



Responsible Office: Department of Government Affairs

BOARD POLICY 1310

POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN SCHOOLS

PURPOSE

The Board of Trustees (“Board”) is dedicated to civic engagement and strongly supports individual and community participation in the political process. This includes educating our students as well as policy makers and participating in the public dialogue on policy issues where appropriate. However, no student or other person shall be subjected to partisan political activities on Washoe County School District (“District”) property or at District-sponsored events. No District modes of communication shall be utilized by or on behalf of political candidates, political organizations, District employees, students, contractors, volunteers or visitors.

POLICY

1. Governing Principles

- a. As a tax-supported institution, it is the position of the Board of Trustees that no District resources including buildings, materials, or supplies be used to support, endorse, or oppose any candidate, ballot question, initiative or petition or any other matter currently before any local government agency (such as city and county commissions or planning and zoning boards), or any matter being considered by the Nevada State Legislature without the permission of the Board of Trustees.
 - i. 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.
- b. Nothing contained in this policy shall be interpreted to prohibit a member of the Board of Trustees, District faculty or other staff 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.

2. Governing Practices

a. Guidelines for Political Activities

- i. The District's name and/or logo should not be used on letterhead or on any written material used for political purposes. This includes letters soliciting funds for political purposes or activities.
- ii. Faculty and staff members should use their titles in political correspondence only for purposes of identification and should avoid creating the impression that they are speaking or acting for the District.
- iii. Distribution of internal or external informational materials to students, through students to parents/guardians, to parents/guardians, or to faculty and staff, shall be done in accordance with Board Policy 1140, Distribution and Display of Informational Materials..., and in compliance with this Board Policy.
- iv. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to restrict or ban a student's First Amendment Right to Free Speech, to include wearing of clothing and/or accessories related to a political stance, with the exception of unprotected speech.

b. The following may not under any circumstances be used for political campaign purpose:

- i. The District's bulk-mailing privilege;
- ii. District mailing lists - including the addresses and e-mail addresses of District schools and offices or of faculty or other employees;
- iii. District-provided office supplies, telephones, facsimile machines, copiers, etc.; and/or
- iv. The District's sales tax exemption for purchases of goods and services.

c. Permissible Activities

- i. Candidates for political office may be invited to speak to students at school or at school sponsored events only if they are resource speakers for a classroom activity that is a legitimate part of the regular instructional program and prior approval has been granted by the Principal. If a political candidate is permitted to speak, equal opportunity shall be afforded to other candidates running for the same office.

- ii. Certain nonpartisan political activities (such as properly organized voter registration activities, voter education programs, and candidate debates) may be permissible if they do not evidence a preference for or opposition to a political party or to candidates who have taken a particular position. In order to ensure that all legal and District requirements are followed, advance approval for these events must be obtained from (and all materials must be reviewed by) the District's Department of Government Affairs which will, if necessary, provide further guidance to the organizer.
 1. In addition, an announcement should be made at the beginning of each such event and in any written materials setting forth the following disclaimer of the District:

"The Washoe County School District does not support or oppose any political candidates. The views expressed are those of [the candidate or other partisan political speaker] only. The [organization] is sponsoring this event.
- d. Political activities of faculty members and staff, including campaigning for candidates or for issues, must be kept separate and distinct from identification with and activities of the District. With the exception of unprotected speech, nothing in this policy shall be construed to restrict or ban an individual's right to free speech.
- e. Funds the District receives for educational purposes may not be used to support political activities. A distinction must be made between the political activities of individuals as private citizens and the activities of those individuals in their official relationship to the District.
- f. Political parties are allowed to form political party organizations on campuses, provided they adhere to the following guidelines:
 - i. A political party organization on campus must conform to club regulations of the school or the regulations established by the school for the control of the establishment and operation of clubs.
 - ii. No political activity of any kind is to be conducted during class hours.
 - iii. Membership must be open to any student who wishes to participate.
- g. Any signage that is displayed on District property that is, or becomes, political in nature must be removed or covered. Political signage is defined as any sign indicating support for an individual candidate, ballot question, or political matter, or reasonably resembling any signage of that nature as determined by the Superintendent or his/her designee.

- h. This policy is not intended to infringe upon any individual's right to support a particular candidate or participate in a political campaign. Individuals remain entirely free to become involved in the election process as long as such involvement does not involve the District either overtly or impliedly.
- i. Running for or Holding Political Office.
 - i. While the District supports an individual's right to run for and hold public office, employees who are seeking, or who have been elected or appointed to public office, shall not conduct any business related to these activities while on duty, to include during normal work/contract hours.
 - ii. The District will make every attempt to enable an employee to run for or hold public office, within the requirements established by the collective bargaining agreement between the District and the employee association.

DEFINITIONS

1. Contribution means the following:
 - a. Any direct or indirect payment, loan, advance or gift of money, services or anything of value; and
 - b. Any non-monetary ("in-kind") contribution, including goods or services, provided to benefit a campaign such as the use of office space, equipment and materials.
2. Ballot Initiative means a non-partisan election of a matter that does not relate to a candidate for office.
3. Unprotected Speech – unprotected speech may include, but is not necessarily limited to, the following: obscenity, fighting words, defamation (includes libel, slander), child pornography, perjury, blackmail, incitement to imminent lawless action, true threats, solicitations to commit crimes, and speech which is vulgar or profane.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

1. Students and staff are informed, engaged and educated on civic duties in a fair, non-partisan manner.
2. Through the commitment stated in this policy, the District seeks to increase community support and political capital.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES & ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

1. This policy reflects the goals of the District’s Strategic Plan and aligns/complies with the governing documents of the District, to include:
 - a. Administrative Regulation 1310, Political Activity in Schools
 - b. Administrative Regulation 1321, Participation by School Groups in Public Events.
 - c. Board Policy 1140, Distribution of Information Materials Through Students
2. The policy aligns with Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS), and specifically:
 - a. NRS 218D, Legislative Measures and Procedures
 - i. NRS 218D.205, Requests from counties, school districts and cities.
 - b. NRS 281A, Ethics in Government:
 - i. NRS 281A.520 Public officer or employee prohibited from requesting or otherwise causing governmental entity to incur expense or make expenditure to support or oppose ballot question or candidate in certain circumstances.

REVIEW AND REPORTING

1. This document shall be reviewed as part of the bi-annual review and reporting process, following each regular session of the Nevada Legislature. The Board of Trustees shall receive notification of any required changes to the policy as well as an audit of the accompanying governing documents.
2. Administrative regulations, and/or other associated documents, will be developed as necessary to implement this policy.

REVISION HISTORY

Date	Revision	Modification
9/9/1997	1.0	Adopted
11/8/2013	1.1	Revised to include NRS 281A under Implementation Guidelines
11/18/2014	2.0	Revised
1/25/2018	2.1	Reviewed by Staff for Potential Revision