

# **NASS IDEAS Award Application**

## **State of West Virginia**

### **Nomination Submitted by:**

Mac Warner  
WV Secretary of State

### **Program Title:**

WV Secretary of State's High School Civic Engagement Strategy:  
The Honorary Secretary of State Program (2017) &  
The Jennings Randolph Award

### **Project Leads:**

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### **Brief Description of Program:**

**An affordable, manageable, easy to duplicate, fun and effective annual civic engagement strategy to register high school students to vote; To annually commemorate the passage of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment; To promote voter involvement; and To educate students on the duties and responsibilities of the Secretary of State.**

### **General Subject Area of Nomination:**

Elections & Voter Registration

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On March 23, 1971, the United States Congress passed the 26th Amendment to the Constitution, giving 18, 19 and 20-year olds the right to vote. After ratification by a majority of the states, the Amendment became law on July 5, 1971.

The late United States Senator Jennings Randolph of West Virginia was the sponsor of the Amendment. He first introduced the Amendment in 1942 during World War II. Senator Randolph was persistent in his pursuit to give young Americans sent into battle the right to vote. He finally captured the congressional support he needed to pass the Amendment during the height of the Vietnam War.

In 1992, the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office developed a program to recognize high schools who were successful in encouraging their students to register to vote. The program was initiated to compliment high school history and civics curriculum. The prestigious Jennings Randolph Award (<http://sos.wv.gov/elections/civics/teachers/Pages/JenningsRandolph.aspx>) is given to those high schools who registered 100 percent of their eligible student body to vote. For the 2016-17 school year, a total of 16 high schools earned the award.

Despite this effort, registration among our state's youngest eligible voters has remained very low over the last 25 years. Like the rest of the country, West Virginia's young voters seemed disengaged and disinterested.

Upon taking office, Secretary of State Mac Warner challenged his staff to create a strategy to increase the civic engagement of our state's young people. He suggested that we start in our high schools where students first become eligible to vote.

In 2017, we sought not only to recognize successful high schools with the Jennings Randolph Award, but also the students who worked so hard to encourage their classmates to register to vote. In doing so, Secretary Warner developed the West Virginia Honorary Secretary of State Program (<https://sos.wv.gov/secretary-desk/Pages/Honorary-Secretary-of-State-Program.aspx>) to recognize students in public and private high schools whose high school achieved at least 85 percent registration of their eligible students.

Honorary Secretaries of State have to be active in the student-led effort at their high school to register eligible students to vote. They work with their history and/or civics teachers to arrange for outside speakers to talk with students about the importance of

voting. They are asked to promote on-line voter registration among their peers, neighbors and family members. And finally, Honorary Secretary of State candidates must have worked with their local county clerk and the Secretary of State's Office to host voter registration drives at their high school.

On March 23, 2017, the Secretary Warner hosted a anniversary celebration of the passage of the 26th Amendment. We livestreamed our presentation to high schools across the state. Presenters included Ella Mae Thompson Haddix, a teacher who lives in West Virginia, who was the first 18-year old in America to register to vote in 1971. Here is a link to the forum hosted by the Secretary of State's Office:

<http://wvpress.org/breaking-news/state-officials-guests-celebrate-anniversary-26th-amendment-passage/>

As part of what will become an annual commemoration, Secretary Warner hosted a panel discussion with the millennial members of the West Virginia Legislature that included Delegates Saira Blair. In 2013 at 17 years old and a senior at Hedgesville High School at the time, Delegate Blair became the youngest citizen ever elected to serve as a member of any state legislature.

Honorary Secretary of State (HSOS) recipients spend the day shadowing Secretary Warner, who serves as the state's chief election official. Each honoree is formally recognized from the floor of the House of Delegates or State Senate. And students who have participated in the program are excited, energized and engaged:

[http://www.inspire-usa.org/honorary\\_sos](http://www.inspire-usa.org/honorary_sos)

The impact and results of combining the HSOS Program with the Jennings Randolph Award has been incredible. Working with the state's high schools and our local county clerks, a total of 13,688 eligible high school students in West Virginia were registered to vote between January 16th and December 31st. During the upcoming session of the Legislature, 49 high school students from all over West Virginia will be recognized as Honorary Secretaries of State. And by the end of the 2017-2018 school year, more than 50 high schools will qualify for the Jennings Randolph Award (the highest single year total before this year was 16 schools).

The success of our new civic engagement strategy can also be measured in the number of students who have been introduced to the electoral process. In 2017, Secretary Warner and representatives from the Secretary of State's Office visited more than 160 public and private high schools throughout the state. We engaged with civics and history teachers to support curriculum that introduces young adults to the importance of voting and being an educated voter.

Properly planned, we've discovered that an annual strategy to engage eligible high school students to register to vote will garner the attention of partisan and non-partisan groups alike. In West Virginia, our program has the support of all of our political parties, the legislature, the state board of education and even groups like AARP. Groups like Inspire-USA have become active partners: <http://www.inspire-usa.org/wvlegday18>

The success of a program like ours is also dependent on free and frequent access to the media. From the outset of our program, we made the time necessary to explain the goals of our civic engagement strategy to members of the press. The dividends of that time commitment were extraordinary. We are proud to say that the WV Press Association is proud partner with the Secretary of State's Office on this endeavor.

