



Washoe County
School District

Political Activity

Frequently Asked Questions



POLITICAL ACTIVITY

I. STUDENT AND SCHOOL POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Washoe County School District [Board Policy 1310](#) sets forth basic guidance regarding political activity on campus. The policy encourages the education of students regarding the political process.

As a general rule, principals have the authority to determine the degree of political activity to occur on campus. However, principals must also familiarize themselves with the guidelines and expectations in this document to ensure they maintain political neutrality, while providing educational opportunities for students and appropriate access for political activities. Political activity on campus must further educational rather than political interests, and must not interfere with the educational process.

GUIDANCE FOR PRINCIPALS

Whether someone at the school initiates contact or an elected or other public official requests access, it is necessary to carefully balance competing interests. Here are five guiding principles to consider when you receive a request:

1. Protect student instructional time and student identity
2. Encourage students to participate in democracy
3. Maintain appropriate use of district resources, including maintaining employee focus
4. Provide impartial, consistent, and equal opportunity
5. Foster positive relationships with elected officials

II. SCHOOL VISITS BY ELECTED OFFICIALS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Elected officials and other public officials often request to visit schools in their official capacity to share information with students and/or community members, or to gather more information about the operation of schools. For example, members of the Nevada Legislature participate in *America's Legislators Back to School Program* in the fall of each year to discuss the legislative process with students. Elected and public officials may request to use school facilities to provide information to constituents (such as federal guidelines and opportunities related to student financial aid) or to hold town hall meetings on current topics related to education. Since schools are often the hub of community activities, under the right circumstances, these are acceptable activities and can often be accommodated. Please note, however, that while **activities related to the duties of the office are generally encouraged and accommodated, activities related to campaign efforts generally are not** (except under the circumstances outlined in the "Candidate and Campaign Activity" section of this document). It can sometimes be difficult to determine the fine line between official duties and campaign activities, and you are encouraged to contact Lindsay Anderson in the Government Affairs office at 775-742-8411 for guidance whenever in doubt.

NOTIFICATION

School visits and official activities are usually arranged through Government Affairs, although some elected officials may contact a school directly to schedule a visit. When this occurs, **timely notification to your supervisor and to the Government Affairs office is required even if the elected official is not currently running for office.** This applies to visits from any candidate, elected official, or prominent or high-ranking local, state, national, or international figure.

Notification may be made by calling 775-742-8411 or by emailing LEAnderson@washoeschools.net. Please provide the date, time, room location, and purpose of the activity/event/meeting, as well as whether attendance is open to the public or by invitation only. This notification should be provided as soon as you are aware that you will have visitors so that the Government Affairs office can provide support when necessary and ensure the trustees, superintendent, and appropriate departments are informed.

MEDIA

There are specific guidelines on media presence at schools that must also be followed. The Office of Communications and Community Engagement works closely with school administrators to provide support for media activities on a regular basis and can be contacted by calling 775-348-0371 for guidance on how to proceed with media inquiries or media presence on campus.

Candidates and candidate surrogates (persons acting on behalf of an elected official or candidate running for political office) **may not invite media into the school to cover their visit with students, unless expressly approved by WCSD Communications.**

Please coordinate visits through Government Affairs to ensure all aspects of the visit, including media presence, are appropriately coordinated within established guidelines.

If unapproved media does arrive during the candidate’s school visit, they must remain off property and on the sidewalk to cover the event. Please notify WCSD Communications by calling 775-348-0371.

III. CANDIDATE AND CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY REQUESTS

People running for office often want to visit schools to speak with students, teachers, and parents. Particularly in election years, principals receive requests from candidates or their representatives to attend back-to-school nights, carnivals, and other activities where large numbers of adults are expected to gather.

Candidates must be treated equally. If the principal determines that a candidate may visit the school, the same opportunity must be afforded to all candidates running for the same seat. During election seasons, these “rules” apply to current office holders who are up for election, candidates for any office, and their surrogates.

CANDIDATES SPEAKING TO STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS

The school’s interaction with these candidates depends on the nature of the visit. **Utilizing forums (such as a staff meeting, a Parent Advisory Committee meeting, or a 12th grade government class) to campaign is not allowed.** WCSD does not provide a captive audience to listen to campaign speeches. However, if they want to meet with students to discuss democracy, the legislative process, or civic responsibilities, and if their experience may be beneficial to government classes or other assemblies, the principal may approve the activity as long as the message is nonpartisan. Equal time should be given to candidates who participate in such events. Teachers allowing class time for such activities must provide a balance of candidates from recognized parties and provide equal time to participants.

It is inappropriate to provide time during the normal workday for employees to participate in political activities, including meeting and talking to candidates or listening to political speeches, even if students are not present. It is allowable for an administrator to make available the use of the school

facilities outside of the normal workday to allow candidates to speak to employees, as long as attendance at such an event is voluntary and not connected to official duties or requiring additional staff time to attend. If such an activity is held, equal time should be allowed for all candidates interested in participating.

