



Seattle Public Schools and the Election Season: ***Community Voter Registration Drive***

Teaching students the value of empowering others by
registering community members to vote!

Hi Civics Supporters and Colleagues,

This document will show you how teaching students can deeply experience and learn the value of empowering others by registering community members to vote! It is written to make it easy for you to run a community voter registration drive at your elementary, middle, or high school.

Listed below is some basic information and directions about how social studies teachers, administrators, and others throughout any district can give students the knowledge and materials to register eligible citizens to vote. **Voter registration** is an absolutely super civics education opportunity – and it takes very little time. –

Remember, there are two categories of voter registration in schools:

- 1) **Registering 17 and 18 year old students at your (high) school** – for info, see your school’s social studies department head, or register [online at the WA Sec. of State Office](#), or order registration forms from [King County Elections](#).
 - a. **Registering all seniors to vote is a commitment that SPS senior social studies (government) teachers made back in 2012** for all SPS high schools. These students can also be superb leaders and helpers in organizing the broader objectives of the Community Voter Registration Drive explained here.
- 2) **Registering non- students – including immediate and extended family** members, friends and families and community members, see other registration options below. **THIS IS THE FOCUS OF THIS DOC!**

Community Voter Registration Drives are Top Shelf Civics Activities!

In Action: E Pluribus Unum and Working for the Common Good:

Basic Overview and Rationale:

The educational goal of a voter registration drive is to help students learn how the registration and voting processes work and to provide students with the powerful and memorable civic experience of helping others to become active voters. Students are given all of the information and voter registration forms that they need to go out and get as many of their family members and eligible friends, neighbors, and community members as possible to sit down and fill out the simple, one page registration document. I’ve had kids register people at church, basketball games, and many other neighborhood places in South Seattle.

I hope you will give it a shot – it is super easy to do --King County Elections will deliver you the single page registration forms!!!! I guarantee your students will profit from the experience. I have done this for years with 9-12 graders and it is wonderful: *the kids feel proud about their work, they learn about the process, they gain a sense of agency in empowering others, it takes very little instructional time, and offers great extension activities if you like.*

Also, Community Voter Registration Drives bring great dividends to your class: Since they occur early in the year, voter registration drives offer:

- 1) a memorable touchstone experience as your social studies class:
 - a) moves forward for the rest of the year, and,
 - b) as it studies the election and its aftermath, *including the anticipated analysis of how low voter turnout and registration issues affected the final vote* (this is a good issue to note/study in advance).
- 2) a way to build unity within classrooms, departments, schools,
- 3) an opportunity for low-skilled kids to succeed and get off to a strong start in class,
- 4) leverage to increase student interest in the elections, civics, etc.
- 5) An enormous, unlimited selection of extension activities --- especially around election issues.

Legalities:

The SSD Legal Department has signed off on this district wide “Get Out the Vote” effort with the provision that it be conducted with an absolutely non-partisan ethos and process. This is as it should be, of course. Also, FYI, attached below is Legal’s 8/31/2012 email “*Re: Election, Initiative, Referendum, and Levy Related Activities - Guidelines for School District Personnel.*”

Crucial dates:

Early October --- All registration forms must postmarked by **early** October-or dropped off at KCE First Tuesday in November – Election day!

REGISTERING VOTERS IS EASY!!!!!! THE TEACHER TO STUDENT TO FAMILY/COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Deciding how many forms to order per school:

*** 3 registration forms per student is the average – some register none and some register 5 or 6. Therefore, a school with 1000 students should get 3000 forms, while 4A schools might order 4000 – 6000.

*** Note: 1000s of forms seems like a lot but it is not – 5000 is equivalent to ten reams of copy paper or one box of it. And, it is ok to have extras! They keep and can be returned or simply kept for future registration efforts.

Order registration forms from:

King County Elections Headquarters

919 SW Grady Way

Renton, WA 98057

206-296- 8683 or 206 – 296 – 5075 direct line to Matt Fowler, unofficial SSD registration advocate

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/elections.aspx>

EDUCATOR DIRECTIONS TO CONDUCT VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES:

For middle schools and high schools:

The process is extremely simple:

- 1) For high and middle schools it's most logical, efficient, and easiest when the student voter registration drive is carried out in social studies classes
- 2) Social studies departments should choose a registration "point person"
- 3) Point teachers at schools make call to King County Elections to have registration forms delivered or prepared for pickup
- 4) Forms are distributed to all students in each social studies class with haste
- 5) Teachers spend 120 seconds reviewing how to fill in the form so students can make sure folks do it properly. Or more if necessary.
- 6) Students discuss, plan, and identify their "victims" for their registration sales pitch! You can give them whatever time you like. Get them to COMPETE to register the most – see below!!!
- 7) Students should have new voters fill out forms completely on the spot and then students "turn in" their registration forms for credit if you like.

