

**CHAPTER 9.00 – SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND INTERLOCAL AGREEMENTS**

**POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN THE SCHOOLS**

**9.043**

- 1) Subject to Board policy and State law, the Board encourages all students and employees to become involved in the political processes of our democratic form of government.
- 2) The Superintendent shall prepare and the School Board shall adopt, guidelines governing the political activities of students and employees when on duty, in school or in any School Board facility or property.
- 3) Minimally, the administrative guidelines shall:
  - a) Provide employees and students rules for political activity.
  - b) Prohibit the use of Board property or facilities for any political fund raising or rallies.
  - c) Prohibit any single candidate from appearing in any facility for the expressed or unexpressed purpose of campaigning or discussing any related issues.
  - d) Provide specific administrative guidelines for political forums.
  - e) Prohibit the distribution of campaign materials, posting of signs on any property of the Board, solicitation of students or employees, and personal appearances of candidates or their representatives before student groups, except as part of an approved course of study with equal opportunity afforded to all candidates.

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:** 1001.41, F.S.

**LAWS IMPLEMENTED:** 106.15; 1001.42; 1001.51; 1013.10; 509.032; 509.232, F.S.

**HISTORY:** ADOPTED: 08/18/1998  
REVISION DATE(S): 03/08/2005



## Political Activities on School Board Property and of Students and Employees

This procedure is adopted pursuant to School Board Rule 9.043: *Political Activity in the Schools*

1. **INTENT:** It is the intent of the School Board to encourage students and employees to be involved in the political process, recognizing that knowledgeable and involved citizens are crucial to a healthy democracy. However, the political process cannot be allowed to interfere with the larger educational mission of the School District.
2. **APPLICATION:** These procedures govern political activity involving the election of individuals to public office, activities of political parties, and political activity involving public issues, whether those issues will ultimately be decided by voter referendum, by the vote of an elected body or in some other forum such as the courts.
3. **RESPONSIBILITY:** Each Building Administrator is responsible for insuring these procedures are followed for all School Board property for which they are assigned.
4. **PROHIBITIONS ON USE OF PROPERTY:** School Board property shall not be used for any political fund raising, rallies, political announcements, or photo opportunities. School Board property includes, but is not limited to, the physical buildings, land, mail distribution system (both paper and email), closed circuit television, newsletters, programs, and intercom system.

A regular newsletter of an employee organization that is normally distributed through the mail distribution system will not be considered political material if it contains news of a political nature taken by the organization.

School Board property shall not be used to post campaign signs or for the distribution of campaign materials, except as may be a part of

a political forum described below or as permitted by state law when School Board property is being used as a polling place the day of an election.

School functions can be divided into two types, open school events and closed student events. Open School Events are those that are open to the community and the community is invited to attend ( for example: sporting events, spaghetti supper fundraisers, and school carnivals). Closed School Events are those that are intended for the school community only, such as agended meetings, open houses and PTO meetings.

Candidates, their supporters or proponents\opponents of issues shall not solicit students, employees, or the general public at closed school events unless as a part of a political forum as described in section 5 or as an employee as described in section 8. Soliciting includes seeking signatures for petition cards to secure a place for either a candidate or issue on a ballot.

5. **FORUMS:** A political forum is an event hosted by the School Board, an individual school, or classroom teacher in which all candidates for a particular office or recognized organizations in support and opposition to an issue are given an equal opportunity to present their viewpoint in an orderly and structured environment.

A) If the forum is sponsored by a classroom teacher, the forum must be reasonably related to the teacher's subject matter and the principal shall have given his or her prior permission.

B) Forums featuring candidates for elected office shall only occur after the qualifying period has ended.

C) All participants shall be invited in writing and the rules of the forum shall be provided in writing.

D) The rules of the forum shall allow all participants an equal opportunity to present their qualifications, positions, and rebuttal (provided however, rebuttal is not required).

