



Election Guidelines

The following guidelines apply to municipal, provincial and federal elections.

School visit by individual candidates

Requests by and for individual candidates to visit a school are not considered appropriate during an election campaign. This restriction includes informal visits to classrooms and meetings with the School Council or with school administrators. District School Board Ontario North East (DSB1) election guidelines do not permit visits of any kind by individual candidates for office.

School events – (e.g., Information Nights, barbecues, graduation/commencement)

Information Nights and other school-related events are intended for current and prospective students and families at the school. They are not for candidates to use as a way to campaign. If the candidate is a family member, he or she must not campaign during a visit and cannot hand out materials.

Candidates who have traditionally attended school-related events at a specific school can attend the event. They cannot campaign while in attendance.

All-candidates debates organized by the school

In intermediate and senior divisions, an election is an ideal time to help students learn more about municipal, provincial and federal government.

DSB1 allows all-candidates debates as part of a learning activity in the classroom program.

Invitations to participate must include all candidates.

A minimum of two weeks notice must be provided to all candidates. If candidates are unable to attend, they may have a designate attend on their behalf.

If two or more candidates can attend the debate, the event may proceed. Candidates must provide written confirmation or regrets to the school organizer at least one week in advance of the meeting.

This approach will give students the opportunity to see a debate between at least two varying points of view. If only one candidate can attend, then the event must be rescheduled or cancelled.

Upon inviting the candidates, the school will set the expectations of tone and conduct for the debate. Candidates or their designate are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful and professional manner. They agree to refrain from any misconduct and derogatory language that would negatively impact the learning environment in the school. The candidates must agree to maintain decorum and contribute to a safe and conducive learning environment for all students.

On approval of the principal, the media may be invited to attend the all-candidates debate. The Communications Officer will support the school in writing and distributing a media advisory that will include the general purpose, date, time and place of the event. No candidate names or biographies will be included in the advisory.

The format of the debates must allow all candidates equal opportunity to address their issues.

All-candidates debates organized independently

These events are part of Community Use of Schools program and open to the general public.

Distribution of material by candidates

DSB1 does not allow any political information to be distributed through schools. It also includes material distributed indirectly on behalf of a candidate. For example, the School Council cannot choose to distribute information about a particular candidate. This restriction includes current Trustees who are candidates in elections.

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.

Individual candidates are not permitted to campaign on school property, including at School Council meetings, staff events or other school and/or board related activities. This includes families, School Council members, staff or Trustees who may be candidates.

Candidates are not permitted to use video or photographic images of students obtained during a school visit or school/board activity in political or information materials. Candidates may not invite the media to school events.

It is appropriate to distribute information about the election in general - for example, information from the municipality about the date of the election.

School Councils

School Councils are agents of the school and of DSB1 and are bound by the same guidelines as the school. It is not appropriate for the School Council as a group to endorse a specific candidate or to campaign on behalf of a specific candidate.

The Council could, however, host an all-candidates debate to assist families in learning more about all the candidates. These debates must be approved by motion at a School Council meeting and, if held at a DSB1 school, must comply with the board's Community Use of Schools procedures and these guidelines.

Any communication with families should be generic in nature and include only the general purpose, date, time and place of the School Council organized event. No candidate names or biographies may be included.

The format of the debates must allow all candidates equal opportunity to address their issues.

The council shall not distribute information on behalf of, or about, a specific candidate.

If it is the practice of the local Trustee to be in attendance when the School Council meets, this may continue. Otherwise, individual candidates are not permitted to meet with the School Council during the campaign period.

These guidelines apply to the School Council as a group. Candidates should not be discussed and/or referenced by School Council members during a School Council meeting. The individual members of a School Council, including the chair of the council, are not limited in any way in terms of their ability to campaign for specific candidates. If they support a candidate, however, it is as an individual, not as a representative of the council.

A School Council chair or member who is also a candidate for election may continue in their School Council role for the remainder of their term. However, they must not use their School Council role to promote their campaign. They are not allowed to distribute campaign material on school property or to discuss their campaign during council meetings. This also applies to members of the Parent Involvement Committee.

School Council meetings are public. Even though candidates for office are not allowed to meet directly with the council, a candidate may choose to attend a council meeting as a member of the public. They may ask a question during public question period, as any other member of the public could, but are not allowed to use this time to deliver campaign messages or to give out campaign material at the meeting.

Requests for information

DSB1 is committed to public accountability and service when responding to requests for information. If a candidate contacts the school office for general information about the school, that information will be provided as promptly as possible.

DSB1 is governed by the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Information that is personal in nature, cannot be disclosed. This includes a list of all the students at a school or in a particular grade or class.

Requests for information may be referred to the Communications Officer at communications@dsb1.ca.

Role of current Trustees

Current members of the Board of Trustees are still serving out their term in office and continue to fulfill their usual roles until a municipal election. It is appropriate for Principals to invite Trustee(s) to events and activities at the school, as they would have prior to the beginning of a municipal election campaign even if they are candidates in upcoming elections.

For example, if it is the previous practice of a school to have the local Trustee hand out student awards at the monthly assembly, attend a regular School Council meeting, attend an information night or bring greetings at graduation, these practices can continue during a municipal election campaign. Messages cannot be political in nature or reference the candidate's election campaign. Current Trustees may not use Board email for campaigning.

Schools shall not send out any campaign material on behalf of any candidate including a current Trustee.

Conflict of interest

It is a conflict of interest for school administrators or other senior staff to campaign on behalf of a candidate for Trustee.

Campaigning for candidates

It is not appropriate for any DSB1 staff member to campaign for or endorse a specific candidate while in the workplace or when they are in the community representing the board in an official capacity, for instance, attending a meeting in the community. Employees may campaign for candidates in their personal time outside of work hours.

Social media - personal accounts

Staff who follow a candidate on their personal social media accounts prior to the election campaign do not need to unfollow them.

School administrators and senior staff may wish to limit retweets, favourites, shares or likes from their personal social media accounts as these are perceived as endorsements.

Social media - school accounts

Schools that follow/friend a candidate on their social media accounts prior to the election campaign, may continue to follow them.

During the election, do not retweet, share or like candidates' social media posts from your school's accounts. These are perceived as endorsements and must be avoided.

If you have questions or if situations arise that are not covered by these guidelines, please contact the Communications Officer at communications@dsb1.ca.