

## Washington State PTA Guidelines for Using “Kid Mail”

(Sending materials home with children via backbacks, go-home folders, etc.)

*August, 2005*

Since PTAs often work closely with schools, the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) guidelines for school districts should be considered when using “kid mail,” or mail such as PTA newsletters that are sent home with children by teachers or other school employees. Communication to parents sent by the school/PTA via children involves the use of public funds. Therefore,

**Rule #1: When using “Kid mail” materials containing election or lobbying issues should not be persuasive**

If the newsletter contains advocacy information, e.g., “Vote for Initiative-123 on Tuesday,” the school district (not PTA) could be judged to be non-compliant with the law. However,

**Rule #2: Factual information from the school district or PTA can be included in “kid mail.”**

For example, at the beginning of the legislative session or immediately before it begins, a listing of district legislators or and contact information as well as the Legislative Hotline number would be appropriate and helpful. Printing such information (when never having done it before) at a time before a vote on a critical issue might be questioned by a school district official. So, several times during the year include in your newsletter a list of all elected officials at the local, state, and federal level. This will help members develop ongoing communication with them. Include elected representatives such as County Council members, School Board members, members of Congress, and State Legislators.

**Rule #3: Usual and customary factual information may be shared via Kid Mail.**

Minutes of PTA meetings that report positions taken by a PTA can be included if such minutes appear in a “usual and customary” way. If the newsletter, for example, always includes a column or article on PTA minutes, it is totally permissible to report actions such as endorsements of election issues or legislative positions **if you also include all other nonpolitical actions that were taken.** Legislative bill reports that are informational only can be included in “kid mail.”

**Rule #4: Encouraging civic duty if allowed.**

Reminding members to vote and/or encouraging them to register to vote can be viewed as “civic duty” and is permissible. Again, it would be advisable to have this information shared in a “usual” and “customary” way—not just once a year before a levy election

**Rule #5: PTA is a non-partisan association.**

A PTA may not distribute campaign literature that **supports or opposes a particular candidate or political party.** In addition, the distribution of campaign literature on the premises of a PTA meeting should be avoided. Third party distribution of campaign material on public property (outside the building during a PTA event) should not be viewed as a PTA activity since the PTA lacks authority to control access to public property. If the PTA invites or suggests such distribution, however, complaints could be raised about political campaign activity.

**Rule #6: When in doubt, call for clarification:**

Washington State PTA – 253.565.2153

Public Disclosure Commission – 360.753.1111

Additional resources:

[http://www.wastatepta.org/programs/Legislation/memo\\_nonpartisan\\_policy.htm](http://www.wastatepta.org/programs/Legislation/memo_nonpartisan_policy.htm)

<http://www.wastatepta.org/programs/Legislation/Miscellaneous/memorandumseptember13.htm>

<http://www.wastatepta.org/programs/Legislation/ElectionGuidelines/guidelines.htm>