

USE OF SCHOOL BOARD RESOURCES DURING ELECTIONS PROCEDURE

RATIONALE:

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) is committed to supporting civic engagement while maintaining fairness, neutrality, and non-partisanship during municipal, provincial, and federal election periods, including by-elections.

HWDSB supports student and community engagement in the democratic process through curriculum-aligned learning opportunities. At the same time, it is essential that school environments remain impartial, safe, and free from political influence or disruption.

HWDSB strictly prohibits the use of School Board Resources for any campaign-related purpose, and all individuals must comply with applicable legislation governing elections.

During the campaign period, campaign-related activities—such as promoting candidates, distributing campaign materials, or using School Board resources for political purposes—do not take place on Board or school property, except as permitted through all-candidates meetings.

This procedure provides operational direction to support consistent application of the policy during the campaign period.

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.

Campaign Period:

- For municipal elections, the campaign period is defined as May 1 until Voting Day in a regular municipal election year.
- For provincial/federal elections, the campaign period begins the day of issuance of the writ or dissolution of Parliament to Voting Day.
- For any by-election, the campaign period is determined by the appropriate legislation, including the [Municipal Elections Act](#), [Election Act](#) and/or the [Canada Elections Act](#).

Candidate: Any person who has filed a Nomination Form as a candidate in the municipal or school board trustee election or by-election, or a person who is a candidate or who is seeking nomination in a provincial or federal election or by-election.

Non-partisanship: Refers to not being biased towards any particular political group or individual.

Registered Third-Party Advertiser: As defined in the Municipal Elections Act, an individual, corporation or trade union registered to incur expenses for advertisements or other election-related messaging.

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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.

School Board Resources: Any HWDSB-issued item, staff time, or Board-owned property and infrastructure, including computers, laptops, phones, tablets, websites, newsletters, email systems, Wi-Fi, Board or school social media accounts, logos/branding, phone numbers and contact lists.

PROCEDURES:

1.0 Candidates and Political Activity in Schools

This section outlines expectations for candidates and political activity to ensure that schools remain neutral, safe, and focused on learning during the campaign period.

1.1 Maintaining a Non-Partisan Environment

- 1.1.1 To maintain a non-partisan environment, campaigning or partisan political activity does not take place on Board or school property.
- 1.1.2 Campaign materials (e.g., signs, flyers, posters) shall not be displayed or distributed on Board property except where authorized (e.g., designated polling station areas).
- 1.1.3 Candidates and registered third-party advertisers shall not use Board resources for any campaign-related purpose.

1.2 Participation of Candidates in Schools

- 1.2.1 To maintain neutrality, Candidates do not participate in school or Board activities during the campaign period, including presenting, attending as invited guests, or engaging with school communities in a campaign capacity.
- 1.2.2 Candidates may attend public meetings (e.g., school council meetings) only as members of the public, without participation or presentation.

1.3 Current Trustees

- 1.3.1 Current Trustees may continue to participate in school or Board events in their official capacity, while maintaining a non-partisan approach throughout the campaign period.
- 1.3.2 Trustees shall not campaign or conduct themselves in any way that may be perceived as campaigning.

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1.4 All-Candidates Meetings

- 1.4.1 All-candidates meetings may be organized by students during the school day as part of curriculum-connected learning, or by school councils or community organizations after school hours, with the approval of the Principal.
- 1.4.2 These meeting may be organized:
 - By students during the school day (curriculum-connected)
 - By school councils or community organizations after school hours, with Principal approval.
- 1.4.3 Requirements:
 - All candidates must be invited
 - Minimum two weeks' notice must be provided
 - At least two candidates (or designates) must confirm attendance
 - Format must be balanced, respectful, and non-partisan
- 1.4.4 During all-candidates meetings, candidates must not invite media, photograph or record students, staff or attendees, and must comply with applicable privacy legislation.

2.0 Use of School Board Resources

- 2.1 School Board resources must not be used for campaign-related purposes.
- 2.2 Examples of inappropriate use of School Board resources include:
 - Use of Board email, devices, or Wi-Fi for campaigning
 - Posting or sharing campaign content on school platforms
 - Use of school logos, branding, or identity
 - Use or sharing of contact lists or personal information
 - Use of staff time or school facilities for campaign purposes
- 2.3 Staff, students, and trustees are expected to ensure that campaign communications are not sent or forwarded using Board-provided resources and that Board systems are not used to promote or endorse candidates.

3.0 Staff Responsibilities

- 3.1 Staff play an important role in maintaining a neutral and respectful learning environment and are expected to demonstrate political neutrality and avoid real or perceived endorsement of any candidate or party.
- 3.2 Staff are expected to refrain from campaign activities during work hours and on Board property.
- 3.3 To support a neutral environment, staff do not wear political campaign materials or distribute campaign materials at school. Staff also do not share or amplify candidate

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messaging through school accounts or provide personal information of students, parents, or staff.

- 3.4 Staff may participate in political activities outside of work hours, provided that no School Board resources are used and there is no conflict with their professional responsibilities.

4.0 Student Engagement and Responsibilities

- 4.1 Students do not engage in campaign-related activities while at school or participating in school-sponsored activities.

5.0 Teaching and Learning (Civic Engagement)

- 5.1 Schools are encouraged to provide meaningful, curriculum-aligned opportunities for students to explore and understand the democratic process during election periods.
- 5.2 Teachers may use selected campaign materials from multiple political perspectives to support critical thinking, debate, and understanding of democratic processes.
- 5.3 These activities must be balanced, non-advocacy in nature, aligned with curriculum expectations, and implemented with Principal awareness.

6.0 Sharing of Political Information

- 6.1 To maintain neutrality and consistency across the system, schools do not share or distribute political materials through students, staff, school councils, communication platforms, or school events and facilities.
- 6.2 Prohibited materials include:
- Flyers, brochures, newsletters
 - Candidate speeches or messaging
 - Campaign advertisements
- 6.3 Only non-partisan election information from official election bodies may be shared, and only through central Board communications, not individual schools.

7.0 School Councils, Committees and Community Use

- 7.1 School Councils support a non-partisan environment and do not endorse candidates, distribute campaign materials, or host partisan activities.
- 7.2 All community users of schools must comply with this procedure.
- 7.3 School facilities shall not be used for campaign purposes except where permitted (e.g., all-candidates meetings).
- 7.4 Third-party advertisers are subject to the same restrictions as candidates.

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8.0 Social Media Use

- 8.1 School social media accounts are expected to remain neutral and reflect the Board's commitment to fairness and non-partisanship.
- 8.2 Schools shall not endorse or promote candidates through posts, likes, shares, or reposts.
- 8.3 If following candidates, all candidates must be followed equally.

9.0 Schools as Polling Stations

- 9.1 Schools designated as polling stations must comply with applicable legislation.
- 9.2 Schools shall maintain normal operations wherever possible, ensure student safety at all times and maintain neutrality in all activities.
 - 9.2.1 Students will not be assigned roles related to managing voter access or election operations.
- 9.3 Where feasible, separate entrances shall be used for voters, with attention to accessibility and ease of use for all members of the public.
- 9.4 Safe access procedures shall be followed in accordance with the Safe Welcome Program.

10.0 Compliance and Reporting of Concerns

- 10.1 Any concerns or potential breaches of this procedure should be reported to the Principal as soon as possible to support timely review and resolution.
- 10.2 Matters may be escalated to the Chief Executive Officer and Trustee Services for review.
- 10.3 Corrective actions may include the removal of materials, direction to cease activity or further investigation and follow-up.