

Since the passage of the Florida Voter's Registration Act in 1994, registration numbers have increased. The legislation implemented the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, called the *Motor Voter* law because it allows people to register to vote at the same time they apply for a driver's license.

A person must be 18 to register to vote in Florida, but pre-registration is allowed at age 17. A person who is otherwise qualified may pre-register on or after that person's 17th birthday and may vote in any election occurring on or after his or her 18th birthday.

Voter Education Efforts

The Secretary of State is responsible for providing technical assistance to the supervisors of elections on voter education and providing voter education assistance to the public. As a part of its election reform package, the 2001 Legislature made revisions to the voter education provisions. Current law now requires the adoption of administrative rules by the Department of State that prescribe minimum standards for nonpartisan voter education. The standards must include the following subjects:

- voter registration;
- balloting procedures, absentee and polling place;
- voter rights and responsibilities;
- distribution of sample ballots; and
- public service announcements.

County supervisors are charged with the responsibility for implementing the minimum voter education standards and conducting additional nonpartisan education efforts to ensure that voters have a working knowledge of the voting process. Existing administrative rules require the supervisors to conduct a high school voter registration/education program at least once a year in each public high school in the county.¹ The program must be developed in cooperation with the local school board. County efforts to implement this requirement are detailed in the recent report by the Department of State.²

Current law (ss. 1003.42 and s. 1003.43, F.S.) sets forth the required courses of study for high school graduation and appropriate instruction designed to ensure that students meet State Board of Education standards in specific subject areas. While these provisions contain requirements for social studies, American government, and Florida government, they do not specifically require voter education.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1. The bill requires district school boards and county supervisors of elections to cooperate in conducting voter education to high-school students who are in grade 12. The voter education must be in the form of a mandatory presentation to public high school students and a voluntary presentation to private high school students.

¹ Rule 1S-2.033(3), F.A.C.

² Florida Department of State, Division of Elections, *Report on Voter Education Programs During the 2002 Election Cycle, Pursuant to s. 98.255(3), F.S.*, January 31, 2003.

Supervisors of elections must conduct the presentation at public high schools and, upon request, at private high schools. The content must include the following:

- how to register to vote and pre-register;
- the operation of new electronic voting machines;
- how, when, and where to vote;
- the importance of voting;
- how to vote by way of absentee ballot;
- how to work at a poll on election day; and
- how to sign up to run for elected office.

The supervisors must also provide voting equipment for the program.

The voter education program must:

- provide students with the opportunity and sufficient time and information to submit voter registration applications to the supervisor of elections;
- be conducted during school hours each term of the school year, as determined by local school board policy; and
- be provided to students enrolled in a magnet program.

The bill prohibits the exclusion of a student from the program due to his or her irregular class schedule.

Section 2. School districts, as a part of the program for grade 12 students, may make arrangements with the supervisors of elections to use county voting equipment in high school student elections. This may be done if there is no conflict with another scheduled election, as determined by the supervisors of elections.

Section 3. The effective date of the bill is July 1, 2003.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The program is voluntary for private school students.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill codifies a part of current administrative rule for voter education for public high school students.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
