

**Staff Participation in the district's
Bond Referendum on Edina Public Schools Facilities
May 5, 2015**

We have prepared the following FAQ to help you understand your role as a district staff member during this referendum election. A good general rule to remember is — if you are acting in the capacity of a district staff member, you should not be advocating for or against the bond referendum.

Q. What may I tell or send home with students? What if students ask about the referendum in class?

- A.** You **may** provide information that is factual, such as when and where the election is being held. Information that you use should come directly from your building principal or the District Communications Office. You **may not** campaign to vote “yes” or “no” while working in your official capacity as an employee (*i.e.* teachers at conferences, when instructing or coaching).

Discussion regarding the bond referendum election is not appropriate for the classroom unless it is related to the curriculum, for example, related to discussion of citizen rights to vote, political process, etc., and/or does not attempt to persuade individuals how to vote on the issue.

Q. What may I say in classroom newsletters or tell parents at school events, conferences, via email, etc.?

- A.** SEE ABOVE. Again, principals and the Communications Office will provide teachers and staff with information that is appropriate to share. Remember, the underlying principle is: school districts may not expend school district funds to support a particular vote on a proposition. Therefore, newsletters or any official communication from the school may only provide factual information about the referendum and the fact that there is a special election on May 5.

Q. How can I be certain that the information I am providing fits within the legal guidelines?

- A.** Use only the information the school district has provided to staff for sharing or is available on the district's referendum website (www.edinaschools.org/referendum2015).

Q. What if a community member or parent confronts me on the information we are providing?

- A.** We are sometimes criticized for providing *any* information, including that which is legal and which we are obligated to provide. It is a good idea, therefore, to only use information provided by the school district. Then, the school district can respond to any criticisms.

Q. May I use school email as it relates to the bond referendum?

- A.** Staff should avoid using district email in any way that relates to campaigning for or against the referendum. District administration may utilize email to provide factual information regarding the levy. If staff members wish to inform parents and the public regarding the facts surrounding the referendum, materials prepared by the district should be used to communicate those facts and inform parents and the public.

Q. What can I use school district equipment for?

- A. We **may** use interschool mail, video/photo equipment, copy machines, etc., to provide factual information regarding many district issues, including our financial condition and facilities plan. We **may not** use school equipment to “get out the vote” or to provide reasons why people should vote yes or no. Remember, the law provides that school district funds cannot be used to promote an affirmative vote on a proposal. Use of school district equipment would be tantamount to using school district funds.

Q. When/where may I wear a button/sticker/t-shirt advocating for or against the referendum?

- A. It is your First Amendment right to wear buttons/stickers/t-shirts that say “Vote Yes” or “Vote No” during contract hours. However, doing so should be done with caution. If you are in a position of authority over students, parents, or other staff, you need to consider the influence you have and whether or not wearing advocacy items is appropriate. Such a consideration should be taken into account when you are acting in this authoritative capacity (e.g. as a teacher in the classroom) and does not apply to hours for which you are off-duty. Staff may, however, display generic positive messages about Edina Public Schools (e.g. “We Love Our Schools”).

In addition, per [MN Statute 211.B11](#) if you work in a school that also serves as a polling location (Concord, Cornelia, Countryside, Normandale, South View and Valley View (which includes EHS), you are not allowed to display any campaign material, post signs, ask, solicit, or in any manner try to induce or persuade a voter within the polling place or within 100 feet of the building in which a polling place is situated, or anywhere on the public property on which a polling place is situated, on primary or election day to vote for or refrain from voting for a candidate or ballot question. A person may not provide political badges, political buttons, or other political insignia to be worn at or about the polling place on the day of a primary or election. A political badge, political button, or other political insignia may not be worn at or about the polling place on Election Day.

Q. Do the rules change when I am off-site (i.e., at a coffee shop or out in public)?

- A. Yes, presuming you are not acting in the capacity of a district employee. While staff members may not encourage a “yes” or “no” vote on school premises during the contract day, staff members and school board members may certainly, in their personal capacity, engage in political activities as they wish.

Q. Can I write letters to the editor of newspapers?

- A. Yes. You may always express your personal opinion on such matters as classroom space issues. While a staff member may identify himself or herself as a staff member of the school district, he or she should also make it clear that the letter expresses his or her own personal opinion. It should not be written on school district stationery or include the district logo. If it is communicated via email, you cannot use your district email account, nor should it be sent using a school-owned device.

Q. May I post a sign in my yard?

- A. Yes.

Q. Am I allowed to make financial contributions to and/or participate in events sponsored by a citizen committee supporting or opposing the bond referendum?

- A. Yes.

Q. May I volunteer to work on phone banks or go door-to-door with literature?

- A.** Yes, so long as the volunteer activity does not occur during the contract day or contracted district activities.

Q. What can schools say in parent newsletters?

- A.** School newsletters, like the district newsletter from the District Communications Office, can provide information about the election such as where and when it is held, and can also provide factual financial and other data about the school district and referendum question. The district will provide principals with information that they can insert in their newsletters.

Q. May employee organizations send a letter or postcard to parents urging “yes” or “no” votes?

- A.** Yes. Employee organizations (e.g. Education Minnesota Edina) are separate entities and may campaign for or against the bond referendum. Employee organizations may also donate money to a citizen campaign. But again, no volunteer activity can occur during the contract day.

Q. What if I have more questions about my role as a staff member?

- A.** If in doubt about whether or not your actions with regard to the bond referendum are legal, consult with your building principal or *Susan Brott, Director of Communications and Community Engagement*, at 952-848-4066 or susan.brott@edinaschools.org.