

Washington State PTA

Guidelines for Using “Kid Mail”

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

Updated September 2008

“Kid mail” is typically distributed by placing material to be sent home with children in staff mailboxes. When PTAs send material home using school resources, they must consider the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) guidelines for school districts, as well as IRS non-profit guidelines. They must also consider the importance of their ongoing relationship with the school community. Below are guidelines that address these three areas. Please feel free to contact the state office if you have questions.

#1: School administration needs to approve material being sent home.

When you are sending information home with children using school resources such as “kid mail”, the school is ultimately responsible for the content of the material. As a result, some schools and school districts have restrictive rules regarding the use of “kid mail”. Always get approval from the principal or his/her designee prior to using “kid mail”, even if you feel that you are closely adhering to the guidelines outlined below.

#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.

#3: Materials containing election or lobbying issues should not be persuasive

If the newsletter contains advocacy information, e.g., “Vote for Initiative-123 on Tuesday” or “Call Rep. Smith and ask her to vote for House Bill 123”, the school district (not PTA) could be judged to be violating the law prohibiting the use of school property or resources for campaign or lobbying purposes. PTA’s **may** include this type of request if they do their own mailing off of school property (but see #5 below).

#4: Usual and customary factual information may be shared via Kid Mail.

Yes, you can endorse issue campaigns and report the endorsements. How can you report this information via kid mail? Minutes of PTA meetings that report positions taken by a PTA can be included if such minutes appear in the “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.”

#5: PTA is a non-partisan association.

A PTA may not distribute campaign literature that **supports or opposes a particular candidate or political party**.

#6: 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

#7: When in doubt, call for clarification:

Washington State PTA – 253.565.2153

Public Disclosure Commission – 360.753.1111