

MISD Staff,

Free speech is one of our nation's core founding principles of democracy and as we enter the political season with the upcoming presidential election, we want to remind staff of the rules as district employees.

Magnolia ISD has two specific board policies that address (1) an employee's personal rights and freedoms in participating in political activities (DGA), and (2) how teachers should select controversial topics for discussion in the classroom and remain impartial (EMB). We address both of these policies below.

The general rules for [DGA \(Local\)](#) board policy states that an employee's participation in community, political, or employee organization activities shall be entirely voluntary and shall not:

1. Interfere with the employee's performance of assigned duties and responsibilities.
2. Result in any political or social pressure being placed on students, parents, or staff.
3. Involve trading on the employee's position or title with the District.

As a general rule, school district employees **may**:

- express their political views and political activities on their own time, with their own resources, so long as the employee's off-duty speech or activities do not adversely affect school operations or the employee's effectiveness on the job.
- encourage the civic duty of voting i.e. wearing an "I voted" sticker. Political lapel pins, clothing, signs, stickers or displays that are specific to a candidate are not permitted on campus. This prohibition does not apply to bumper stickers on personal vehicles provided that the style and content of the bumper sticker is not obscene, profane, disruptive, or otherwise in violation of district rules.
- campaign on their personal social media accounts so long as the accounts are private and with the understanding that any political comments should be respectful as school employees still have to serve the general public.

School district employees **may not**:

- use district resources, time or money for a particular candidate or ballot measure.
- solicit volunteers to assist with a campaign for or against a political candidate or ballot measure.

Board policy [EMB \(Local\)](#) addresses how teachers should select topics and guide the discussion fairly and courteously in the classroom while remaining impartial and objective.

A **teacher selecting topics** for discussion in the classroom shall be adequately informed about the issue and capable of providing instruction on the subject, free from personal bias. The teacher shall be certain that:

1. The issue in question is within the range, knowledge, maturity, and comprehension of the students.

2. The issue is current and educationally significant.
3. The consideration of the issue does not interfere with required instruction.
4. Sufficient relevant information on all aspects of the issue is provided.

In ***guiding classroom discussion*** of controversial issues, teachers shall:

1. Foster students' critical thinking skills.
2. Encourage discussion based on rational analysis.
3. Create an atmosphere in which students learn to respect others' opinions and disagree courteously.
4. Ensure that multiple viewpoints about the issue are presented by introducing an unexpressed viewpoint when necessary.
5. Avoid any attempt to coerce or persuade students to adopt the teacher's point of view.

School district employees ***may not***:

- discuss with students personal opinions regarding a political candidate or ballot proposition.

Public agencies like school districts must remain neutral and the free speech rights of public employees and public officials are sometimes limited by rules and regulations as outlined by our board policies. Public education has been the cornerstone of our democracy and it is our job as educators to allow students to form their own political or ideological beliefs without an educational system bias. Should you have any questions, please contact your campus administrator.

Sincerely,
TS