

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.

Community Relations

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 intra-school 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.

Community Relations

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: April 13, 2015

THOMASTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
 Thomaston, Connecticut

Community Relations

Political Activities in the Schools

A. Purpose

To provide guidelines to candidates, candidate representatives, Board employees and students related to the conduct of political activities as it may involve District schools and school activities.

B. Access to School System Information

Any candidate or other Connecticut citizen may have access to school records and information pursuant to the provisions of the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act.

Requests for information from candidates or their representatives related to political campaigns and issues regarding the District should be directed to the Office of the Superintendent. To ensure impartial cooperation with candidates in elections for the Board of Education, responses to campaign requests will be shared with all announced candidates.

C. Display and Distribution of Political Literature

Display and distribution of political materials in the schools during school hours shall be restricted to those of an educational nature and as part of the educational program. Teachers, who elect to use such materials for instructional purposes, shall present them in an impartial and objective manner that is relevant to the course content and appropriate to the knowledge and maturity of the students. Existing District procedures permit the distribution in schools of materials related to parks and recreation, scouting and other non-profit or service organizations. Consistent with these procedures, political campaign materials or materials that support or oppose political candidates, parties or issues shall not be sent home from school with students. Also such literature shall not be distributed during school hours or on a school bus by students, Board employees or others. Campaign-related posters or signs may not be displayed at or within schools.

Candidates, or their representatives, desiring to distribute campaign or political materials to those attending school-related activities occurring after school hours must do so outside the building or other school facility. The distribution of political literature at events or meetings that are not school-related may be subject to the conditions governing Community Use of School Facilities.

Community Relations

Political Activities in the Schools

C. Display and Distribution of Political Literature (continued)

Candidates or their representatives, who do not comply with these limits on the distribution of campaign or political materials after being so informed, will be requested by a building administrator to leave school property. If the candidate or their representative does not comply with this request to leave, the building administrator will warn the individual(s) that they are trespassing and will notify the police.

Schools will not accept political advertisements in co-curricular publications (example: school newspaper as part of Journalism class). As with other advertisements, paid political advertisements may be placed in school publications unrelated to the curriculum, subject to the review and approval of the Principal (example: programs for athletic events).

During the times that polls are open and schools are serving as polling locations, Connecticut election laws will govern any associated political activity, including the distribution of political literature or posting of political signs.

D. Employee Political Activities

Employees are encouraged to exercise their constitutional rights as citizens, but they shall not involve their schools in political activities. Employees shall not participate in campaign activities during hours of official employment; however, employees may participate in political activity after hours of official employment.

Employees shall not poll students on the political opinions of their parents and shall not attempt to indoctrinate students or other employees with their personal political views. Student mock elections are permitted when conducted as part of the educational program.

No employee shall be expected or required to participate in any campaign or to support any candidate as a condition of employment.

E. Participation by Student Groups

School-sponsored student groups shall not participate in partisan political activities.

F. Use of School Facilities for Political Activities

When space is available, candidates may use school facilities during non-school hours subject to Board policy pertaining to Community Use of School Facilities and the associated regulations.

Community Relations

Political Activities in the Schools (continued)

G. Use of Other District Resources

Any use of the District's website for political activities is prohibited. Use of any other resources for political activities, including but not limited to copiers, computers or facsimile machines, is prohibited.

H. Conduct of Candidates

Candidates for election, or their representatives, shall not use District resources, District personnel (except those employees who may voluntarily participate during non-duty hours), District events at which they are official participants, District stationery, or the District logo in support of their campaigns.

Candidates, or their representatives, may not access students or employees during school hours for campaign purposes. With the prior review and approval of the Principal, candidates may be invited to address specific classes or groups on specific topics related to the curriculum and educational program. The Principal's review shall ensure all candidates are treated impartially and objectively.

(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 4071-4