Should an affiliated organization, whether it be a school-based booster club or PAC, or a school-sponsored organization such as a PTA or PTO, obtain permission to hold a candidate night or a political fair or a similar activity, it is important that all candidates for the offices represented are invited and given an equal opportunity to participate, speak, and/or display materials.

DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL MATERIALS

[Board Policy 1140](#) governs the distribution of materials to students and staff. As a rule, **the dissemination of campaign literature at school is prohibited.**

Campaign materials such as banners and yard signs may not be displayed on school property (including on fences surrounding schools) because it may be viewed as an endorsement of or a display of partiality toward a particular candidate (or issue) by the school. The use of a school marquee or electronic bulletin boards may not be used for political messages, even if a donation is made by the candidate. However, sidewalks around schools are considered public property and WCSD cannot legally prohibit political activity in these areas.

POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

WCSD recognizes that all employees have the right in their individual capacities to be politically active and engage in political efforts. However, employees are prohibited from engaging in any political activity during work hours or at school functions. This prohibition includes a restriction from using district resources such as computers or other equipment, email systems, and materials of any kind.

While employees may advocate for political candidates and/or issues on their own time, they may not make campaign phone calls, send campaign emails, or conduct any other campaign activities during work hours. Employees shall refrain from any conduct during work hours or at school functions that is intended to be or that reasonably could be perceived as endorsing or opposing specific political issues or political candidates, e.g. wearing campaign t-shirts or displaying campaign materials on District property.

WCSD employees must not engage in advocacy for political issues during work hours nor use District resources, including work email accounts for political advocacy. Elected officials or candidates for elective office who are also WCSD employees must be especially diligent about separating political activities from the workplace.

A district employee may not use his or her official authority or influence to compel a person to take part in a political activity, to pay or promise to pay a political contribution, or apply for membership in or become a member of a political organization.

BALLOT QUESTIONS

Employees, parents, volunteers, or other individuals may not use WCSD time, materials, or resources to promote or oppose a candidate or a position on a ballot question.

Any type of communication that supports or opposes a ballot question may not be made while at work or by using District materials, phones, email, computers, printers, or vehicles. District vehicles and

District facilities may not be used to transport and/or store campaign materials that promote or oppose a political candidate or a position on a ballot question.

As noted in **Board Policy 1310**, The District may expend reasonable amounts of resources to apprise voters in the school district of facts pertinent to an election, bond issue, or referendum that may affect the District in accordance with NRS 281A.520.

FACILITY USE

Political parties, individual candidates, and outside community groups wishing to use a school facility for a campaign event (candidate nights, kickoff announcements, debates, etc.) must comply with [Board Policy 7120](#), adhering to its associated fee schedules and District procedures. A request to rent the school's facilities for a campaign kickoff, event, or debate is allowable, as long as the event is during times when school is not in session. If the request of one candidate or party is granted, similar use of the facility must be made available to the opposition, if requested. However, effort must be made to maintain the District's impartiality in these events and the District shall not promote these events.

On occasion, candidates who would like to use a school for a campaign photo or video approach principals for permission and assistance. This is an allowable activity, as long as it is outside of the regular workday and as long as nothing is photographed or video-recorded that identifies the classroom, the school, the school district, or any student. The use of any employees and/or students at these events must be completely voluntary and clearly separated from anything connected to the District and the school.

When candidates want students or educators included in a photo or video, they must provide those individuals themselves; it is not appropriate for them to ask a principal or a teacher to find individuals willing to participate. **Government Affairs must also be notified in advance at 775-742-8411.**

ENDORSEMENTS

WCSD does not endorse campaigns or candidates. Frequently, candidates will ask a friend or family member to appear in a campaign ad or brochure on his or her behalf. WCSD employees may engage in such activities as long as they do not convey or imply the endorsement of a WCSD school, department, division, or the District as a whole. For example, a principal, teacher, or other WCSD employee can contribute a quote endorsing a candidate and citing the candidate's record of support of public education. The identification of the principal or teacher should then be listed as "Jane Smith, elementary school principal" or "John Doe, third grade teacher." It is not acceptable to list the supporter as "Jane Smith, WCSD principal" or "Jane Smith, principal of [name] Elementary School." A teacher can be identified by grade level or subject (i.e., "third grade" or "AP Chemistry") but neither the name of the school nor the school district may be used.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Some U.S. Government and other social studies teachers require students to complete some type of political activity as a part of the course curriculum or for extra credit. Many school-based clubs and organizations encourage students to earn "service hours" by participating in political campaign activities. Likewise, campaigns and/or political parties may contact schools or teachers to provide opportunities for students to volunteer on a political campaign to earn service hours for their clubs or extra credit for government classes or to recruit students to complete campaign work for pay.

Opportunities for volunteer work and internships may be shared with students, but **participation must be voluntary**. When students are presented with opportunities to complete these assignments or earn these service hours, they must be presented with opportunities for a variety of candidates representing major factions of the political spectrum as well as be allowed to work on a campaign or for a recognized political party of their choice. It is inappropriate for teachers, club advisors, or other adults to require a student to work for a specific candidate or campaign to earn hours for course credit, extra credit, or service hours.

