



EDUCATION VOTES 2010

Education Votes 2010 Actions & Efforts

The 2010 elections will be a “change election” in South Carolina. On November 2, 2010, voters will elect a new governor, Lt. governor, superintendent of education, attorney general and a number of state representatives. The outcome of these races could dramatically impact public education. Public education supporters and advocates should take steps now to prepare for the election year. An organized and committed effort can make a difference in the outcome of major races. It is important to remember campaigns are marathons not sprints. Be zealous in your civic responsibility - get involved in the election process on behalf of public education. But, be smart. State law prohibits the use of school district personnel, equipment, materials, office buildings or other resources to influence the outcome of an election. Also, district policies prohibit campaigning for candidates - or campaign materials - on school or district property.

Actions and efforts

- Identify and recruit pro-public education candidates
There will be a minimum of six open seats in the state House of Representatives. To ensure seats are held by supporters of public education, it is important to identify, encourage and recruit pro-public education candidates to run for office.
 - Support pro-public education candidates
Contribute/donate to pro-public education candidates. Campaigns need money to be successful. Any donation, no matter the amount, can have a significant role in successful campaigns.
 - Volunteer
All successful campaigns have canvassing (door-to-door) efforts, phone bank efforts, letters to the editor and other activities that require the commitment and work of volunteers. If time does not permit you to volunteer, encourage your friends and family to do so. As public officials, consider activating your local political machines to support pro-public education candidates.
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- Educate the community
Educating the community about public education facts may be the most important role public education advocates can play during the 2010 election year. Anti-public education activists understand the importance of the 2010 elections and their efforts will center on misleading statements and positions about public school performance and funding. Public education supporters and advocates must be ready to counter these messages but also prepared to proactively inform the public of public education priorities and challenges. Some of the effective methods to educate the community are:
 - Hosting candidate forums
 - Writing editorials
 - Creating an online blog
 - Talking with social circles about education priorities

Known open seats

- House District 15 (Laurens, Newberry) - currently held by Jeff Duncan
- House District 26 (Greenville, Pickens) - currently held by Rex Rice
- House District 33 (Cherokee, Spartanburg) - currently held by Lanny Littlejohn
- House District 69 (Lexington) - currently held by Ted Pitts
- House District 87 (Lexington) - currently held by Nikki Haley
- House District 117 (Charleston) - currently held by Tim Scott

Possible open seats

Seats that may become open because current official is considering a run for another office

- House District 95 (Orangeburg) - currently held by Jerry Govan
- Senate District 8 (Greenville) - currently held David Thomas
- Senate District 25 (Aiken, Edgefield, McCormick) - currently held by Shane Massey



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Key dates and events

- September 7, 2009 - The unofficial start of election year 2010.
- October 10, 2009 - Candidates quarterly financial report due.
- January 10, 2010 - Candidates quarterly financial report due.
- March 16, 2010 (12:00pm) - Filing opens for party primary and convention candidates.
- March 30, 2010 (12:00pm) - Filing closes for party primary and convention candidates.
- April 9, 2010 - First public notice of primary and polling locations published.
- April 10, 2010 - Candidates quarterly financial report due (last report before June primary).
- April 24, 2010 - Last day to mail absentee ballots to Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voters.
- May 8, 2010 - Last day to register to vote in June 8 primary.
- **June 8, 2010 - Primaries held.**
- June 22, 2010 - Primary run-offs (if required).
- July 10 - Candidates quarterly financial report due.
- July 15, 2010 (12:00pm) - Last day to submit petitions for name to be placed on November 2 general election ballot.
- August 16, 2010 (12:00pm) - Petition candidates must be certified by this date.
- October 2, 2010 - Last day to register to vote for the general election.
- October 10, 2010 - Candidates quarterly financial report due (last report before General Election).
- **November 2, 2010 - Election day**

Online resources

- SC Election Commission (www.scvotes.org)
- SC Republican Party (www.scgop.com)
- SC Democratic Party (www.scdp.org)
- SC Ethics Commission (www.ethics.sc.gov)



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Public Employee Dos and Don'ts Questions & Answers

When it comes to elections, school and district employees have the same fundamental civic responsibilities and privileges as any other citizen. The 2010 election is an excellent opportunity for the education community to remind candidates for office to keep strong support for public schools as a top priority. Educators are trusted leaders who typically work with all facets of a community. It is critical to use this influence to speak out, organize, and support public education interests in the elections. The community listens to educators. Capture this strength! Be zealous in your civic responsibility by being active in the elections process for public schools!

