

GENERAL GUIDANCE ON ACTIVITIES RELATED TO UPCOMING ELECTIONS 2018



#EDMNVOTES
#CHOOSEUNION

Elections are happening across Minnesota. Early voting started on Sept. 21 and Election Day is on Nov. 6. So how do we best communicate with colleagues, parents and the community about the election? Education institutions have faced increased scrutiny from hostile groups about their perceived support for candidates and ballot initiatives. As a result, some institutions have tried to tighten up their practices to ensure they do not get sued after a candidate gets elected or if a ballot initiative passes.

Educators should be mindful of this concern and it should not dampen our efforts to make sure students, teachers, higher education faculty and education support professionals get the financial resources they need. Below are answers to some questions to provide some guidance on navigating election season:

Q: What may employees say to colleagues, parents or students at school regarding an election?

A: At school, educators may provide colleagues, parents and students with factual information, such as when and where to vote, what the educational needs are, what additional revenue would be used for and how current funding is used. Staff should not, however, tell students, community members or parents how to vote (i.e., “yes” or “no” on a ballot initiative or for a particular candidate) while working in their official capacities as educators (i.e., during classroom instruction, during office hours, before or after school activities, during conferences or during other educational functions). Additionally, during the working day, staff should ensure that conversations about the election do not interfere with their work.

Q: What may employees say to students, community members or parents away from school regarding an election?

A: Outside of the normal workday and away from normal job duties, any employee may provide other information that is intended to persuade voters to support a particular candidate or ballot initiative. Employees should avoid the appearance that they are speaking for the employer, school district, college/university, etc. Employees may make presentations and encourage a “yes” vote, advocate for a particular candidate, etc., through non-employer sponsored events such as community and neighborhood meetings, while door knocking, etc.

Q: May employees place signs in their yard at home? May employees place stickers on their cars or bikes?

A. Most definitely.

Q: May employees engage in political fundraising activities?

A: Yes; employees may participate in fundraising and other political activities when they are not on the job.



Q: May employees write letters to newspapers or posts on social media?

A: Employees of education institutions have the right to express their personal opinions and may do so in the media. While they may identify themselves as employees of an education institution, they should avoid the appearance of speaking for the institution. Members working in school districts should not post on social media during the workday unless it is during their duty-free lunch. Also, any emails should be sent from a personal account, not the staff member's employee account.

Q: May staff distribute political literature via school, campus or district mailboxes?

A: Yes; (a) provided the information is connected to union activity, and (b) provided that your union has the ability to use these mailboxes for union business. We recommend that political literature be incorporated into a union newsletter or handout so that it is clear that this is connected to union business.

Q: What may the employer say in school or classroom newsletters (including those created by classroom staff)?

A: Such newsletters may provide information about where and when an election will be held. They also may provide factual financial data about the institution for a ballot initiative. The newsletter, however, may not advocate for a specific candidate or position. Again, the underlying principle is that education institutions may not expend public funds to support a particular political viewpoint.

Q: May employees contact students, parents or community members from their home telephones or home computers and urge them to vote for a particular candidate or position?

A: Employees can definitely do this, although they should not use an employer contact list in order to gather contact data. Staff members could request this information from parent teacher associations, and parents who are staff members can use parent contact information in directories they have received in their capacity as parents.

Q: May employees serve on political campaigns or committees?

A: Yes. Employees in public education enjoy the same rights to free speech and involvement in political activities as private citizens. The same recommendations apply – make sure this volunteer work is happening during non-working time, and use your personal email when communicating on behalf of a candidate or political committee.

Q: May political groups or committees meet in employer buildings?

A: Yes, to the same degree that any other group is. Review your school, campus or district policy regarding facilities use, as they vary among institutions.