E) Participants may not distribute campaign material, except as may be provided for as follows. The host of the forum may allocate space for the passive distribution of campaign material which requires an attendee to request the material, as opposed to the material being unilaterally distributed. It is the intent of this provision that participants and their supports shall not overtly distribute material. (For example, it would be appropriate under these procedures and an example of passive distribution to allocate space, tables and chairs in the lobby of the auditorium for candidates to display their campaign material and to allow the attendees to visit and receive material if they so desire. However, it would be inappropriate under these procedures for candidates to stand at the door of the auditorium and distribute material to everyone that enters.)

F) Campaign signs or other decorations in support or opposition to any candidate or issue should not be displayed in the physical area where the forum is to be held.

6. **POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF STUDENTS:** A student has the right to wear buttons and other items (t-shirt, hats) in support or opposition to a candidate or issue, provided that the items do not violate the dress code when considered separately from the message. For example, if hats are not permitted, it is immaterial whether the hat contains a political message or not, the student may not wear a hat. However, if T-shirts are permitted, a student cannot be sanctioned for the political message printed on the shirt, unless it meets the very highest constitutional standards where the message poses a real and demonstrated threat to the safety of others.

Further the student has the right to verbally or in writing express his or her viewpoint on candidates and issues. However, students must do so in a manner that does not unduly disrupt the educational process or intrude on the right of others to be left alone.

7. **VEHICLES:** Bumper strips or other signs on vehicles parked on School Board property are permissible when the occupant of the

vehicle is on School Board property for an otherwise valid purpose (student, employee, attending a public function such as a soccer game). However, a vehicle parked on School Board property serving no other purpose than a "moveable bill board" is not permitted.

8. **POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF EMPLOYEES:** School Board Policy 6.46 *Political Activity of Employees* provides that employees shall not solicit support of or opposition to any candidate or issue during regular work hours. This prohibition includes A) participating in a political activity while on duty, B) attempting, either directly or indirectly, to coerce political activity or support from any other School Board employee, or C) soliciting funds from a School Board employee on behalf of any candidate, party, or issue while on duty. Provided however, 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 for duty.

Employees shall not inject their personal preferences on political campaigns in their conversations and interactions with students except as provided in section 9. While they may express their political views with other adults, they should not do so if it interferes with their duties or if doing so intrudes on the right of others to be left alone. Employees should refrain from wearing political buttons or other items.

Nothing contained in this procedure shall be interpreted to prohibit a School Board member or employee from performing any statutory or assigned duty with respect to any issue which directly affects the School District or which is placed on a ballot by or at the request of the School Board.

9. **POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:** 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.

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.

As a part of the class discussion, 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. Teachers shall not use professional contacts with students to further his/her own political aims or views or those of any other individual or group.

10. **ELECTED PUBLIC OFFICIALS:** Elected officials are always welcome on School Board property upon the invitation of a School Board Member, the Superintendent, or the principal. The purpose of such visits should be for teaching or sharing about their office and its role in our system of government, to learn about public school issues, or to participate in school activities. They may be invited to attend school functions, speak to students and employees, and otherwise share and receive information during such visits.
11. **TOWN HALL MEETINGS:** School Board property may be used for "town hall meetings." These are public meetings when the general public is invited to meet with one or more elected officials for the purpose of giving and receiving information on issues relevant to the

office of the elected official hosting the event. The use of School Board property for this purpose shall be governed by School Board Rule 9.04 and related procedures. Provided however, such meetings shall not be permitted after qualifying and prior to the final election when the elected official is running for reelection.

12. **FORUMS SPONSORED BY OUTSIDE GROUPS:** School Board property may be used for forums sponsored by community groups. The use of School Board property for this purpose shall be governed by School Board Rule 9.04 and related procedures.

These administrative guidelines were reviewed with the School Board in workshop session on February 5, 2004 and adopted by the Superintendent on the same date.