



## Lesson 2: Why Vote?

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

Why is voting, including in local elections, important?

### LESSON OBJECTIVES:

- Students will be able to identify issues affected by local policies and elections and prioritize the most important issues to them.
- Students will be able to provide reasons voting is important and explain the difference one vote can make.

### STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

- PA 5.2.C.D. Evaluate and demonstrate what makes competent and responsible citizens.
- PA 5.3.C.B. Analyze the roles of local, state, and national governments in policy-making.

### LESSON DURATION:

50-60 minutes

### TYPE OF ACTIVITIES:

- ✓ Analyzing data from graphs
- ✓ Evaluating arguments for and against voting
- ✓ Classifying federal vs. state/local decisions
- ✓ Constructing an argument using information from news articles
- ✓ Building group consensus around important issues

### MATERIALS:

- Student handout (pp. 3-5)
- Close election news articles (see pages 6-11; 3-5 copies needed of each article for small group activity)

### HOOK/DO-NOW (5 MINUTES)

Have students analyze the Philadelphia voter turnout line graph from 66 Wards and answer the following focus prompt in their handout: “How is Philadelphia voter turnout different in presidential election years compared to years where there is no presidential election?” Students should respond in three minutes or less – push for them to cite specific data in their answers.

Have students share their observations—they should notice that participation is much lower in years with no presidential election and for local offices such as mayor and district attorney.

Introduce today’s essential question and lesson objectives.

### WHO DECIDES? (15-20 MINUTES)

*Note: This activity has been adapted from Rock the Vote’s Democracy Class curriculum.*

Tell students that often when we think of “government,” we think about the federal government—the House and Senate, the Supreme Court, and the President. We know that Americans think about government this way because while 3/5 of eligible voters vote for President, much fewer vote in local elections.

Give students two minutes to brainstorm as many reasons as possible to answer this prompt: “List as many reasons as you can think of why people might choose NOT to vote in local or state elections.” Have students share their responses aloud; you may hear some of these responses:

- The idea that local government doesn’t matter (E.g., “The mayor doesn’t really do much,” “Who cares who’s on city council?”)
- A lack of trust about a single vote (E.g., “My vote doesn’t count.”)
- The effects of voter suppression (E.g., “Voting is too difficult.”)

Explain that today’s class will push back against those ideas: We’re going to talk about local and state elections. We’ll identify some of the ways local and state government shapes our lives, we’ll look at the value of a single vote, and we’ll talk about the most important issues to us.

Have students work in small groups for five minutes to answer the questions in the “Who Decides?” section of their handout. Let students know that it’s okay if they aren’t sure of all the answers – do your best!

Ask students to share their answers aloud. (They will quickly notice that none of these decisions are made at the federal level.) As students share their answers, you might identify more specifically who makes these decisions:



1. Do we have a recycling program? (City/District)
2. Do we teach sexual education in schools? (State/District)
3. Do we check the immigration status of everyone detained by police? (City/State)
4. Do we protect people from being fired because they're LGBTQ? (City/State)
5. Do we arrest people for marijuana use? (City/State/Federal)
6. Do we switch to year-round schooling? (City/District)
7. Do we require police to wear body cameras? (City/District/State)
8. Do we give firefighters a raise? (City/District/State)
9. Do we expand public transportation? (City/District/State)
10. Do we ban tackle football in elementary and middle schools? (City/District/State)
11. Do we allow teachers to carry guns at school? (State)
12. Do we lower the age for learners' permits to 13? (State)
13. Do we set the minimum wage at \$15 an hour? (City/State)
14. Do we allow 15-year-olds to get married? (State)
15. Do we institute an 11 p.m. curfew for everyone under 18? (City/District)

### **THE POWER OF YOUR VOTE (15 MINUTES)**

*Note: This activity has been adapted from Rock the Vote's Democracy Class curriculum.*

Recap the last activity for students and introduce the next objective: *We've just proved that local government does matter. But we haven't addressed the next reason why people don't vote in local or state elections. So let's look at that idea: That one vote doesn't matter.*

Split students into six groups of 3-5 students each. Each group will be responsible for reading one of the news articles about a close local, state, or national election. Students will read and then present out evidence to rebut the idea that one vote doesn't matter. Students can use bullet points to summarize.

Give groups 7 minutes to read and discuss together, then 1 minute each to present out to the full class.

### **OUR TOP ISSUES (15 MINUTES)**

Tell students that now that they understand the power of their vote in state and local elections, it's time to decide what issues are most important to them as citizens and future voters. Give students three minutes to individually list the top three most important issues to them, thinking about what problems or issues have the biggest effect on them and their communities.

