

Submitter: Matthew McNatt
On Behalf Of:
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Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3012

Letting an extraordinary 14, 15, 16, or 17 year-old serve on a city council, if s/he can gain the support of enough adult voters? I'm all for it! Thanks in part to my efforts, Oakridge, Oregon, became the first city in Oregon to allow this. But letting ordinary 16 or 17 year-olds vote in school board elections? Please, no! Minimum voting ages are set based on the average voter's competency at that age, and the average 16 or 17 year-old is still too capricious to be trusted with the same kind of vote as parents and local local employers, who have a stake in how schools operate and who bring a maturity to the voting process that too many 16 and 17 year-olds still lack. Under Oregon law, 16 and 17 year-olds are not old enough to buy cigarettes; to consent to sex; to purchase or carry a handgun, shotgun, or rifle; or to serve in the Oregon Civil Defense Force. ORS 109.510 even recognizes the average 16 and 17 year-old's caprice by acknowledging 16 and 17 year-olds' right to void any contract they enter into that is not for necessities.

If students really want representation on their school boards, why not campaign for a student seat on their local school board via a referendum in their municipality? Students could attempt to secure a non-voting seat as a trial run, helping adults to get comfortable (or not) with a student representative's presence on the board. If that experiment is successful, students could attempt to secure a voting seat via the same referendum process. An election for a student representative could be conducted in the school itself, and ballots could be hand-counted. This would be far less costly to counties, and it would not dilute the votes of adults who, again, have both a stake in the performance of local schools and the maturity to evaluate candidates for school board elections.