



Eugene School District

Guidelines for Political Activity & Advocacy

Public employees cannot use public time or resources to advocate for or against a ballot measure or a candidate. This includes use of our computer network to send information. Using the 4J network and email system for political activity is prohibited, even if it is outside of regular working hours.

Here is a review of state laws and guidelines that public employees and public agencies, including schools, must follow in distributing information about ballot measures or candidates. These rules apply whenever there is an election.

1. State Law on Political Activity by Public Employees

Public agencies, including schools, cannot use public time or resources to advocate for or against a ballot measure or a candidate. This includes use of our computer network or other school communication channels to send information.

ORS 260.432(2) states:

“No public employee shall solicit any money, influence, service or other thing of value or otherwise promote or oppose any political committee or promote or oppose the nomination or election of a candidate, the gathering of signatures on an initiative, referendum or recall petition, the adoption of a measure or the recall of a public office holder while on the job during working hours. However, this section does not restrict the right of a public employee to express personal political views.”

2. Examples of Prohibited Activities:

- We cannot prepare or distribute written material, post website information, or send email that advocates for or against a ballot measure or candidate.
- We cannot attach to school newsletters or send home with students any materials that advocate or announce a position on a ballot measure/candidate, even if the flyer or material is prepared by an outside group and given to students or staff by a volunteer.
- We cannot include messages such as “Vote Yes on Measure X” or “Support Candidate Y,” or even “Vote For Schools” in school newsletters, email messages or on bulletin boards.
- We cannot provide access to our facilities unless we are providing the same opportunity to groups on either side of a ballot measure.
- We cannot post meeting announcements for groups advocating a position, unless we extend the same opportunity to opposing groups.

3. Examples of Allowable Activities:

- Distribution of neutral and objective information is allowed. The district and its employees may provide factual, neutral, and objective information about a ballot measure and the impact it will have on the school district.

- A school may encourage parents to vote and may make voter registration materials available.
- A school's parent group may invite advocates for or against a ballot measure to speak at a school parent group meeting. If a school parent group has an information table at a school activity, they may have information for and/or against ballot measures on the information table. It is important to provide the same opportunities to opposing sides of a ballot measure, if requested.
- A school's parent group may sponsor a candidate forum if it is open to all candidates. All candidates filed for the same office must be invited to participate. (The forum may still be held even if one or more candidates choose not to attend.)
- A school's parent group may share information advocating for or against a ballot measure in their communications, provided no district resources (e.g. computers, copiers, staff time) are used to produce or distribute those communications. It is important to provide the same opportunities to the opposing side, if requested.
- A school facility may be rented by a political candidate or by a group that is advocating a position on a ballot measure. The same opportunity must be available to opposing candidates or groups.
- Wearing of political buttons is a constitutional right of freedom of speech. Staff members may wear political buttons while on the job. Students, parents, volunteers, and other members of the public may also wear political buttons while on campus.
- When on their own off-duty time, not acting in their role, and not using any public resources, public employees may advocate political positions, send letters to the editor, and participate in any other lawful political activity. Salaried public employees are advised to keep records to verify that such political activity occurs while off duty.

The Secretary of State provides a quick reference guide, "Restrictions on Political Campaigning for Public Employees," http://oregonvotes.org/doc/publications/260.432_quickref.pdf, that addresses additional prohibited and allowable activities.

If you have a question about whether a particular action or piece of information is allowed, please ask your supervisor or contact the 4J Communications Office (Kerry Delf, delf_k@4j.lane.edu, x7733 direct line, x7737 department line, cell 541-520-6880).

4. Political Activities Notice

Schools and other public employers are required to post a notice (attached) regarding restrictions on political activities in a conspicuous place.