Recommendations for Safe Voting on School Campuses

Many Maine schools are utilized as voting places. Although the safest action is to not utilize schools for this purpose when staff and students are present, for many communities, school buildings are the only sites big enough to be used for this purpose. If your building(s) will be used as a voting place on November 3rd or in the future, please see the following recommendations for safety and security.

Part 1. Lay the groundwork

Each SAU emergency operations plan should include a policy for SAU property used as voting places (if in fact a school is used for this purpose). Voting place coordinators should review the SAU's safety and security policies and procedures before the election. Communication and collaboration with public safety partners, as well as municipal clerks, should occur prior to the event to assure all safety concerns are addressed.

Consider making the day a remote learning or professional development day

Some school administrative units (SAUs) steer clear of mixing students and voters by making election day a professional development day for staff only. Others conduct remote learning exclusively. Both strategies help limit COVID-19 risks.

Notify stakeholders

Use your typical means of community communication to notify families, students, and staff that elections will take place on SAU property. Share appropriate election day security procedures and stress the need for awareness.

Identify appropriate voting areas

Voting areas should be separated from offices and classrooms. Ideal locations have their own entry and exit doors, can accommodate large crowds and remain open, and are accessible to people with disabilities. You must also make sure voting booths and equipment do not block emergency exits. When you have chosen safe voting areas, provide local or school-based law enforcement officers with details.

Limit campus access

All polling places and permitted entrances and exits should be clearly marked. Election workers should have limited access to the building. Similarly, the public should be prohibited from entering any area other than voting places. That includes restrooms and side exits.

Traffic Control

Comprehensive traffic control will enhance overall safety on your campus. Whenever possible have sufficient traffic control officers assisting with parking and the flow of traffic. Traffic calming measures should be considered to assure speed control and adherence to traffic patterns.

Create and place clear signage

Parking, traffic patterns and voting entrances and exits should all be clearly marked and easy to find. Increase signage to tell voters where they should and should not go, such as in the bus lane or down a hallway.

Strengthen security

Prepare for the increase in visitors by requesting additional police patrol for election day. Staff should also be on the lookout for suspicious activity. While adhering to health and safety precautions for COVID-19, consider asking school-based organizations such as the PTA or other volunteer parent groups to serve as additional hall monitors or help with morning drop-off and afternoon pickup procedures.

Clean and disinfect

Sanitary environments help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Before voters and election workers arrive at your facilities, prepare by cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces. Cleaning with soap and water first removes germs and dirt. Disinfecting afterward kills germs left behind.

Part 2. Communicate and cooperate

From the beginning to the end of election day, communication and cooperation among all stakeholders are key to keeping everyone safe.

Engage your employees

Ensure a school staff member is on site from poll opening to closing. Choose someone whose primary responsibility is maintaining school safety.

Inform election workers

Election workers must check in through the school's visitor management system. Make sure they understand the importance of following security protocols, which include signing in and out of campus, keeping voters out of restricted areas, and not propping doors open or opening locked exterior doors for any reason.

Require identification

With so many people coming and going, take extra care to ensure everyone on campus has a valid reason to be there. Require everyone to wear proper identification. If vendors, parents, community members, or other third parties visit campus for reasons other than voting, they should be issued proper school visitor badges.

Manage voters-turned-visitors

If a voter wants to stay on campus or enter another area of campus after voting, require them to go through your check-in process. Remember that SAUs ay not impose public health requirements, such as physical distancing or wearing a mask, on anyone who enters SAU property to vote. If the person wants to remain on campus or enter another area after voting, the SAU may then impose its public health requirements.

Part 3. Prepare for the return of staff and students

After the final vote is cast, there is still work to be done to ensure campuses are safe and secure when staff and students return the next day.

Clean and disinfect - again

Take time to clean and disinfect polling areas again.

Check the grounds

Look for security risks around campus the morning after the election. Staff should also look for items that may have been moved in order to facilitate voting (including the propping of doors).

Remove election-related items

Work with the local election office to remove voting equipment and election-related signs from SAU property. Signs may pose a vandalism threat or encourage people to try to access campuses after voting places are closed.

Get more information

Feel free to reach out to the Maine School Safety Center for more information - https://www.maine.gov/doe/safety/contact

Material obtained from source - *Your Three-Part Plan for a Secure Election Day*, October 13, 2020 Melanie Moss https://www.tasbrmf.org/learning-news/insiderm/home/safety-security/your-three-part-plan-for-a-secure-election-day.aspx