IV. POLITICAL INITIATIVES AND WCSD-SPONSORED BALLOT QUESTIONS

As a general rule, the guidelines found in this guide apply universally to all political matters and ballot questions, regardless if the ballot question or initiative activity is related to education either specifically or peripherally.

When the Washoe County School District Board of Trustees has taken the legal steps necessary to place a school construction question on the ballot, District employees must be especially vigilant about adhering to the rules. **The District, the Superintendent, and District employees have the responsibility to provide factual information to parents, the community, and District employees related to a WCSD-sponsored ballot question.** Materials are created and distributed in order to provide information to employees and parents so they understand the facts regarding the need that the ballot question is designed to address. However, **the District and its employees may not use District resources to support or oppose any ballot question, even one that is District-sponsored. District employees may support or oppose a candidate or ballot question while on their own time/off-duty and using their own resources.**

Regarding other political activities, the District and employees must remain content-neutral while on District time and when using District resources. **Administrators and teachers acting in an official capacity may present factual information and encourage political participation, but may not advocate a particular political position.** The District and its employees may not use District resources to support or oppose a political candidate or political campaign. Off-duty political activity is generally not regulated but the use of District resources, as outlined in the “Candidate and Campaign Activity Requests” section above, is strictly prohibited, whether before, during, or after school hours.

V. VOTER REGISTRATION

WCSD educators and many community and political organizations recognize the importance of encouraging students who will be 18 in time to vote in an election to register to vote. Voter registration – of students, their parents, and adults at the school – is a legitimate school-based activity.

1. Interested parties must contact the principal to schedule campus visits
2. Voter registration organizations must place displays and volunteers in the locations on campuses designated by the principal or his/her designee and at the times approved by the principal.
3. As required by election law, registrars must remain completely impartial regarding party affiliation, quality or effectiveness of specific candidates, and positions on ballot initiatives.

VI. PETITIONS

Public schools are excluded from the requirement in NRS 293.127565 for governments to designate an area for any person to gather signatures on a petition. However, it is legal for people to use the sidewalks around schools for these activities, as long as they do not substantially interfere with the operation of the school. If signature-gathering activities are considered disruptive to activities taking place at the school, **please contact the Government Affairs office at 775-742-8411 to resolve the issue.**

VII. CAUCUS EVENTS

Nevada Revised Statute 293, Chapter 1, requires school districts to provide caucus locations at no charge to the political parties. During presidential election years, a state or county central committee may utilize public facilities for the purpose of conducting precinct meetings and other activities related to selection of delegates for state or county central committees and conventions. However, parties are required to comply with all WCSD regulations and policies as they relate to the use of facilities. Facilities Management and Government Affairs can help coordinate these requests.

VIII. POLLING LOCATIONS ON ELECTION DAY

In partnership with the Washoe County Registrar of Voters, WCSD has agreed to close school on General Election days, which are held the first Tuesday (following the first Monday) in November of even-numbered years. In addition to reducing concerns related to student safety, closing schools eliminates parking problems encountered in the past and ensures voters have access to the polls.

Questions, concerns, or complaints regarding the operation of the polls at schools should be referred to the Government Relations office (775-742-8411), which will work with county election officials to resolve the issue.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

Per NRS 293.740, "Except as otherwise provided in subsection 2, it is unlawful inside a polling place or within 100 feet from the entrance to the building or other structure in which a polling place is located: (a) For any person to solicit a vote or speak to a voter on the subject of marking the voter's ballot..." *Violations of the 100-foot law are enforced by poll workers who are trained by the Washoe County Registrar of Voters.*

Voters waiting in line or approaching the polling place are often targeted by candidates or their workers for last-minute campaign activities. **On Election Day only, campaign activities at school campuses that have been designated as polling sites may not be restricted in any way except as required by NRS 293.740.** When a school is a polling site, it is considered public property and rules that normally apply on non-Election Days must be waived. If activities are considered disruptive, either to the voters coming to cast ballots or to the professional development or other school activities taking place at the school, the Washoe County Registrar of Voters should be contacted at 775-328-3670 to resolve the issue. **Administrators should not take any action prior to calling the Election Department.**

IX. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

For questions or situations not addressed in this guide, or for clarification of these guidelines, please contact the Government Relations office at 775-742-8411. For more information, please review the following WCSD Policies & Regulations:

Policy 1310	Political Activity in Schools
Admin Reg 1310	Political Activity in Schools
Policy 7120	Community Use of School Buildings and Facilities
Admin Procedure 7120	Facilities Use Application Terms and Conditions
Policy 1140	Distribution of materials to students and staff
Admin Form 1142	Approval for distribution of materials to students and staff form

X. GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

The Government Affairs Department is located at 425 E. Ninth Street, Reno, NV 89512. Director Lindsay Anderson can be reached at 775-742-8411 or LEAnderson@washoeschools.net