Next, have students get back into their groups from the previous activity. Give the groups five minutes to come to consensus on their top three issues based on their individual lists – encourage them to use voting as a way to decide.

Finally, have each group share out their top three issues, and have the class as a whole select their top three (suggested: each student can vote by raising their hand for a total of three issues). If groups have similar issues and it makes sense to consolidate prior to voting, do so.

Ask students to discuss how this process felt, how it felt to compromise as a class and only get some preferences represented, and how it connects to voting in the future.

### **EXIT TICKET (5 MINUTES)**

Give students a few minutes to respond to the exit ticket prompt: "Why is it important to vote in all elections, including local ones?" If time allows, ask volunteers to share their responses.



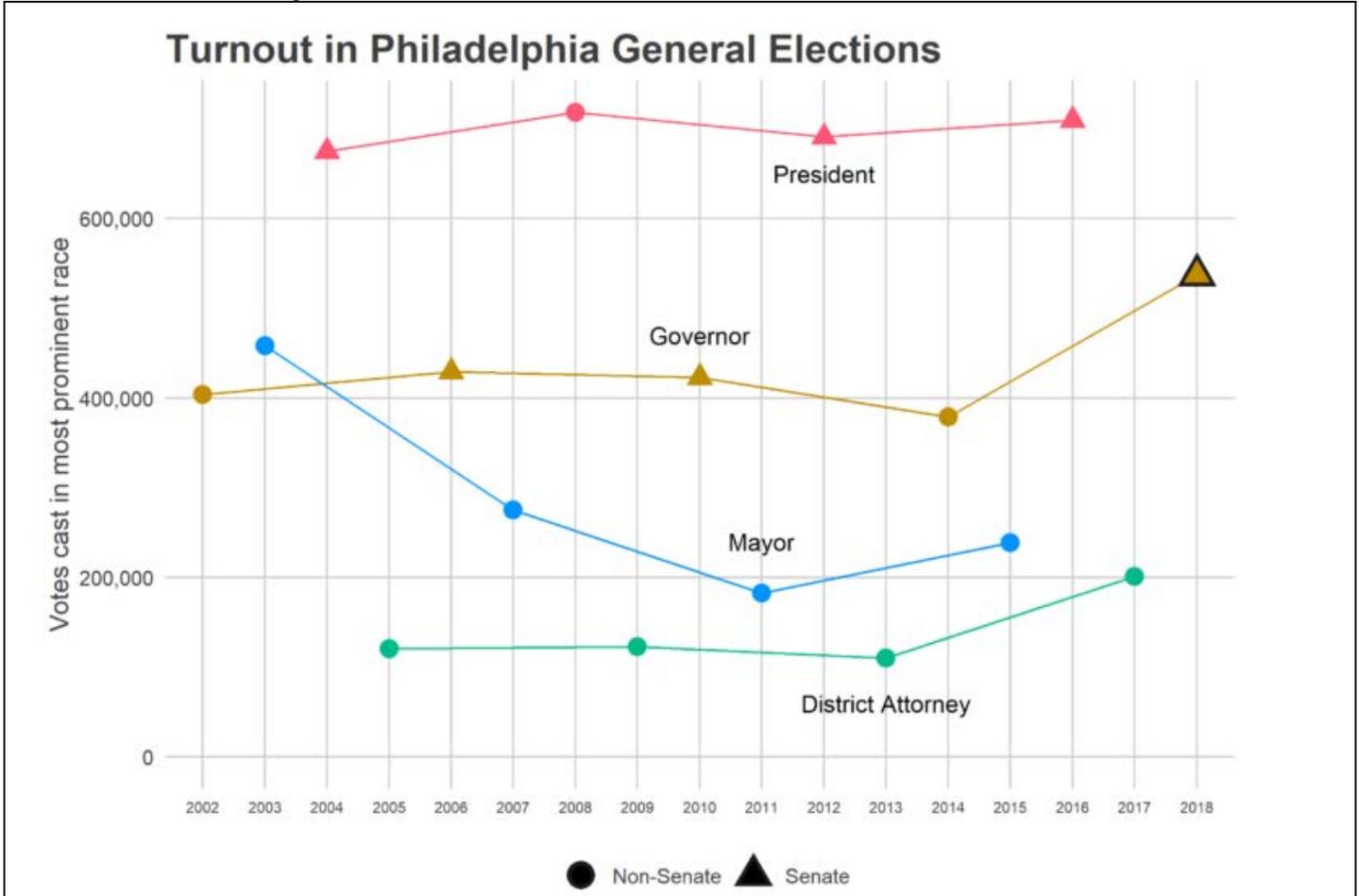
Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Period \_\_\_\_\_

### Day 2: Why Vote?

#### Do-Now: Philadelphia Voter Turnout



Source: sixtysixwards.com

How is Philadelphia voter turnout different in presidential election years compared to years where there is no presidential election?

