
OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL

Political Activities on School Property

To: All Staff

From: J. Stephen Cowles
General Counsel

The following procedures govern political campaign activities and political expression on school property:

- Any school system employee acting solely in his or her capacity may participate freely in politics, political campaigns, and the free expression of political opinions. However, school system employees may not engage in political activities during working hours on school property or at HCPSS-sponsored activities, including field trips, assemblies, and after school. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Displaying political buttons or wearing T-shirts or other clothing in support of a particular political party or candidate.
 - The display or dissemination of political materials.
 - The display of political buttons, signs, clothing, etc., in the background of a virtual meeting, synchronous instruction, or any virtual activity during work hours or at HCPSS-sponsored activities.
 - Making speeches for a partisan political organization or candidate for public office.
- A person, including a candidate for the Board of Education or a staff member supporting candidates, may not campaign or solicit support for a political candidate on school property except:
 - On primary or general election days and then, only at school facilities that are designated as polling locations.
 - When a political event sponsored by a community organization is held on school property in compliance with Policy 10020-Use of School Facilities.
- A person may not use any Board of Education property or symbol (e.g., logo, signage, pictures) in any political campaign material or activities if the impression given is one of endorsement by the school or school system. This would include wearing any school system uniform or clothing identifying the wearer as an HCPSS employee while campaigning.
- Campaign literature or other information that endorses or advocates for a candidacy may not be distributed on school property during school hours or at a school-sponsored activity.
- School system resources and equipment, including but not limited to Howard County Public School System email, may not be used to distribute campaign literature or information or solicit support for a political candidate or party.
- All Board members and employees who are seeking or holding public office or campaigning for

a political candidate:

- Must not conduct campaign activities within the staff workplace or while the staff is engaged in HCPSS business.
- May not associate their HCPSS position with the endorsement of any candidate.

- May not require any HCPSS student to participate in political campaigns for the employee or for any special political party, candidate, or political issue that the employee is promoting (Policy 2070)
- Instructional activities where issues or political events are discussed as part of a broad-based instructional format are permitted. Any instructional activities must be conducted in a non-partisan and impartial manner.
- Special school-sponsored programs where each candidate for an office is given an equitable opportunity to present his/her candidacy may be conducted in accordance with Board of Education Policy 8060-Resource Speakers and Policy 8050-Teaching of Controversial Issues.
- Candidates for political office may place paid political ads in high school student newspapers.

Note: Student activities are governed by Policy 9020-Students' Rights and Responsibilities and by Policy 9210-Student Dress Code.

JSC/am