bill is the lack of brain development; however, there has been evidence that has proven it wrong. From my experience in psychology, I have learned that there are different aspects of cognition that are developed at different stages in a person's adolescence. The part of a person's brain that is responsible for making decisions under low-pressure situations whilst processing information is known as “cold cognition”, and that is developed by age 16. Decision-making skills have already been developed and are an essential part of a teenager's day-to-day life. By the time a student is a junior in high school, we are asked to know what we want to do for the next 40 years of our professional lives, something that is monumentally more difficult than researching and reading background information on candidates and voting.

When researching opposition to this bill for this specific cycle, there has been a surge of comments attacking the educational abilities of students themselves. Due to the educational standards, students are actually thought about civics and government interwoven within other humanities classes, such as history. As a current student, I have also gone through a government and economics class, which is required for graduation in my district, and in growing districts around the state. However, on a more important note, education level has never been used as a requirement when establishing who is eligible for voting. It has been deemed unconstitutional for that matter.

16 and 17-year-olds are already pre-registered to vote due to Oregon's pre-registration program, with over 190 thousand students eligible. By allowing students to participate in school board elections we are also conditioning lifelong civic habits, which will stick with students no matter where they end up. At 18 there are a remarkable amount of huge life changes and new stressors which might detract from someone's willingness to vote, however, data has shown from places where they have lowered the voting age to 16, that 16-year-old voters vote at a higher percentage than first-time voters.

But personally, I have been able to talk to my peers and listen to their struggles and problems with the current system, and their frustrations that have never been addressed formally. As the main population living through the decisions of school districts, it's important that we have a formal representation of who can make these decisions in the first place. It gives us a seat at the table of what our educational futures look like.