List as many reasons as you can think of why people might choose NOT to vote in local or state elections:

Blank area for student response.



## Who Decides?

*If this question is answered by an elected official at the local or state level, mark with an "L." If it's answered by an official at the federal or national level, mark with an "F."*

1. Do we have a recycling program? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Do we teach sexual education in schools? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do we check the immigration status of everyone detained by police? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do we protect people from being fired because they're LGBTQ? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do we arrest people for marijuana use? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do we switch to year-round schooling? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do we require police to wear body cameras? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Do we give firefighters a raise? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do we expand public transportation? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Do we ban tackle football in elementary and middle schools? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Do we allow teachers to carry guns at school? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Do we lower the age for learners' permits to 13? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Do we set the minimum wage at \$15 an hour? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Do we allow 15-year-olds to get married? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Do we institute an 11 p.m. curfew for everyone under 18? \_\_\_\_\_

## The Power of Your Vote

My group's article #: \_\_\_\_\_

Provide specific evidence from your article to rebut (prove wrong) the idea that one vote doesn't matter:



## Our Top Issues

List the top three most important issues to you, thinking about what problems or issues have the biggest effect on you and your community.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

With your group, select your top three issues as a group:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

After your class discussion and vote, write down your top three issues as a class:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Exit Ticket

Why is it important to vote in all elections, including local ones?

MAY 21, 2015

## At-large City Council candidate Isaiah Thomas not conceding yet

With about 1,100 votes separating him from fifth place, he is going to wait for a final count

BY MICHAEL PHILLIS

*PhillyVoice Contributor*

The top five Democrats vying for an at-large seat on City Council after the Democratic primary are inevitably voted into office.

[Isaiah Thomas](#) is sitting in sixth place.

He is, according to the [latest online count](#) with 98.87 percent of precincts reporting, 1,129 votes behind [Helen Gym](#), who ran a campaign based on improving the city's schools. That is a margin of just 0.18 percent of all votes cast.

Thomas isn't conceding yet.

"Let me start by saying that the race is not over yet," he said in an email to supporters sent out Wednesday.

Before the Thomas email was sent out, Gym also sent out a message Wednesday expressing confidence she would win.

"We are ahead," she said in a statement. "The numbers are on our side."

"And although all the votes haven't been counted, we're confident we will be declared the winner."

Max Weisman, Thomas' communications director, said the campaign is in a wait-and-see mode.

"We are waiting for every vote to come in, and every absentee vote to come in, and every absentee vote to be counted," said Weisman.

When asked why all of the precincts haven't reported their votes - the Thomas campaign referenced the "1.42 percent of the vote not yet counted" in its email - Tim Dowling, the acting supervisor of elections, said, "as usual, some of the cartridges [containing voter information] are left in the machines by board workers. Staff is in the process of retrieving those cartridges."

This is Thomas' second bid for City Council and his second time presumably coming up short. In his 2011 campaign, he won 6.6 percent of the vote. Then-Council incumbent James Kenney, the fifth-place finisher that year, was favored by 9.7 percent of voters.

When Thomas spoke with PhillyVoice earlier in the campaign, he said he had learned a lot from his previous run and now understood the importance of money and endorsements. He also explained what failure would mean.

"Me losing this race this time around would be the biggest failure of my life," Thomas said earlier this year. "I did not know what I was stepping into the first time around; this time around I have no excuses, I know exactly what I'm getting myself into."

"If I lose, it will be my fault."

The Thomas campaign believes it will know by next week.

"From what I've heard, people are going to still be counting today and tomorrow," Weisman said. "The speculation is that there will a final count by Tuesday."

He said his campaign will let supporters know the result in an email.

## [NATIONAL](#)

# Virginia Republican David Yancey Wins Tie-Breaking Drawing

January 4, 2018 10:07 AM ET

[SARAH MCCAMMON](#) FOR NPR NEWS

Virginia Republican David Yancey is the winner of a tie-breaking drawing for a House of Delegates seat, a result that appears to allow Republicans to barely hang on to control of the chamber.

Each candidate's name was placed in a film canister; those were then placed into a bowl and one name was drawn.

It's the latest chapter in an unusual and drawn-out process to decide a winner in House District 94 in Newport News. After a December recount, the Democratic candidate, Shelly Simonds, was initially declared the winner [by just one vote](#).

