
ELECTIONS & ADVOCACY

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL LEADERS



OKLAHOMA LAW

Any official in this state who shall direct or authorize the expenditure of any public funds under his care, except as specifically authorized by law, to be used either in support of, or in opposition to, any measure which is being referred to a vote of the people by means of the initiative or referendum, or which citizens of this state are attempting to have referred to a vote of the people by the initiative or referendum, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and the office held by such party shall be adjudged vacant and shall be filled in the manner prescribed by law.

26 O.S. § 16-119

WHAT THE LAW MEANS

- School resources can't be used for election-related purposes. This means school copiers can't be used to copy election-related material, even if an individual furnishes the paper and wants to reimburse the school.
- School telephones and e-mail cannot be used in order to support or oppose any candidate, petition or question on the ballot.
- School employees and board of education members should avoid using school district-issued computers, tablets or phones for campaign purposes or in support of a petition drive.
- Supporters cannot be allowed to come into the school buildings during the school day or during school activities to campaign or to solicit signatures.
- School district employees cannot campaign for or against a proposed ballot measure or candidate during time they are on the clock.
- Information cannot be sent home with students supporting or opposing a ballot measure, petition drive or candidate.





LEGAL & ETHICAL ELECTION & ADVOCACY INVOLVEMENT

There are many ways education leaders and employees can be legally and ethically involved in elections and advocacy. Here are a few examples.

BOARD MEMBERS AND SCHOOL EMPLOYEES MAY:

- Write letters to the editor (using personal equipment/resources). Identify your role *and* say you are speaking as a private citizen, not on behalf of the school district.
- Campaign door-to-door on your own time.
- Place signs in the yard of your home (as long as it is not on school property or within 300 feet of a ballot box).
- Use your personal email from home.
- Write letters from home using your own paper and postage.
- Donate personal resources to a campaign.
- Place a campaign bumper sticker on a personal vehicle.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS MAY:

- Permit teaching about a referendum and election process.
- Have mock elections.
- Allow students to discuss electoral issues.
- Allow forums or dates on school district property and facilitate such forums.
- Spend money to encourage people to vote and remind them of voting days.
- Provide information to employees and district patrons about a ballot measure and the potential impact on the district. **This information must be factual in nature and must not advocate for or against a ballot measure.**
- Post election date on a school marquee.
- Use school message systems to remind patrons to vote.

Questions? Please contact the OSSBA legal team at 405.528.3571.





LEGAL & ETHICAL ELECTION & ADVOCACY INVOLVEMENT

EMPLOYEES WHO ARE CANDIDATES

- Employees who are candidates may not use district resources related to their campaign nor may they promote their candidacy on district time.
- All sharing of information regarding the election/candidacy must occur off school district premises and during personal time unless the district is holding a candidate forum for a particular race.

SCHOOL DISTRICT ADVOCACY TEAMS

- The school district administration may select teams to advocate regarding legislative issues on behalf of the school district. The district would prepare talking points for the employees who would be advocating on the district's behalf and should ensure advocacy team members have been adequately briefed on key education issues.
- Under this approach, the superintendent or designee(s) could solicit names of interested employees and then select rotating teams from that list to represent the school district. Employees could not be required to serve on teams.
- These employees would not be on leave and would be at a different work station for the day. Advocacy team members would be designated as on duty as long as they were adhering to requirements set by the administration. This is similar to when teachers are taken to state board meetings or sent to other meetings during the work day for which they are compensated under the terms of the original contract with the school district.
- Advocacy teams may travel using school vehicles.
- [Click here](#) to read the Attorney General Opinion that allows employees to lobby/advocate on behalf of the school district.

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