Politics and the PTPC

Civic engagement is a right and a responsibility of citizenship. It can be a way to get involved in the local community. Many educators have run for and served in public office. Educators should be aware of the risks associated with discussing personal political views and activities with students and colleagues. Students should not be subjected to personal political views of educators who hold positions of authority and influence.

The good news is educators enjoy the right to free speech by statute:

AK Sec. 14.20.095. Right to comment and criticize not to be restricted.
A bylaw or regulation of the commissioner, a school board, or local school administrator may not restrict or modify the right of a teacher to engage in comment and criticism outside school hours, regarding school personnel, members of the governing body of any school or school district, any other public official, or any school employee, to the same extent that any private individual may exercise the right.

Be aware however that your professional obligations to the **Code of Ethics for Educators** includes several subsections that address politics, political activities, and personal views. Understanding and adhering to these subsections of the Code should help protect educators from complaints of violating the Code of Ethics.

Subsections (b) (2) and (6) and (7)

In fulfilling obligations to students, an educator:

(2) may not deliberately distort, suppress, or deny access to curricular materials or educational information in order to promote the personal view, interest, or goal of the educator;

(6) may not harass, discriminate against, or grant a discriminatory advantage to a student on the grounds of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, marital status, political or religious beliefs, physical or mental conditions, family, social, or cultural background, gender identification, or sexual orientation; shall make reasonable effort to assure that a student is protected from harassment or discrimination on these grounds; and may not engage in a course of conduct that would encourage a reasonable student to develop a prejudice on these grounds;

(7) may not use professional relationships with students for private advantage or gain;

Examples or Suggestions:

Educators should not share their personal political views while on duty. As adults in a position of authority, sharing our views with students can influence their beliefs in a manner that is unethical. Students should be allowed to discuss political issues (at appropriate times) in the classroom without their beliefs being applauded, criticized, or questioned by educators.

When teaching about political issues in the curriculum, give equal coverage to all sides of an issue. If you invite candidates for office to your classroom or school, invite all candidates for that office.

Students hear through their own filters, and may misconstrue or take parts of your perspective out of context.

Subsections (c) (2) and (5) and (6)	*Examples or Suggestions:*
In fulfilling obligations to the public, an educator: (2) shall take reasonable precautions to distinguish between the educator's personal views and those of any educational institution or organization with which the educator is affiliated; (5) may not use institutional privileges for private gain, to promote political candidates, or for partisan political activities; (6) not accept a gratuity, gift, or favor that might influence or appear to influence professional judgment, and may not offer a gratuity, gift, or favor to obtain special advantage;	**Educators should refrain from discussing political issues with parents or other members of the community *while on the clock*–they are acting in their official role as a representative of the school district, and as such may not use that position to influence people on political issues.** **Check School Board Policy regarding gifts and consider the appearance of favoritism.**
Subsections (d) (1) and (3) and (19) **In fulfilling obligations to the profession, an educator** (1) may not, on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, age, national origin, marital status, political or religious beliefs, physical condition, family, social or cultural background, gender identification, or sexual orientation, deny to a colleague a professional benefit, advantage, or participation in any professional organization, and may not discriminate in employment practice, assignment, or personnel evaluation; (3) may not use coercive means or promise special treatment in order to influence professional decisions of colleagues; (19) may not interfere with a colleague's exercise of political or citizenship rights and responsibilities.	**Educators are still citizens in our democracy and have full political rights when off duty. Educators can engage in free speech, participate in peaceful protests, work on political campaigns, etc., if such actions are outside of working hours, and they make clear (when appropriate) that their actions and messages are their own personal beliefs and not made on behalf of their school/district.** **Be aware of any local policies about political activities by school district employees, such as school board policies, local government ethics acts, etc.**

Recent cases involving political actions by educators:

In 2021, the PTPC sanctioned two educators with warnings for inappropriate political activities involving students and parents. While warnings are low level sanctions, they are permanent and must be disclosed on teacher certification renewal applications.

MAINTAIN THE PUBLIC'S TRUST: KEEP YOUR PERSONAL POLITICS OUT OF YOUR CLASSROOM.