

Voter registration at Atlantic City school coincides with state effort

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ATLANTIC CITY — During a break in Atlantic City High School seniors' day on Tuesday, many took the next simple step in civic engagement: They registered to vote.

As part of a movement around the state and country, the high school and the city chapter of the NAACP brought representatives from the Atlantic County Superintendent of Elections to pass around voter registration forms and get students familiar with the voting process.

"How do you make sure somebody that reflects your views is in office to make decisions you would want to benefit you?" Charles Goodman, who led the event on behalf of the local NAACP chapter, asked the room full of students. "By voting."

Goodman approached the high school about this effort to encourage participation and to familiarize students with a process that they might not have seen before, he said. In its second year, it provides an opportunity to spur youth civic engagement on a local, state and national level, he said, referencing political engagement from students in Parkland, Florida.

Derrick Horn, 19, president of the 2019 class, told his classmates Tuesday that being able to register to vote is one way to elect leaders you support and take part in a process that has a long history to it. His father had encouraged him to be an active voter by explaining who fought for the rights to vote, he said.

"You may think that your voice doesn't matter, but I'm here to tell you that it does," Horn said.

Earlier this month, Gov. Phil Murphy signed legislation to expand voter registration in the state.

The legislation requires the Motor Vehicle Commission to automatically register people who are eligible to vote if they are applying for a permit, license or identification card, unless the applicant declines registration, according to a statement from the governor's office.

"In New Jersey, we recognize our democracy is stronger when more people are given the opportunity to participate and when the residents of our state are empowered to be part of the democratic process," Murphy said in a statement.

Joanna Thomas, director of outreach for the Superintendent of Elections, went over with the students how to fill out the voter registration form and had a voting machine on display to show how it operates.

The outreach department participates in this effort to make voter registration less intimidating and more convenient by visiting schools and participating in community events, said Maureen G. Bugdon, Atlantic County Superintendent of Elections. The event registered about 165 high school students on Tuesday.

"You may not feel like it's important," said Sheree Alexander, assistant principal at the high school. "But it is imperative that you make important choices, because what's going on right now in our community and our society is directly impacting and affecting you."