That result appeared to wrest control of the chamber away from Republicans, who'd gone into November with nearly a two-thirds majority in the House of Delegates. That majority was all but swept away in a Democratic wave that boosted the party up and down the ballot.

But then, after another ballot was re-examined and counted for Yancey, the Republican incumbent, the race was declared a tie. Each candidate was determined to have [11,607 votes](#), according to James Alcorn, chair of the Virginia elections board.

The ballot that was re-examined has marks next to both candidates. But the mark next to Simonds' bubble also has a slash through it, so judges determined that the voter did not intend to select her.

As NPR's Brett Neely reported, [Virginia law](#) says that when candidates have an equal number of votes, the state election board shall "determine by lot which of the candidates shall be declared elected."

The tie-breaking drawing was initially scheduled for the week of Christmas, but it [was postponed](#) after Democrats asked a court to review the process that was used to determine the winner of the disputed ballot. On Wednesday, a [court denied Democrats' request](#) to throw out that ballot and said the drawing could proceed this week as planned.

With Yancey's win, the GOP appears poised to retain control of the chamber. A win for Democrat Simonds would have likely meant a 50-50 split.

Simonds could choose to ask for *another* recount of the original ballots, though observers from both parties acknowledge it would likely be difficult to convene another recount panel in time for the Virginia General Assembly to convene on Jan. 10 in Richmond.

If the session begins with the District 94 seat still uncertain, Republicans would remain in control by a 50-49 majority. Republican leaders have said under that scenario, they [would move forward](#) with electing leaders and making rules to govern the legislative session.

Another House of Delegates seat, District 28, is still in dispute: in the Fredericksburg area, a group of Democratic voters has [asked a federal judge for a new election](#) after a mix-up over district boundaries caused some voters to be assigned to the wrong districts. The Republican in that race, Robert Thomas, was [certified as the winner](#) in late November over Democrat Joshua Cole. A hearing regarding the request for a new election is scheduled for Friday in Alexandria.

# Democrat Helen Tai wins special state House election in Bucks, gains a seat for her party

Posted: May 16, 2018 - 5:32 PM

[Thomas Fitzgerald](#) for the Philadelphia Inquirer | [@tomfitzgerald](#) | [tfitzgerald@phillynews.com](#)



**MATT ROURKE**

Democrats flipped a Pennsylvania House seat in Bucks County on Tuesday as [Helen Tai](#) won the 178th District special election by 96 votes over Republican [Wendi Thomas](#), according to complete but unofficial returns.

Tai, 53, will fill the last six months of the term of former State Rep. Scott Petri (R., Bucks), who left in January to become [executive director of the Philadelphia Parking Authority](#). During that time, the new representative and Thomas will continue to campaign against each other to try to win a full two-year term on Nov. 6.

Republicans have held the central Bucks district for 34 years.

A Solebury Township supervisor, Tai will be the 42<sup>nd</sup> woman in the state House, the highest number of female members the chamber has had at any one time, according to Bill Patton, spokesman for the Democratic caucus. Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez acknowledged Tai's accomplishment in a statement late Tuesday, saying "the wind is at our backs" in Pennsylvania.

EMILY's List, a national political committee that backs Democratic women who support abortion rights, also hailed Tai.

Thomas, 57, of Northampton, is a health-care executive who resigned from her position on the Council Rock school board to run for the legislative seat.

A Republican candidate won another special election in western Pennsylvania, so the House's partisan makeup will have no net change.

# Ryan Gallagher congratulates Perry Warren on winning District 31 state House race

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By **Joan Hellyer** for Bucks County Courier Times

Posted Nov 22, 2016 at 12:01 AM

Updated Nov 22, 2016 at 6:15 PM

Two weeks after the election, Republican Ryan Gallagher congratulated Democratic opponent Perry Warren on his victory in the 31st District state House race.

In a written statement released Tuesday, Gallagher said he would not ask for a recount of the vote, even though many area residents wanted him to do so because of the 77-vote difference.

Warren secured 19,072 votes to Gallagher's 18,995, according to an official vote count of the Nov. 8 race that was completed last week by the Bucks County Board of Elections.

"It is my belief that the Bucks County Board of Elections has properly performed (its) duties, and I am not inclined to challenge the veracity of (its) conclusions," Gallagher said in the statement. "This has been a historic election in many ways, and this particular race, with just a 00.002 percent vote margin, is as historically close as it gets. However, I believe it is important for our community to move forward in a positive manner."

Warren said Tuesday night that he is excited to learn that he officially has won the race.

"I am thankful to the people of these communities who supported me and voted for me," Warren said. "I am looking to do a great job for District 31 and for the state."

