

*A new, optional policy pertaining to this issue.*

## **Community Relations**

### **Political Activities in the Schools/On School Board Property**

The Board of Education is committed to ensuring each citizen's rights as provided in the Constitution and laws of the State of Connecticut and the Constitution of the United States. However, Board employees shall be prohibited from the following:

- a. Participating in any political activity while on duty.

*or (for a more specific listing)*

Engaging in political activities including but not limited to, soliciting, receiving, collecting, handling, disbursing or accounting for assessments, contributions or other political funds, organizing, selling tickets to, promoting a candidate, soliciting votes in support of or opposition to a candidate, circulating petitions, displaying political pictures, badges, stickers or buttons on District property during assigned hours of employment.

- b. Using school property to solicit funds for political associations or activities.
- c. Attempting, either directly or indirectly, to coerce political activity or support from any other District employee.
- d. Soliciting or attempting to solicit funds from a District employee on behalf of any candidate, party, or issue while on duty.

School Board employees shall have the right to actively participate in political activities on behalf of any candidate, party, or issue during the time they are not scheduled to be on duty.

Nothing contained in this policy shall be interpreted to prohibit a Board member or employee from performing any statutory or assigned duty with respect to any issue which directly affects the District or which is placed on a ballot by or at the request of the Board, provided that such assigned duty is consistent with a willing employee's personal political beliefs.

District employees who offer themselves as candidates for public office shall notify the Superintendent immediately upon qualifying for election. They shall file a written statement explaining plans for conducting their campaign so as not to interfere with their job responsibilities.

## Community Relations

### Political Activities in the Schools/On School Board Property (continued)

- a. Personal leave may be taken for thirty (30) days prior to the election as provided herein.
- b. A successful candidate for an office requiring a part-time responsibility shall report immediately to the Superintendent after the election and thereafter when deemed necessary by the Superintendent or Board to evaluate the compatibility of the dual responsibility.
- c. A Board employee may be granted leave of absence, with loss of full pay, for a specified period of time for the purpose of campaigning or for serving in public office.

District employees shall be entitled to full rights of citizenship, and no political activities of any employee or the lack thereof shall be grounds for any discipline or discrimination with respect to the employment of such employee providing such activities do not interfere with the performance of the employee's duties or the District's business.

### Political Candidates

**Debate or Forum:** If a class or school-sponsored group plans a political debate or forum during the school day, the Principal/teacher/sponsor shall ensure that all candidates for the same public office or who have differing opinions on a political issue are given equal opportunity to participate.

**Appearances:** Political candidates are not allowed to appear at a school unless they are invited to visit or speak to a class or other school-related activity during school hours. However, they are entitled to the same rights of all citizens to visit the schools. The requirements for debates or forums are applicable and other candidates for the public office should be invited to visit at the same time or be provided an equivalent opportunity.

Nothing in this policy shall preclude or prevent incumbent elected public officials from appearances on District property upon the invitation of a Board member, the Superintendent, the Superintendent's designee or Principal provided that it is within their official capacity and not a campaign activity.

### School Group Participation in Political Events

School groups may not participate in events that fall into these classifications:

- a. Public appearances to promote the political candidacy of any person or the furtherance of any partisan political interest.

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### Political Activities in the Schools/On School Board Property

#### School Group Participation in Political Events (continued)

- b. Appearances that create an undue amount of interference with the regular school program or that cause an excessive amount of students' absences for rehearsal or preparation.
- c. The school Principal shall refer any case where a possible conflict may exist to the Superintendent for approval or disapproval.

#### Use or Distribution of Political Materials During School Hours or on School Grounds

**Interschool Mail:** Any interschool or intraschool mail system may not be used to distribute any political materials to schools. A regular newsletter of an employee organization that is normally distributed by the District's/school's mail system will not be considered political material if it simply contains news of a political nature taken by the organization. However, a publication from, or newsletter primarily containing news or discussion about, any political action committee is considered political material and may not be distributed through the pony mail.

**Political Materials:** Any distribution of political materials, except as part of the instructional program or student government, or political activity during working hours (including e-mail messages) is prohibited, except as allowed under this policy.

**Student Elections:** Students may post or distribute student-government election materials in an appropriate time, place, and manner, as determined by the Principal, so as to avoid any disruption to the learning environment.

#### Political Materials as Part of the Instructional Program

- Teachers may use political materials as part of the instructional program, provided the material is germane to the instructional objectives of the course. Any presentation of political materials, or issues, or expression of views, however, must be balanced and fair.
- Teachers shall be responsible for providing students with the opportunity to investigate various sides of the topics presented in their courses, particularly in relation to controversial subjects, within such limits as may be imposed by relevance to the course, the maturity level and intellectual ability of the students, and the time available.

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### Political Activities in the Schools/On School Board Property

#### Political Materials as Part of the Instructional Program (continued)

- Teachers shall permit freedom of expression on those topics that are matters of opinion so that students may weigh alternative views and make up their own minds. Students shall be encouraged to examine, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the information available to them before drawing conclusions in order to develop as fully as possible their capacities for rational judgment.
- Teachers shall strive to promote tolerance for the opinions of others and respect for the right of all individuals to hold and express differing opinions.
- A teacher may express his/her opinions in regard to political, social and religious values or issues provided that the total presentation is essentially balanced and fair. He/she shall not use professional interaction with students to further his/her own political aims or views or those of any other individual or group.

(cf. 1140 – Distribution of Materials by Students)

(cf. 1311.1 – Political Activities of School Employees)

(cf. 1330/3515 – Community Use of School Facilities)

(cf. 3543.13 – Mail and Delivery)

(cf. 4118.21 – Academic Freedom)

(cf. 6144 – Controversial Issues)

(cf. 6153.2 – Student Participation in Election Process)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes  
 7-421 Political activities of classified municipal employees.  
 7-421b Limitation on restriction of political rights of municipal employees.  
 9-369b Explanatory text relating to local questions.  
 10-156e Employees of boards of education permitted to serve as elected officials; exception.  
 10-239 Use of school facilities for other purposes  
 31-51q Liability of employer for discipline or discharge of employee on account of employee's exercise of certain constitutional rights.  
*Keyishian v. Board of Regents* 395 U.S. 589, 603 (1967)  
 Academic Freedom Policy (adopted by Connecticut State Board of Education, 9/9/81)  
 Equal Access Act, 20 U.S.C. ss 4071-4074

Policy adopted:

*A succinct version of this policy pertaining to this issue.*

## Community Relations

### Political Activities in the Schools

The Board of Education strongly supports the concepts of representative government and elected office. The Board encourages District employees to exercise their right to vote, and the Board expresses its admiration for those who seek and obtain public office. Further, the Board recognizes that the public schools are tax-supported and should be accessible to the community. The Board, however, does believe that the educational process should be clearly separate from the political activities associated with campaigns for public office.

Therefore, political activities in the schools during school hours shall be restricted to those of an educational nature that are beneficial to students as part of their program of study. The Board shall promulgate regulations in conjunction with this policy governing the following:

- Access to school system information
- Display and distribution of political literature
- Employee political activities
- Participation by student groups
- Use of school facilities
- Use of district resources
- Conduct of candidates

(cf. 1140 – Distribution of Materials by Students)

(cf. 1311.1 – Political Activities of School Employees)

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