### **III. SUPPORTING MATERIALS**

See attachments

<http://sos.wv.gov/News-Center/Pages/Secretary-Warner,-State-Leaders-Recognize-Erin-Dodd-as-%E2%80%9CHonorary-Secretary-of-State%E2%80%9D.aspx>

<https://wvrecord.com/stories/511085408-students-to-be-recognized-at-honorary-secretary-of-state-for-the-day-event>

<https://sos.wv.gov/News-Center/Pages/Secretary-Warner-to-Present-15-High-Schools-With-Prestigious-%E2%80%9CJennings-Randolph-School%E2%80%9D-Designation.aspx>

# FROM THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE



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## Secretary Warner Announces First Round of Jennings Randolph Award-Winning High Schools for 2017- 2018

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Secretary Warner Announces First Round of Jennings Randolph Award-Winning High Schools for 2017-2018

Secretary of State Mac Warner is proud to announce the first round of West Virginia high schools to qualify as Jennings Randolph Award-winning schools for the 2017-2018 school year.

The Jennings Randolph Award honors high schools that engage their students into participating in the election process. The award is earned by a high school that registers 100 percent of its eligible seniors to vote. Students who will be 18 on or before the November 6th General Election are eligible to vote in 2018.

Warner works closely with local county clerks, his Field Representatives, and civic engagement groups like Inspire West Virginia to educate students on the importance of voting. Voter registration drives are student-led with the support of the school's administration and faculty.

The Jennings Randolph Award was established in 1992 as a way to work with high school civics and history teachers on the importance of voter registration and participation. For the 2016-2017 school year, a record 16 high schools qualified to be Jennings Randolph Award winners. It is very difficult to achieve a 100 percent participation.

There are more than 200 public and private high schools in West Virginia.

"I knew we could do better than just sixteen," Warner said.

Over the last year, Warner worked closely with all 55 county clerks on the effort to register eligible students. He directed his five-member Field Team to visit high schools in their regions. The effort also included working closely with groups like Inspire U.S., who has worked on civic engagement with several high schools for the last four years.

Since Warner took office on January 16th, there have been 13,593 eligible high school students registered to vote.

Today, Warner is proud to announce that 19 schools have already qualified for the Jennings Randolph Award for the 2017-2018 school year, with more applications expected to be turned in throughout the school year. The deadline to apply for the Jennings Randolph Award is April 17, 2018. Schools can apply by visiting the West Virginia Secretary of State's website ([link](#)).

“Our first Jennings Randolph Award winner was Braxton County High School. They got to work fast and encouraged all of their eligible students to register to vote,” Warner said.

The first round of Jennings Randolph Award winners are:

- Berkeley Springs High School - Morgan County
- Braxton County High School - Braxton County
- Buffalo High School - Putnam County
- Cameron High School - Marshall County
- East Fairmont High School - Marion County
- Fairmont Senior High School - Marion County
- Hedgesville High School - Berkeley County
- Hundred High School - Wetzel County
- Independence High School - Raleigh County
- James Monroe High School - Monroe County
- Nicholas County High School - Nicholas County
- Notre Dame High School - Harrison County
- Poca High School - Putnam County
- Ravenswood High School - Jackson County
- Richwood High School - Nicholas County
- Scott High School - Boone County
- Shady Spring High School - Raleigh County
- South Harrison High School – Harrison County
- Winfield High School - Putnam County

- End of Release -

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## Secretary Warner Recognizes November Effort to Register 2,731 High School Students to Vote

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Secretary of State Mac Warner is pleased to announce that November saw another substantial increase in voter registrations from eligible high school students.

Across West Virginia, 2,731 eligible 17 and 18-year-olds registered to vote during the month of November.

Right after the recent special election in October, Warner said that the Elections Division of the Secretary of State's Office and the county clerks kicked off a voter registration effort working with high schools throughout the state. The Secretary of State's Office is also working closely with organizations like Inspire-WV, who promote civic engagement and voter registration among our youngest voters.

Since the October 9th kick off, there have been 4,260 eligible high schools students registered to vote.

"This successful effort to encourage the next generation to participate in our democracy demonstrates that our message is getting through," Secretary Warner said. "These high school voter registration numbers show that our students understand how powerful their voices can be when they are registered and eligible to vote. I'm thankful for our teachers, our county clerks, and organizations who care about the civic engagement of young adults."

"It all begins with being registered to vote," Warner said.

The Secretary of State's Office recognizes those high schools who register 100 percent of their eligible students with the presentation of the Jennings Randolph Award. The award is named for

former U.S. Senator Jennings Randolph of West Virginia, the father of the 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 ([link](#)).

Under Warner's leadership, a record high of 16 high schools earned the Jennings Randolph Award during the 2016-2017 school year.

Students who are active in the effort to register their classmates to vote can also apply for the Honorary Secretary of State program. Students selected for this honor are invited to Charleston to shadow Secretary Warner and learn more about how the Secretary of State's Office functions. The deadline for Honorary Secretary of State Program is Wednesday, December 13.

For the 2017-2018 school year, 45 high schools have already hosted voter registration drives, including 31 schools in November. The Secretary of State's Field Services Team works with the county clerk in each county, as well as with school staff and other interested organizations to help organize the voter registration effort in each high school.

Since taking office on January 16, 2017, Warner's administration has been working closely with the state's 55 county clerks on cleaning up voter registration rolls. As of November 30th, there have been 79,022 outdated, deceased, duplicate and improper voter files canceled.

At the same time, there have been 39,381 newly registered voters, including more than 12,000 high school students.

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