Warren, a Newtown Borough councilman, and Gallagher, a Newtown Township supervisor, are both attorneys by profession. They battled for the chance to succeed Steve Santarsiero for the two-year seat that covers Lower Makefield, Newtown Borough, Newtown Township, Yardley and the first, second and third wards in Morrisville.

Warren will become the district's new representative -- and first to live outside Lower Makefield -- when he is sworn into office in January.

Joan Hellyer: 215-949-4048; email: [jhellyer@calkins.com](mailto:jhellyer@calkins.com); Twitter: [@BCCTintheknow](https://twitter.com/BCCTintheknow)

# Kenyatta Johnson Prevails In 2nd City Council Primary

by [Chris Brennan for the Philadelphia Inquirer](#), Posted: May 23, 2011

State Rep. Kenyatta Johnson has defeated real estate broker Barbara Capozzi in the Democratic primary election for City Council's 2nd District seat, both camps have confirmed. Johnson won with just a 46-vote margin in a four-way race with more than 16,000 votes cast.

The results were determined this morning in vote-counting by the Philadelphia City Commission, which on Friday started the official tally, including absentee, alternative, and provisional ballots.

Attorney Damon Roberts, who ran for the seat four years ago, withdrew from the race on May 5, too late to have his name removed from the ballot. Community activist Tracey Gordon finished third with 1,555 while Roberts received 319 votes that were declared void due to his withdrawal.

Johnson will face Republican Ivan Cohen, who ran unopposed in the May 17 primary, in the Nov. 8 general election.

Johnson is serving his second term in the state House's 186th District. Capozzi has been active for many years in real estate in South Philly and Center City and helped establish the Sports Complex Special Services District. They were both seeking the seat being vacated in January by Council President Anna Verna, who is retiring after 35 years in office.

Posted: May 23, 2011 - 2:24 PM

## Bush leads Gore by 327 votes in Florida recount, Associated Press reports

### Another Palm Beach recount on Saturday

November 10, 2000

Web posted at: 6:59 a.m. EST (1159 GMT)

TALLAHASSEE, Florida (CNN) -- Florida officials have counted, for the second time, every presidential election ballot cast in the state. Texas Gov. George W. Bush has a thin lead over Democrat Al Gore in the state's popular vote. But another recount this weekend and uncounted overseas ballots make the race still uncertain.

The Associated Press, reporting results unofficially for all of Florida's 67 counties, put Bush's advantage over Gore at only 327 votes.

Both candidates are short of the 270 electoral votes required to become the next president of the United States. Whoever wins Florida's 25 electoral votes wins the White House.

The Bush campaign reacted immediately, calling on the Gore campaign to give up. The Gore campaign responded saying, "This is just the beginning."

The statement from Karen Hughes, the Bush campaign spokeswoman, said: "The vote count on Tuesday night showed Governor Bush won Florida's election and a recount has now confirmed his victory. We hope Vice President Gore and his campaign will reconsider their threats of lawsuits or still more recounts which could undermine the constitutional process of selecting a president and have no foreseeable end."

Meanwhile, the top elections official for [Palm Beach County](#) has confirmed reports that more than 19,000 votes cast in the county on Tuesday were thrown out without being counted.

Florida Secretary of State [Katherine Harris](#) said state elections officials had received unofficial results from 53 of the state's 67 counties. The remaining 14, she said, would be given until next Tuesday to get their totals in. The final statewide vote before the recount gave Bush a lead of 1,781 votes.

Another recount, conducted by machine, and manually on a small sample of votes, is scheduled for Saturday in Palm Beach County. Voters there have complained that the county's ballot design was confusing and netted Reform Party candidate [Pat Buchanan](#) hundreds, perhaps thousands, of votes intended for Gore.

After the statewide recount is completed, state officials must wait until at least November 17 to certify those results. That is the deadline for the estimated 2,000 ballots cast by Floridians living overseas -- mostly military personnel and their families -- to arrive in the state. Those ballots must have been postmarked by Election Day.

### Several lawsuits filed; one withdrawn

Several lawsuits have been filed in Florida state court by Palm Beach voters, challenging the election.

And protesters in front of the county's elections supervisor's office on Thursday demanded a "re-vote" because of what one described as "crossword puzzle" ballots.

"I had no idea that in this country you have to read zig-zag and diagonal to know who you're voting for," Andre Fladell, a plaintiff in an elections suit, said on CNN's "Larry King Live."

Officials at a Democratic telephone bank set up in a Palm Beach law office told CNN it had taken 5,000 calls since Wednesday from voters complaining about the presidential ballot.