

FAQ on Staff Participation in Election Activities

The following FAQ will help you understand your role as a district staff member during the election season. A general rule to remember – if you are acting in the capacity of a district staff member, you cannot advocate for or against a particular candidate or ballot initiative, but outside of work, when you are acting as an independent citizen, you can advocate as you wish. This includes social media accounts.

Q. What may I tell or send home with students? What if students ask about the election in class?

- A.** You *may* provide information that is factual, such as when and where the election is being held, etc. You *may not* campaign to vote for or against a candidate while working in your official capacity as an employee (i.e. teachers at parent conferences, when instructing or coaching, etc.).

Discussion regarding elections are not appropriate for the classroom unless related to the curriculum, for example, related to discussions of citizenship, the right to vote, political process, government entities, etc., and/or does not attempt to persuade individuals how to vote on the issue.

Additional guidelines for classroom discussion are available in [Appendix IV of the District Policy 606](#).

Q. What may I say in classroom newsletters or tell parents at open houses, conferences, via e-mail, etc.?

- A.** Similar to the question above. Remember, newsletters or any official communication from the school may only provide factual information about the election and voting process. Therefore, newsletters or any official communication from the school may only provide factual information about the fact that there is an election on November 6. School districts may not expend school district funds to support a particular vote or candidate.

Note that a school's PTA/PTO is technically an independent organization and as such is allowed to invite in representatives of campaigns, but only in accordance with district policy (see [Policy 904](#)). All such invitations must come from the PTA, not school staff or the building principal. Similarly, a union is a separate entity and is entitled to use its membership list and/or funds to advocate on behalf of a candidate.

Student groups and booster clubs that are supported or sponsored by the school are said to be utilizing district funds and thus should not advocate on behalf of a candidate. However, independent groups of students or staff members are allowed to advocate and gather on behalf of a candidate if so desired, but they cannot utilize district equipment (email accounts, computers, printers, copiers, etc.).

Q. What if a community member/parent confronts me on discussions occurring in class?

A. Remember to connect discussions to student learning and not persuasion and advocacy. If you continue to get questions, contact your building administrator or program supervisor.

Q. May I use school e-mail as it relates to the election?

A. Staff should avoid using district e-mail in any way that relates to campaigning for/against a candidate or ballot measure. District administration may utilize e-mail to provide factual information regarding the election (e.g. polling locations, voter registration drives, facts about the referendum, etc.).

Q. Can I use school district equipment for election activities?

A. We **may** use interschool mail, video equipment, copy machines, etc., to provide *factual* information about an election as noted above. We **may not** use school equipment to provide reasons why people should vote one way or another. Remember, the law provides that school district funds cannot be used to promote a particular candidate or ballot measure. Use of school district equipment would be tantamount to using school district funds.

Q. What about social media accounts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)?

A. As noted above, district staff utilizing social media account as part of their professional role in EPS (i.e., a teacher who uses twitter to communicate with students and families) **may not** use their social media account to promote or advocate for or against a candidate or ballot measure. As such, it is important to be cautious when sharing or retweeting other posts by said candidates or campaigns. Even if the shared content is seemingly “harmless,” sharing or retweeting the post can be seen as implying endorsement and therefore should be avoided.

Q. When/where may I wear a button/sticker/t-shirt advocating for or against a candidate?

A. It is your First Amendment right to wear buttons/stickers/t-shirts that relate to the election during contract hours. However, doing so should be done with caution. If you are in a position of authority over students, parents, or other staff, you need to consider the influence you have and whether or not wearing advocacy items is appropriate. Such a consideration should be taken into account when you are acting in this authoritative capacity (e.g. as a teacher in the classroom) and does not apply to hours for which you are off-duty.

In addition, per [MN Statute 211.B11](#) if you work in a school that also serves as a polling location you are not allowed to display any campaign material, post signs, ask, solicit, or in any manner try to induce or persuade a voter within the polling place or within 100 feet of the building in which a polling place is situated, or anywhere on the public property on which a polling place is situated, on primary or election day to vote for or refrain from voting for a candidate or ballot question. A person may not wear or provide to others political badges, political buttons, or other political insignia to be worn at or about the polling place on the day of a primary or on Election Day.

Q. Do the rules change when I am off-site (i.e., at a coffee shop or out in public)?

A. Yes, presuming you are not acting in the capacity of a district employee. Staff members and school board members may certainly, in their personal capacity, engage in political activities as they wish.

Q. Can I write letters to the editor of newspapers?

A. It depends. If it is a school funded newspaper (e.g. *Zephyrus*), a letter from a staff member would be assumed to be in their capacity as a district employee and therefore should not advocate for or against a ballot question or candidate. However, if the publication is outside of the district (e.g. *Edina SunCurrent*), one has the individual right to advocate as they wish, but they should not identify themselves as representing the school district or school. It should be clear that the letter expresses one's own personal opinion and is not representative of other district employees, the school or organization. It cannot be written on school district stationery or include the district logo. If it is communicated via email, it cannot be done using a district email account, nor should it be sent using a school-owned device.

Q. May I post a sign in my yard?

A. Yes.

Q. Am I allowed to make financial contributions to and/or participate in events sponsored by a citizen committee supporting or opposing a candidate?

A. Yes, so long as the volunteer activity does not occur during the contract day or contracted district activities.

Q. Can employee organizations send a letter or postcard to parents urging "yes" or "no" votes or in favor or against a candidate?

A. Yes. Employee organizations (e.g. Education Minnesota Edina, SEIU) are separate entities and may campaign for or against a candidate or ballot measure. Employee organizations may also donate money to a citizen campaign. But again, volunteer activity cannot occur during the contract day.

Q. What if I have additional questions about the election and my responsibility as an EPS employee?

A. Questions about staff participation in election activity should be directed to your building principal.