Should 16 years be allowed to vote?

For a handout to provide students to supplement this lesson, click here.

Should students have a say in how their lives are impacted by political representatives? How about at the local level, including school decision-making that affects student lives? This lesson looks at the roles and responsibilities of local school boards and encourages debate on whether sixteen year olds should be able to vote in these elections or other elections.

Subjects

History, U.S. Government, Civics

Grades: 9-12

Time needed: 50 minutes with extension ideas

Objective:

1. Students will be able to explain the roles of the school board and consider whether students should be eligible to vote for school board members.
2. Students will be able to debate both sides of the debate as to whether sixteen years should vote on local issues.

Lesson:

1. *Warm up:* Discussion question—What does a school board do?
2. *Main activity:*
    1. Read this **article** about what school board members do and how those roles have been impacted by the pandemic and calls for social reform.
    2. Discussion question— Should students have a say in their local school boards? Why or why not?
    3. Watch PBS NewsHour **video** on the topic
    4. This next part can be done in small groups or individually, and focuses on the broader question of whether or not the voting age should be lowered.
        1. Have students read these two guides—
            - This **one** argues 16 years should be able to vote.
            - This **one** argues three pros and three cons of student voting.
    5. Have students finish the handout by having students pick the top three reasons for both sides and then write their own opinion.
    6. If time permits, students can share in small groups, as a class or have a class vote about whether or not students should vote in local elections, including school boards.

Extension:

If ninety minutes are available, or if you want to make this a multiple day lesson:

1. Set up a class debate. Students can have more time to research, write down their side, and argue in class.
2. Assign an argumentative essay.
3. Assign a research project: Have students research the debate about lowering the age from 21 to 18, ending in the 26th amendment.

Resources:

More cities consider lowering the voting age to 16-
https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/two-california-cities-consider-letting-16-year-olds-vote-in-local-elections/2020/10/30/608dadd4-0e58-11eb-8a35-237ef1eb2ef7_story.html

Voting for School Board Members-
https://www.teachforamerica.org/stories/voting-for-school-board-members-matters-too

Top 10 reasons 16 years should vote by National Youth Rights Association-
https://www.youthrights.org/issues/voting-age/top-ten-reasons-to-lower-the-voting-age/

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9
Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.