

Political Activity in Schools During Elections Procedure

RATIONALE:

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) is committed to the principles of fairness and non-partisanship during election campaigns.

HWDSB supports student and community engagement in the political process. However, it is also essential that the learning environment in schools remains impartial when discussing political topics.

HWDSB does not permit the use of any board or school resources for partisan political activity.

TERMINOLOGY:

Bias: An opinion, preference, prejudice, or inclination that limits an individual's or a group's ability to make fair, objective or accurate judgments.

Board Resources: Any board-issued item and/or any other information technology device provided to employees or trustees for their work for HWDSB.

Non-Partisan: Not biased towards any particular political group or individual.

Safe Welcome Program: A Ministry funded program that puts in place access device systems such as locking outside doors, security cameras and buzzers at schools.

PROCEDURES:

1.0 Candidates

- 1.1 Current trustees may continue to attend and participate in school or Board functions and events, but shall not campaign or conduct themselves in any way that may be perceived as campaigning.
- 1.2 Political lawn signs and partisan literature are not to be posted on Board property, including bulletin boards. Candidates may not distribute flyers on vehicles parked on school or Board property.
- 1.3 Political candidates may attend school council meetings only as observers, just as with any other member of the public. Candidates cannot make individual presentations to school councils.

Political Activity in Schools During Elections Procedure

- 1.4 School councils are not permitted to endorse a specific trustee candidate or other government level candidate, or to campaign on behalf of a specific candidate. School councils are not to distribute candidate information.
- 1.5 In the event that an all-candidates meeting is requested by students and connected to curriculum, such a meeting is to be for students taking relevant courses. If other students express an interest in participating to their teacher or principal, they will have the opportunity to do so.
- 1.6 When arranging an all-candidates meeting, every effort must be made to ensure all candidates have an opportunity to attend.
 - 1.6.1 At least two weeks advance notice must be given to all candidates.
 - 1.6.2 If candidates are unable to attend, they may have a designate attend on their behalf.
 - 1.6.3 A minimum of two candidates or designates, for the same position, must confirm their attendance at least one week in advance of the meeting in order for the meeting to proceed.
 - 1.6.4 All candidates meetings may be organized by students during the regular school day or by community organizations / school councils after regular school hours with the support of the principal.
 - 1.6.5 An all-candidates meeting organized by students or school councils must ensure that candidates' messaging remains restricted to their party's platform, or personal views while being respectful of other candidates' views or beliefs.
- 1.7 Candidates are not to invite any media to school events.
- 1.8 Candidates, or their staff, are prohibited from taking pictures or recording audio/video when inside the school during an all-candidates meeting.
- 1.9 All activities related to capturing student images and identifiable information must be undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.
- 2.0 Students**
 - 2.1 While on Board property during school hours, a student may not be actively involved in a candidate's campaign.

Political Activity in Schools During Elections Procedure

- 2.2 Secondary school students may choose to work on political campaigns. Activities related to recognized political organizations, municipal, provincial and federal political activities, except for candidates running for the position of Trustee for Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, will count towards community involvement hours. This work must take place outside of the instructional day.

3.0 Staff

- 3.1 Employees must not engage in partisan or campaign activities of any kind while on Board property or during work hours.
- 3.2 Board employees may not wear articles of clothing or other paraphernalia, such as but not limited to, scarves, buttons, caps, pins and signs while on Board property that support or refer to political parties or candidates.
- 3.3 Supplying personal information (name, address, phone number, email) of students and parents, including school council members, to any candidates or their staff is strictly prohibited.
- 3.4 No campaign materials shall be given to the students or distributed for students to take home.

4.0 Schools

- 4.1 Schools with social media accounts may follow candidates but must ensure that they follow all candidates involved.
- 4.2 As per the *Municipal Elections Act*, if a school is selected as a polling station and an agreement between HWDSB and the Returning Officer has been reached, it may not be changed.
- 4.3 Schools that are selected as polling stations should try to use doors that open directly to the outside from the area used as a polling station as the main entrance and exit for voters.
- 4.4 Principals should be cognizant that exterior entrances may include walking across uneven terrain, accessibility or distance issues and it may be difficult for some to use these entrances. If this is the case, voters are to use an accessible door.

Political Activity in Schools During Elections Procedure

- 4.5 As part of the Safe Welcome Program, Facility Services will make every effort to ensure elections staff provide two monitors to greet voters and escort them through the school to the polling station, in the event that exterior doors do not enter directly into the polling station.
- 4.6 In the event that election monitors cannot be secured, Principals should ask for community volunteers to be on a roster to admit voters as they arrive. Students are not permitted to do this task.