

**State of New Jersey
Department of the Public Advocate
240 W. State St.
Trenton, NJ 08625**

Jon S. Corzine
Governor

Ronald K. Chen
Public Advocate

For Immediate Release:
October 3, 2008

Contact:
Laurie Brewer
609-826-5054
609-417-0038

NJ Public Advocate and Education Commissioner urge school districts to register young voters

TRENTON – New Jersey Public Advocate Ronald K. Chen and state Education Commissioner Lucille Davy today urged high school educators to take advantage of the enthusiasm generated by the upcoming Presidential campaign and set aside time to discuss the importance of voting and to register young voters.

[View Public Advocate's Guide for Implementing the "High School Voter Registration Law"](#)

Noting that about 20,000 to 30,000 of the state's approximately 400,000 high school students either are or will turn 18 in time to vote for the upcoming Nov. 4 election, Davy said high school teachers and principals have a unique opportunity this year to incorporate discussions about the importance of voting into their curriculum and to register new voters.

The deadline for registering voters for the upcoming Presidential election is Oct. 14.

Chen, who has made voting rights a cornerstone of his tenure of as Public Advocate, commended recent efforts by the state Department of Education to urge administrators to make voter registration opportunities available to students.

“Commissioner Davy has made a strong commitment to reaching out to districts to make sure they are aware of their legal responsibility to provide voter registration forms to all eligible high school students as required under state law,” said Chen,

noting that he and Davy met jointly with county superintendents this summer and that DOE has contacted every public school district with instructions on how to meet this legal mandate.

Specifically, the 1985 law mandates the distribution of voter registration materials and instructional materials “describing the role of a citizen and the importance of voting,” said Chen. The law also applies to private and charter schools with students eligible to vote.

“Working together, I think we can make great strides helping our youth understand and exercise their rights as citizens to participate fully in the democratic process,” said Davy.

During the meeting with superintendents, Chen noted that New Jersey schools have not consistently provided voter registration opportunities to students. He offered the superintendents ideas on how they can meet the law’s requirements.

Specifically, Chen suggested that administrators focus their voter registration efforts in time for the registration deadline for the November general election and again late in the school year, when a greater number of high school seniors will be turning 18. Further, Chen suggested that at least one class period be devoted to a discussion of voting rights during each registration drive.

While it is difficult to obtain exact figures, research collected by the Department of the Public Advocate indicates substantial noncompliance with the high school voter registration law, said Chen.

According to a study that was conducted in 2004 by the New Jersey Center for Civic & Law-Related Education and the Eagleton Institute, only 40 percent of the 189 New Jersey school districts surveyed actually ran a voter registration program.

In Spring 2007, the Department conducted its own survey of teachers, education coordinators, superintendents, high school class presidents and principals in public and non-public schools. That random survey showed only a 44 percent rate of compliance with the law’s mandate to distribute both voter registration forms and educational materials.

U.S. Census Bureau statistics support these figures. Of 18 states that encourage high school voter registration, New Jersey’s voter registration rate for people aged 18-24 ranks a disappointing 13th.

All citizens can obtain voter registration forms on the state Division of Elections' website (www.state.nj.us/state/elections) or from county Boards of Election, Motor Vehicle Commission agencies, and a variety of other government offices.

For more information regarding the Public Advocate's voting rights activities, [click here](#) or visit www.njpublicadvocate.gov and click on "voters' rights" on the top right hand corner.