
CARROLL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

BOARD POLICY GBI: POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF CARROLL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS EMPLOYEES

During the months prior to an election there usually is an increase in campaign activity in our community. It is important for school principals to understand what types of campaign activities may take place in the schools. These regulations are intended to offer guidance on this issue.

1. School-based Forums: School officials do not need to give candidates an opportunity to speak at school sponsored activities such as back to school nights. School sponsored activities, such as back to school nights, do not constitute “public forums” since the activities that take place at such an event are organized and controlled by school officials for an intended audience. According to the Supreme Court, “school facilities may be deemed public forums only if school authorities have ‘by policy or by practice’ opened those facilities ‘for indiscriminate use by the general public’ or by some segment of the public.

School officials may give candidates an opportunity to speak at school sponsored activities, but if you allow one candidate, all other candidates should be given an equal opportunity to speak. Carroll County Public Schools must maintain an official stance of neutrality on political issues.

2. PTA/PTO Role: Provided that the organization’s use of school facilities is consistent with the Use of Facilities Guidelines, school officials should have no say as to whether a private organization invites some, all, or no candidates to speak at a meeting. The decision is entirely up to the private organization that is using school facilities in a manner consistent with the Use of Facilities Guidelines.
3. Wearing of Buttons, etc.: Students may wear clothing or buttons that endorse or oppose political views or candidates. Employees may wear political campaign buttons, provided they do not do so in the school setting.
4. Classroom Instruction/Discussion: Teachers should not engage in political activities during instructional time, and any type of “captive audience” presentation by a teacher who spends valuable class time talking about a

preferred candidate, or disparaging another, would be engaging in misconduct in violation of Board policy.

Serious consideration of purposeful, carefully planned investigations of political or controversial issues relating to a course of study is important to the citizenship education of students. In providing for the study and discussion of these issues, the school system must maintain a non-partisan, neutral position. Such study shall be objective and scholarly, and teachers shall guard against giving their personal opinions, allowing students to interpret the data without prejudice to reconsider assumptions and claims, and to reach personal conclusions. Students must be encouraged to search after truth as well as to form, express, and justify personal views in controversial issues.

When students disagree on political issues, teachers should serve as neutral moderators and instruct on the bounds of civil discourse. Educators should encourage student freedom of speech and even polite disagreements while teaching an important lesson that members of a civil society may disagree with viewpoints while not engaging in personal attacks of a speaker. Educators should teach that it is appropriate to peacefully agree to disagree.

5. Classroom Environment: Teachers have an obligation to create a welcoming and inviting learning environment for all students. Classroom displays are a tangible way to create such an environment. Classroom displays, including school purchased and teacher purchased items, shall:
 - a. Be related to the instructional goals of the course of study, to the school's written vision or mission statement, or to general school information;
 - b. Be appropriate for the level of maturity of the students; and
 - c. When taken as a whole, be non-partisan and free from prejudice.

The principal has the responsibility and authority to remove any display item from the classroom that does not conform with these guidelines or that causes a disruption to the learning environment. The principal shall confer with the teacher in private, explain the reason for his/her decision to remove the item, and outline expectations for removal. Exceptions: Teachers may display items of a personal nature, i.e. family photos, diplomas, teaching awards, etc., in their classroom.

6. Campaign Literature: Candidates, or their supporters, may distribute campaign literature at or in the schools. However, they must conform to the following guidelines:

- a. Distribution of advertisements and campaign literature that does not contain references to “obscenities, alcoholic beverages, drugs, drug paraphernalia, contraceptives, abortion services, sexual deviation, tobacco products, fortune telling, palm reading, mind reading, defamatory falsehoods attacks on person(s) or group(s), or statements of discrimination toward race, culture, religion, or sex.”
- b. With the permission of the principal, campaign literature that does not violate the above limitations and is not otherwise “obscene, libelous, or disruptive may be distributed on school property during school hours in areas designated by the principal of the subject school.”
- c. Any distribution which “interferes with the normal flow of traffic within the school corridors and entrance ways, which is coercive of any other person’s right to accept or reject any publication, or which causes substantial or material interference with normal school activities shall not be permitted.”
- d. The principal has limited discretion to prohibit the distribution of literature. Reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions are allowed. However, a principal may not deem material “disruptive” unless there are “specific, articulable facts upon which it would be reasonable to forecast that a clear and present likelihood of an immediate, substantial material disruption to normal school activity or school discipline would occur if the material were distributed. Mere undifferentiated fear or apprehension of disturbance is not enough; school personnel must be able to affirmatively show substantial facts which reasonably support a forecast of likely disruption. Material that merely stimulates heated discussion or debate does not constitute the type of disruption prohibited.

Accordingly, if a candidate or his or her supporter want to (a) hand out fliers in the parking lot on a back to school night, (b) have their children distribute buttons to classmates, (c) advertise in the school newspaper, (d) pass out literature at a football game or engage in similar types of campaign activity they should probably be allowed unless such activities interfere with normal school activities or create traffic or crowd control problems.

7. School Equipment: School employees may not use phones copiers, school directories, or the “pony” for campaigning for or against certain candidates. As stated earlier, the school system needs to maintain an official posture of neutrality. Any use of school facilities, equipment, directories, or supplies for

campaign activity by school employees is improper and grounds for disciplinary action.

8. Use of Employees' Own Time: All school employees are free to support or oppose any candidate without fear of reprisal. There is no "Hatch Act" prohibiting the full and active expression of school employees on their own free time provided, however, that such expressions are clearly those of the individual employee and do not carry the imprimatur of the school system.