How and when to participate?

The education community must be dedicated to recruiting and supporting qualified, pro-education candidates (which might be you!), working/volunteering on pro-education candidates' campaigns and hosting candidate forums. State law specifically says that government personnel may participate in election campaigns on their own time and on nongovernment premises.

However, some of these activities must take place after the school day and off district property. The law clearly prohibits the use of school district personnel, equipment, materials or an office building in an election campaign. Nor may anyone use or authorize the use of public funds, property, or time to influence the outcome of an election. Most district policies do not allow campaigning for candidates - or campaign materials - on school or district property, meaning no candidate t-shirts or other campaign items, or handing out campaign materials on school or district property. Be aware of what local policy says regarding political activities on district property.

As citizens, school employees are free to support the candidate(s) of their choice. It may be as simple as placing a candidate's sign in the front yard or supporting pro-public school candidates through such methods as:

- Identifying and recruiting pro-public education candidates.
- Contributing/donating to pro-public education candidates. Campaigns need money to be successful and public employees are free to contribute to candidates. State



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ethics laws limit the contribution amount to a candidate in an election cycle (up to \$3,500 for a state office, and up to \$1,000 for any other office).

- Volunteering! All successful campaigns have canvassing (door-to-door) efforts, phone banks, letters to the editor and other activities requiring the commitment and work of volunteers.
- Holding a fundraiser or a meet-and-greet the candidate event.

Can a district or school publish informational material concerning candidates?

Educating the community about public education facts may be one of the most important role public education advocates can play in the 2010 elections. Effective methods include hosting candidate forums, writing editorials, and talking in social circles about education issues.

State ethics laws allows for the use of incidental time and materials to prepare an informational newsletter (like this one), prepare informational materials, and conduct public meetings.

A school or district can ask all candidates running for a specific office to respond to questions on educational issues, which can be shared with employees and the public. Be sure each candidate is given the opportunity to respond to each question and, if they do not, then indicate "did not respond" next to the candidate's name for that question.

All candidates for the office must be included in the publication. Questions should be framed in a manner such that a particular candidate (or candidates) is not favored. State law forbids the use of public funds, property, or time to influence the outcome of an election. The key is to not attempt to convince people how to vote, or to favor a particular candidate.

Can a school or district conduct a candidates' forum?

Schools or districts may under state law conduct a candidates' forum. All candidates for a particular office should be invited (in writing) to participate. Prior to beginning the forum, it should be announced that all candidates were invited to participate. Remember, the run-up to the June primaries provides an excellent opportunity for a lively forum!



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Can districts/schools conduct get-out-the-vote activities? Can students be involved?

Nothing in state law prohibits a school or district from conducting get-out-the-vote activities that encourage students, teachers, and the public to register and vote in upcoming elections. In fact, state law enacted in 2004 requires public high schools to make available to its students voter registration application forms. The local voter registration board in each county must provide application forms upon the request of a high school official. Nothing in the law prohibits student involvement in these activities.

Any on-campus or school sponsored get-out-the-vote activities must ensure that campaign or other political materials are not included as part of the event.

Can candidates campaign on district property at after-school events such as football games?

In short, yes. But, this will likely be an issue mostly governed by local district policy.

A 2005 State Ethics Commission opinion said that placing campaign signs on or inside a government office building is a clear violation of state ethics laws prohibiting the use of government personnel, equipment, materials, or an office building in an election campaign. Further, "modifying" one's car by placing campaign signs on or around it in the school parking lot during school hours would violate this provision, the Commission said, because the predominant purpose of the public school property during the school day is the education of children.

A sporting event, however, is different, the Commission said. The placement of campaign signs during a sporting event, such as a football game, to which the general public is invited is not using public property to influence the outcome of an election. The predominant purpose of the public property during that time is to provide entertainment, not the education of children.

So, district policy may allow candidates to campaign on district property at after-school events such as an athletic event where the general public is invited. If such activity is allowed, all candidates must be given an equal opportunity.



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Can employees have candidate bumper stickers on their cars in the school or district parking lot?

As a state law matter, candidate bumper stickers on employees' cars parked in the school/district parking lot is acceptable. As noted above, "modifying" one's car by placing campaign signs on or around it in the school parking lot during school hours would violate the ethics act provision that prohibits the use of government personnel, equipment, materials, or an office building in an election campaign.

Public education will be at the center of the political discussion in every race next year. Will the public education community have a voice in these discussions? The answer is up to you.