That is all there is to it!!!

Related process info/ideas for planning, motivation, etc.

- 1) Clip boards can be very helpful in this vein of civic work – plus kids love them because it makes them feel more officious!
- 2) Participants can earn Community Service Learning Hours at most schools
- 3) Each student should attempt to register as many folks as possible, including: all family members, and at least 2-6 other adults - that has been a reasonable goal over the years – obviously the "availability" of folks to register will vary from neighborhood to neighborhood – ambitious students can go search out folks to register beyond the confines of their neighborhood
- 4) **Participation can be maximized in many ways:**
 - a. **Have students COMPETE against one another in a given class (KIDS LOVE THIS), have your classes compete against other classes for most completed, turned in forms, whole grades can compete against one another, or even schools.**
 - b. Encourage students to "Get the Vote Out" in their neighborhoods, places of worship, even the mall. It takes so little time and *is very rewarding for the students* - and brings their families into the school/politics nexus in a powerful way.
- 5) Non-essential notes: a) for that small percentage of kids who do not have social studies this fall, a simple note or two in the bulletin can get them in, b) registering seniors in class or at school in a larger group can be made into a great ceremony and learning opportunity on occasion.

For elementary schools:

The process is extremely simple:

- 1) For Elementary schools – principals can work with staff to determine if there is enough time to do this assignment/activity this year. If so:
- 2) For Elementary schools – principals can work with staff to determine from which grade level up would be able to responsibly carry out the basic requirements of the process. 4th graders would likely be able to register voters perhaps.
- 3) A point person would have to be chosen and then simply follow the directions above, except:
- 4) Each classroom teacher would run the process out of her/his room.

Internet resources

[Washington State Elections](#) – Sec. of State’s Office

- Note: in mult. languages

[King County Elections](#)

- Note: in mult. languages

[League of Women Voters \(King Co./Seattle\)](#)

VERY IMPORTANT FOR SOME FAMILIES: Both provide background data for any students' family members that might have questions about eligibility to vote.

I hope these documents are helpful in your efforts to push voter registration and participation with your students. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions!

Yours in Civics,
Hutch

[Web Hutchins](#)
 Founder & Director
[Civics for All: Seattle's K-12 Initiative](#)
 206-931-7246
webhutchins@comcast.net

Joy in the morning.
Peace in the valley.

Note: Attached below on next page is a 2012 legal overview for educators in the SSD on Election, Initiative, Referendum, and Levy Related Activities - Guidelines for School District Personnel ---though it does not refer to teacher-student issues of political bias, etc. it elucidates some of the basic ideas therein--- might be worth a quick scan.

MEMORANDUM

To: All Staff

From: Kevin O'Neill, Senior Assistant General Counsel
John Cerqui, Deputy General Counsel

Date: August 31, 2012

Re: Election, Initiative, Referendum, and Levy Related Activities - Guidelines for School District Personnel

The purpose for this email is to remind all Seattle School District ("District") employees that under Washington State law employees may not use or authorize the use of District facilities to support or oppose a candidate or a ballot measure. District facilities include, but are not limited to use of stationery, postage, equipment, use of employee time, vehicles, office space, publications, and client lists. These rules apply to all upcoming elections.

Basic Principles

The general rule is that school district employees cannot use public funds or resources to support or oppose a statewide referendum, a statewide or local ballot proposition, or a candidate for public office. This includes a school levy. As such, the District cannot allow employees or outside individuals or organizations to use District equipment (e.g., copy machines, fax machines, or computers), supplies, employee work time, school buildings or office space, or District communications to support or oppose a statewide referendum, a statewide or local ballot proposition, or a candidate for public office.

Staff can spend their own personal time and resources helping a campaign on their own time and with their own resources. District employees should be clear that any participation in campaign activities is personal.

For additional information on Public Disclosure Commission ("PDC") election campaign rules, please go to the PDC website and review PDC Interpretation No. 01-03, Guidelines for School Districts in Election Campaigns (Revised September 28, 2006). See <http://www.pdc.wa.gov/archive/pdf/01-03Revised092806.pdf>

If you have any questions about this memorandum or ballot measure/election campaign activities please contact us by email at jcerqui@seattleschools.org or kfoneill@seattleschools.org.

Common Questions

Q: May school newsletters remind voters of upcoming elections in their school newsletter?

A: Yes, if schools regularly announce election dates in the school newsletter. The announcement cannot, however, tell voters how to vote.

Q: May schools provide factual information to staff and families about levies.

A: Yes. An objective and fair presentation of the facts is permitted. The District's Communications Department will prepare a factual document for distribution. This document may be distributed through normal distribution channels for your school, e.g., kid mail, regularly scheduled newsletters, websites, bilingual documents, or other formats that are regularly used to communicate to families at your school.

