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## Teens look to get out the vote

By **Jaime Longoria** on July 5, 2017 at 4:31 pm



Katrina Shakarian/NYC Campaign Finance Board

Fannie Lou Hamer students present their new voter awareness booklet at the Bronx Music Heritage Center on June 29.

### Fannie Lou Hamer students publish new guidebook for voters

A new educational booklet offering tips for voters may soon be available to the public, courtesy of 11 students from Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School.

The teens partnered with NYC Votes and the Center for Urban Pedagogy to create "Our Voice, Our Choice," a 14-page guide they introduced at a June 29 roundtable at the Bronx Music Heritage Center in Soundview. The publication underscores the importance of youth involvement in local elections, including those not yet old enough to register to vote.

When the group started conducting its research in October 2016, the students admitted, they weren't all that interested in the subject. Terrence Freeman, 17, one of four students who presented at the roundtable, confessed he didn't used to think too much about local elections. But after months of involvement in the project, it was as if a lightbulb went off.

"The most important aspect of a local election is that you're really impacting the local community," Freeman said. "It's something that's really going to impact you almost immediately."

"People my age, we're not given the access to vote," he said. "But these programs will inform us with strategies and tactics that will aid us when we're able."

Providing learning opportunities that go beyond the classroom is the "civic duty of a school," which includes molding them into informed citizens involved in community policies, said Jeff Palladino, principal of Fannie Lou Hamer.

Just over half of Hunts Point's 12,900 registered voters cast their ballots in the 2016 general election, compared with 56 percent of registered voters across the borough, according to the New York City Campaign Finance Board. Fewer than half of the neighborhood's registered 1,450 residents between 18 and 24 voted.

NYC Votes says it targeted teens to create the booklet, as a way of making a dent in the alarming apathy rates young people in the Bronx and beyond show toward the voting process. Young people have historically been underrepresented at the polls, according to a spokesman for the City Campaign Finance Board.

"Low voter participation among youth is in part attributable to the failure of political campaigns to target young citizens," said William Fowler, public relations aide at the CCFB. "This points to the antiquated paper-based nature of our voter registration system. It just doesn't connect with how people live their lives any more, adding that "Instilling the values of voting, and getting young people excited to participate in our electoral process is important to making voting a habit for young people."

Eddie Cuesta, New York director of Dominicanos USA, said that reaching young voters who have felt marginalized in the city's political process is key.

"There hasn't been much attention to the contributions that young people are doing," said Cuesta, adding that participating on community boards is another step young Bronxites could take to have a say in local issues. "If we are able to work with them, given the opportunity, they will make a difference in learning the issues."

Jen Anne Williams, youth education program manager at the Center for Urban Pedagogy, pointed out that "with participatory budgeting or being a board member, you can be young and be part of" important community decision-making. "You don't have to be 18."

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