

TELEPHONE
508-835-2917

FAX
508-835-8992



RICHARD A. MEAGHER
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

WEST BOYLSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
125 CRESCENT STREET
WEST BOYLSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 01583

October 7, 2024

Dear West Boylston Staff and Community Members:

With state and federal elections fast approaching, I am taking this opportunity to remind us all of the importance of adhering to the relevant laws, policies, and guidelines with respect to political activity in school.

As a public school district, it is our obligation and legal responsibility to educate students about the history of the United States, current events, and the importance of civic engagement to our democracy. Our educational system is designed not to tell students what to think about issues, but rather, how to gather and examine information, think critically, engage with peers, and draw informed conclusions.

I recognize that we live in a politically charged time and that this community is composed of individuals with different life experiences, backgrounds, and viewpoints. Many of us are deeply passionate about certain issues and candidates. Although all community members may not share the same views, it is imperative that we maintain a safe educational environment that fosters thoughtful academic discourse, protects the rights of those involved, and is conducive to learning. Thus, we must take care to preserve our school cultures rooted in empathy and support rather than conflict and opposition.

When disputes arise regarding political activity in school, individuals often argue they have a right to free speech under the First Amendment. That Constitutional provision does not, however, give individuals the right to voice any opinion, in any setting, without any consequences. The circumstances and context matter, and in the case of schools, we have a legal and ethical responsibility to ensure speech does not impermissibly influence the political process or create a disruption that would be harmful to students or staff.

Thus, in preparation for Election Day, I am reminding the entire community that the law prohibits campaigning and political fundraising in schools or on school grounds. Furthermore, public employees are prohibited from engaging in any political advocacy on school grounds, or during the school day, and may not use any school property or resources to campaign or raise funds for any candidate or referendum. See M.G.L. c. 268A; M.G.L. c. 55. This includes a prohibition on using school district emails, mailing lists, printers, and office supplies. It is also not permissible for teachers or other staff members to affix signs endorsing a candidate on school walls or advocate for any political candidate in class.

When engaging students in discussion about politics, which should generally be limited to classes in which such discussions are appropriate, educators typically should remain neutral about our own views, while creating a constructive forum for students to explore and discuss the issues.

Finally, verbal or symbolic speech which results in disruption, disorder, or interference with instruction or professional activities is prohibited.

If you have questions or concerns about these matters, please feel free to contact my office.

Sincerely,

Richard Meagher, Superintendent