Q: Can staff use internal mail systems (employee mail boxes and e-mail) to promote a ballot measure or a candidate?

A. No. The PDC in a Memorandum Dated May 18, 2004 (see attachment to this e-mail) states that internal mail systems (mail boxes and e-mail) cannot be used by "administrative staff, teachers and other district personnel to distribute information that supports or opposes a statewide referendum, a statewide or local ballot proposition, or a candidate for public office." Furthermore, the District's Network Use Agreement, which all employees were required to accept to obtain network access provides that "supporting or opposing a political candidate, an election campaign, or a ballot proposition, including a school levy," is prohibited. If you receive a political e-mail, please promptly delete the e-mail and do not forward it on. Receiving an unsolicited political e-mail is not a rule violation.

Q: May unions that represent District employees have a union meeting where a levy or a candidate is promoted?

A: Yes, if the collective bargaining agreement provides for meeting space at school. For example, the District's collective bargaining agreement with the Seattle Education Association ("SEA") authorizes SEA to have meetings on school property without paying a fee. These meetings are not public meetings; they are private meetings for SEA represented employees. The subjects for discussion at these meetings are exclusively SEA's. An SEA meeting to discuss or promote a candidate or ballot measure must take place during non-work time.

Q: May staff display campaign literature at school that promotes a ballot measure or candidate (e.g., posters and flyers)?

A: No. The District cannot display or distribute campaign material on school property that promotes a ballot measure or candidate. For example, a school cannot post in the front office a pro-levy sign or allow a teacher to post a "Vote for President A" sign in his or her classroom window. An exception to this rule is that if a class is discussing an educational topic e.g., political campaigns. If yes, political information may be shared and posted if it is done in a balanced manner.

Q: May staff hand out campaign materials to other staff in their classroom, the hallway, or the break room?

A: Yes. Staff may hand out campaign material to other staff during non-work times. The PDC recommends that this take place in a staff break room. That said, the District acknowledges that staff have a First Amendment right to discuss political issues with other staff, which includes the sharing of printed material.

Q: May principals/staff wear political buttons or display vehicle window signs or bumper stickers on a personal vehicle?

A: Yes. However, principals or supervisors cannot direct or encourage their staff to wear buttons or place bumper stickers on their vehicles. For clarification, a sign in a personal vehicle is permitted, but a sign in a school window is prohibited.

Q: May a staff member assist a campaign or support a ballot measure?

A: Yes. You may participate in any campaign activities as long as you are not representing your school or the District in your official capacity and provided no District facilities are used unless properly rented or used by staff for an approved union meeting.

Q: May schools or PTSA groups inform students and parents on how to register to vote?

A: Yes, so long as information on registering to vote takes place not only for school levies, but also for all elections.

Q: What are the basic rules on using "kid mail" to send campaign information home?

A: "Kid mail" is considered a District resource. Thus, school or PTSA publications or newsletters sent home with students cannot contain any material promoting or opposing a ballot measure or initiative. However, a factual description of the ballot measure or initiative, with no editorial opinion, may be included. School and PTSA newsletters sent home with kids cannot ask for volunteers to promote a ballot measure. For example, kid mail newsletters cannot say: "If you want to support the Families and Education Levy or volunteer on a phone bank, please contact person A."

Also, if a PTSA has endorsed a levy and PTSA endorsements are regularly included in their newsletters, the fact of that endorsement and the ballot title may be reported in the PTSA newsletter, even if it is delivered via kid mail.

Q: May a PTSA discuss levy or other ballot measures at a regularly scheduled PTSA meeting?

A: Yes. A factual discussion or participant comments concerning a levy or a ballot measure may take place at a PTSA meeting. The purpose for this discussion should be for the PTSA to decide whether to endorse or oppose a ballot proposition.

Q: May a PTSA use school facilities for meetings where information supporting or opposing a levy or ballot measure is presented, even if presented by an advocacy group?

A: Yes, if the presentation is done in a forum open to the public where equal access is provided to both groups. Equal access means both sides of a levy or ballot measure are given an equal opportunity to speak and make a presentation.

Q: May the PTSA use school facilities to campaign for the passage of a levy or ballot measure?

A: No. If the PTSA or any other group wants to campaign for a levy or ballot measure, the school facility would need to be rented for a fee. Please contact Eleanor Lockett at (206) 252-0640 to learn about property rental options and rates.

Q: May PTSA print and distribute a separate newsletter advocating support for a levy?

A: Yes, so long as no District resources are used (such as kid mail, school newsletters, or District websites). If PTSA want to produce a pro-levy statement or advocate for the passing of a levy, such a statement or newsletter would need to be mailed or delivered off school property to families at PTSA expense.