

POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Board employees may participate in political activities to the full extent permitted by the United States Constitution and federal and state laws securing the right to engage in such activities. However, to the extent not inconsistent with the constitution and laws, participation in political activities by Board employees is subject to the restrictions stated in this policy.

As used in this policy, the term “political” or “politics” refers either to activities in support of or opposition to a candidate for elected office at any level of government, or activities in support of or in opposition to an issue, initiative, or ballot question related to governmental or public affairs.

School employees, in their capacities as public employees of Athens City Schools, should maintain a position of neutrality on political issues so as not to impose their personal views and beliefs on students. As such, no political activity shall be permitted on the part of any school employee at any time during regular school hours, on-duty hours, or at Board-sponsored or Board-sanctioned events, functions, or at activities, while the employee is on duty or assigned official responsibilities. Under no circumstances shall school system personnel use classrooms, facilities, materials, equipment, or other Board property/resources to espouse politics, except that school facilities may be utilized in accordance with the school system's Facility Rental policy.

Employees may not display signs, posters, banners, flags or symbols in their offices and classrooms that represent their political viewpoints and that are unrelated to class curriculum. This does not prevent the display of the United States flag, the Alabama flag, or other flags that are appropriate to the curriculum of a particular class.

School system personnel may participate in national, city, county, or state political activities to the same extent as any other citizen, including the endorsement of candidates and contributing to political campaigns, provided such activities are not conducted during normal work periods. However, school system personnel engaging in political activity shall make it clear that their statements and actions are theirs as individuals and that they in no manner represent the views of the school system.

School system personnel seeking public office may continue to hold their employment positions as long as all political activities are conducted on their personal time, i.e. not during the workday.

Employees may not invite or allow announced candidates for political office to address student groups except when such candidates are participating in a forum or like format that is designed to provide all candidates the opportunity to participate. Such forums may be conducted only for appropriate age groups, and with the advance approval of the school principal and the Superintendent.

Signs for political candidates may not be placed on schools or school board property. Campaign literature for political candidates and other such material may not be distributed on Board property during the regular school or work day, and may not be distributed at school or Board-sponsored events or activities in a manner that impedes the normal and safe movement of pedestrian or vehicular traffic, that creates any other safety hazard or risk, or that disturbs or disrupts the function, activity, or event.

Nothing in this policy shall be construed to prohibit Board employees from engaging in personal political expressions provided that the activity:

- a. Is passive in nature (such as a bumper sticker on the employee's personal vehicle, or having a private discussion with a colleague about politics while on a break from his/her duties) and does not consist of active campaigning, electioneering, or advocating while on duty;
- b. Is not disturbing or disruptive of the learning environment; and
- c. Is not displayed, presented, or discussed so as to suggest that students or subordinate employees who do not support or agree with the employee's political position will suffer any retaliation or adverse consequences as a result of such disagreement.

Nothing in this policy shall be construed to prohibit Board employees from discussing political matters when such discussions are appropriate to the curriculum of a particular class.

Nothing in this policy shall be construed to prohibit the Board from using public funds and resources to support statewide or local ballot measures related to the school system to the extent they are not prohibited by Ala. Code § 17-17-5.1. Likewise, nothing in this policy shall be constructed to prohibit Board employees from engaging in activities concerning statewide or local ballot measures related to the school system to the extent they are not prohibited by Ala. Code § 17-17-5.1.

Legal Reference: Ala. Code § 17-1-4 (1975); Ala. Code § 17-17-5 (1975); *Kennedy v. Bremerton School Dist.*, 142 S. Ct. 2407 (2022); *Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Community School Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969); Ala. Code § 17-17-5.1 (1975).

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