

ASIAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND

BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE

CITIZENS UNION

DEMOS

NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP

WOMEN'S CITY CLUB

April 16, 2012

Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott
NYC Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Walcott:

Our organizations write to inquire as to how the Department of Education plans to implement the Young Adult Voter Registration Act (YARVA) this year.

The City Council passed and Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed "The Young Adult Voter Registration Act"¹ on July 12th, 2004 in an attempt to enhance the participation of young people in the democratic process. The legislation requires the New York City Department of Education to provide voter registration forms to every senior graduating from New York City high schools as part of graduation proceedings and to provide these same forms at the central office of every high school in the city.

In 2005, in testimony before the City Council, former Chancellor Joel Klein stated that the Department was planning to implement YARVA in several ways. Contact persons in every school were identified for the receipt of voter registration materials from the City Board of Elections, which would coordinate delivery with the Division of Teaching and Learning and Office of Youth Development. Notification was further provided in Principals' Weekly. The Office of Secondary Schools was charged with both conducting spot checks of city high schools and requiring every high school principal to complete a letter of assurance that the initiative has been completed on a school-level. A letter was sent to every graduating senior encouraging them to both return their registration cards and to be civically engaged. We inquire as to whether the department is still pursuing these policies or adopting any new policies to comply with YARVA in preparation for both graduation and the upcoming presidential election.

YARVA aims to increase civic engagement, which is paramount to both education and a democratic society. Its role in advancing civic engagement is essential every year but

¹ <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=441698&GUID=C38890D4-E9A0-460A-86A1-ED38D8D08178&Options=ID%7cText%7c&Search=Young+Adult+Voter+Registration+Act>

even more so in this presidential election year, which provides an opportunity to inculcate the practice of voting among graduating and other eligible students.

We look forward to hearing about how the Department plans on fulfilling YARVA as seniors graduate this June and during the beginning of the school year just before the presidential election. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Department to discuss this initiative. If the Department is interested in doing so, please contact Alex Camarda, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy at Citizens Union at 212-227-0342 ext 24.

Sincerely,

Larry Norden
Brennan Center for Justice

Steve Carbo
Demos

Margaret Fung
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Dick Dadey
Citizens Union

Neal Rosenstein
New York Public Interest Research Group

Ruth E. Acker
Women's City Club

CC:

Frank Barry, Mayor Michael Bloomberg
Eric Munson, Mayor Michael Bloomberg
Lenny Speiller, New York City Department of Education
Dawn Sandow, Board of Elections of the City of New York
Steve Richman, Board of Elections of the City of New York
Councilmember Robert Jackson, New York City Council
Councilmember Gale Brewer, New York City Council
Rob Newman, New York City Council
Alix Pustilnik, New York City Council
Seth Grossman, New York City Council