



New York State  
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity

# 2019-2020

## Civic Engagement Activities Guide



## **Overview**

Beginning in the 2019-20 school year, all Comprehensive Support and Improvement schools will be required to implement CSI Engagement Options.

This option requires schools to host two events with elected officials in the school community that students and parents are invited to attend. High Schools pursuing this option are also required to conduct a voter registration drive.

## **Purpose**

This guidebook will provide specific information on how to plan, organize and implement school civic engagement activities.

## **Coordination of Activities**

The school will need one person to coordinate the activities. This person will be responsible for coordinating and hosting no less than two events per school year.

- For elementary and middle schools, two Civic Engagement Events with Elected Officials.
- For high schools, two Civic Engagement Events with Elected Officials and one Voter Registration event.

## **Civic Engagement Event Expectations**

- The purpose of the events with elected officials is to promote an exchange of ideas between students and families and local decision makers.
- The event should be approximately 60 minutes long.
- The events with the elected officials should be organized so that the elected officials and the students and families in the audience are able to ask questions of one another.
- The school is able to bring any elected official to the event. The school is only able to use the same elected official for both events if the events are several months apart and the return visit is used as an opportunity to learn if circumstances and perceptions have changed since the previous visit as a result of things learned.
- The coordinator at the school will serve a crucial role in making sure that the elected official(s) are aware of these expectations and encouraging the elected official to come prepared with questions to ask the audience.
- The coordinator at the school will also need to moderate the discussion and ensure that the exchange of ideas is civil and productive. The coordinator should be aware of potential “hot-button” issues and approach any such issue delicately.

## **Civic Engagement Event Steps**

### **Prior to the Event**

- Identify a coordinator for the Civic Engagement events.
- The coordinator and the principal should identify an ideal time to host an elected official and identify potential elected officials to invite.
- Identify if the event will be around a specific topic or a general discussion.
- Invite an elected official.
  - Share with the elected official the purpose of the event and that he/she will have an opportunity to ask the audience questions.
  - Emphasize that this is intended to be an exchange of ideas and that the students and families will be asking questions of the elected official.

- Share that the elected official will begin the discussion by providing an outline of his or her responsibilities and the types of decisions he or she makes as part of those responsibilities.
- Once the event is confirmed, share the details with the school community.
- Identify a way to have the audience, especially students, prepare questions.
- Promote the event with students and families.
- Discuss the event with staff and consider any ways the event may connect to the curriculum.
- Identify individuals that can assist on the day of the event.

#### Day of the Event

- Ensure that seating is available for all attendees.
- Ensure that there is adequate signage to direct attendees.
- Use individuals assisting with the event to help usher attendees to their seats.
- Ensure that all A/V needs are in place, including microphones to be used by the official and members of the audience.
- Greet the elected official upon arrival.
- Introduce the elected official and outline the goals of the discussion.
- Ensure that the exchange of ideas remains productive throughout the hour discussion.
- Thank everyone for their attendance.

#### Following the Event

- Have students/attendees send thank you notes to the elected official.

## **Voter Registration Expectations**

- Any school serving 12<sup>th</sup> grade students completing this option must also host a voter registration drive over the course of several days.
- The voter registration drive must be organized in a manner that is consistent with school policies and all local, state, and federal laws.
- Students must not be required to register to vote. Registering must be optional.
- Under no circumstances should anyone from the school inquire about the citizenship status of any student to learn if the student is eligible to vote.
- Students that complete a voter registration form will be offering personal information on the form, such as their address or their party affiliation. Schools must ensure that the information on the form is kept private and confidential.
- To submit a voter registration, one must be turning 18 before the end of the current calendar year (December 31<sup>st</sup>). For this reason, the Voter Registration drive should occur after January 1 so that all who turn 18 during the calendar year would be old enough to register.
- The voter registration drive should occur early enough in the calendar year after January 1<sup>st</sup> to ensure that students interested in voting in primary elections will be registered in time to do so.

## **Qualifications to Register to Vote**

- be a United States citizen;
- be 18 years old by December 31 of the year in which you file this form (note: you must be 18 years old by the date of the general, primary or other election in which you want to vote);
- resident of this state and the county, city or village for at least 30 days before the election;
- not be in prison or on parole for a felony conviction (unless parolee pardoned or restored rights of citizenship);
- not be adjudged mentally incompetent by a court;
- not claim the right to vote elsewhere

## **Voter Registration Steps**

- Identify an individual or group of individuals that can organize the voter registration drive. This could be organized by a school club, provided the faculty advisor takes an active role in ensuring that the provisions identified earlier are met.
- Coordinate the schedule and location of the event.
  - The event should occur between January 1 and May to provide the opportunity for students to register in time for any upcoming primary election.
  - The event should occur in a visible location within the school building, such as the cafeteria.
- Identify volunteers that can assist with the event and handle specific tasks that does not compromise the privacy of any student.
- Promote the event throughout the school building.
- Make clear to students the requirements to be eligible to vote.
- Ensure that there are a sufficient number of voter registration forms.
- Ensure that the registration process is voluntary and that there is nothing that would single out a student or punish a student for not registering to vote.
- Provide a means for ensuring that information provided on completed voter registration forms remains private.
- Submit completed voter registration forms to the appropriate authority in a timely manner.

## **Helpful Voting Resources**

### **New York State Board of Elections**

<https://www.elections.ny.gov/VotingRegister.html>

### **League of Women Voters**

<https://www.vote411.org/>

## Appendix D: Frequently Asked Questions for Student Civic Engagement Activities

### **1. Does the elected official have to be from a certain office or of a certain status?**

No. The school can use its discretion to determine the most appropriate elected official to invite.

### **2. Should the events take place during school day hours or after school day hours?**

It is at the discretion of each school to determine the best times that are most convenient for students and their families. Additionally, when coordinating events that require volunteers, consider the time of the day and the amount of time that is being asked of the volunteers.

### **3. Can we have two elected officials come on one night to fulfil the requirements?**

No, the events must be separate. This will allow those unable to attend during one scheduled event the opportunity to attend the other event.

### **4. Would staff be compensated for work outside of their contractual hours?**

Schools should abide by its local collective bargaining agreements pertaining to compensation outside of contractual hours. The school would have the ability to use its school improvement funds to compensate an assigned staff member if desired.

### **5. If our school already does voter registration through another means, must the school implement the voter registration drive as outlined in this document?**

If the school already has a means of providing students with the opportunity to register to vote, it can continue with those methods.

### **6. If our school registers all of the eligible 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in the first day of the voter registration drive, must we keep the drive open for more days?**

No. If the school is confident that it has already registered every eligible student, the school can opt to end the drive early.

### **7. We have some 11<sup>th</sup> grade students that will be 18 before the November election. Should they be allowed to register, or are only 12<sup>th</sup> grade students allowed to register?**

The schools should encourage any student that will be at least 18 by the end of the calendar year to register to vote, regardless of the grade level of that student.

### **8. Can we hand out rewards for students that register to vote to increase participation?**

No. Schools should be sensitive that not all students may meet the eligibility criteria to vote, and therefore the school should not do anything to reward students that do register to vote.