



EAB

# Developing a Faculty Speech and Expression Policy

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A Resource for Heads of School to Identify and Design Clear  
Faculty Guidelines in order to Create a Safe and Consistent  
School Experience for all Stakeholders

Independent School Executive Forum

# Faculty Speech and Expression at Independent Schools

## Why determine an expression policy for faculty?

Everyone has an opinion. As head of school, **it's your responsibility to decide if and when opinions are shared with students.** This decision should be uniformly applied across all disciplines and divisions for consistency and to ensure one opinion or perspective is not perceived to be valued over another.

Faculty have significant influence on students; they are the frontline to addressing difficult and sensitive political issues as they arise on campus, in the country, and throughout the world. When it comes to faculty's philosophy on political expression, our research has shown that faculty often fall into one of three categories:

- Those who openly share their views both in and out of the classroom.
- Those who attempt to remain neutral.
- Those who avoid topics and shut down conversation.

These types of faculty members often all coexist within the same school, which results in confusion for faculty, school leaders, and students. Faculty are unclear about what they can and cannot share with students. Administrative leaders are unsure how to respond to parent concerns. Students are left wondering why some opinions appear to be more acceptable or valued than others.

Research is inconclusive about what level of political expression is best for faculty members. What is clear, however, is that the school should have a comprehensive policy determined by school leadership. **It is important that your school's policy is clear and consistent for all teachers—across all departments, divisions, and classrooms.**



## Take these steps to determine your school's stance and communicate appropriately:

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### Part One: School Expression Policy Maturity Assessment

Turn to **page 3** to identify your school's current expression policy. Find out if it is reactive, unclear, or proactive.

2

### Part Two: Ideal Faculty Expression Philosophy Identification

Turn to **page 5** to determine the ideal state for your school. Find out if your faculty should be sharing their views unencumbered, with limitations, or not at all.

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### Part Three: Build and Communicate a Faculty Expression Policy

Finally, look to the recommendations on **pages 7 and 8** to write a clear and effective policy on faculty expression to share with your faculty and greater school community.

Source: James, "Reframing the Disclosure Debate: Confronting Issues of Transparency in Teaching Controversial Content," *Social Science Research and Practice*, 2009; Levitt, Deever, Grubaugh, & Gonzales, "Education and Indoctrination in the Social Sciences: Research-based Protocols for Best Practices of Teaching with Objectivity," *National Social Science Journal*, 2018; Journell, "Making a case for teacher political disclosure," *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.



# School Expression Policy Maturity Assessment

**Respond to each statement with “yes” or “no” to determine the maturity of your school’s expression policy.**

		Yes	No
1.	My school has a published policy on faculty sharing their political views.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Faculty are consistently reminded of this policy in meetings, reviews, and written communications.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Our published policy on faculty expression accurately reflects and communicates the school’s stance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Our policy on expression is detailed and consistent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Faculty know what topics they can and cannot discuss with students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Academic departments consistently enforce our school’s expression policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Faculty at all grades and within every division know our schools’ expression policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	All faculty members are expected to adhere to the same guidelines about sharing their personal political views, regardless of their preference.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Academic leadership throughout the school is aware of the school’s policy regarding faculty expression.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	Division directors proactively remind faculty of the school’s speech and expression policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	Department chairs include reminders about the school’s expression policy in regular emails or other formal communication channels.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	Conversations about the school’s expression policy are embedded within review conversations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	Discussions of the school’s expression policy are proactive, not just reminders when someone has deviated from the expectations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

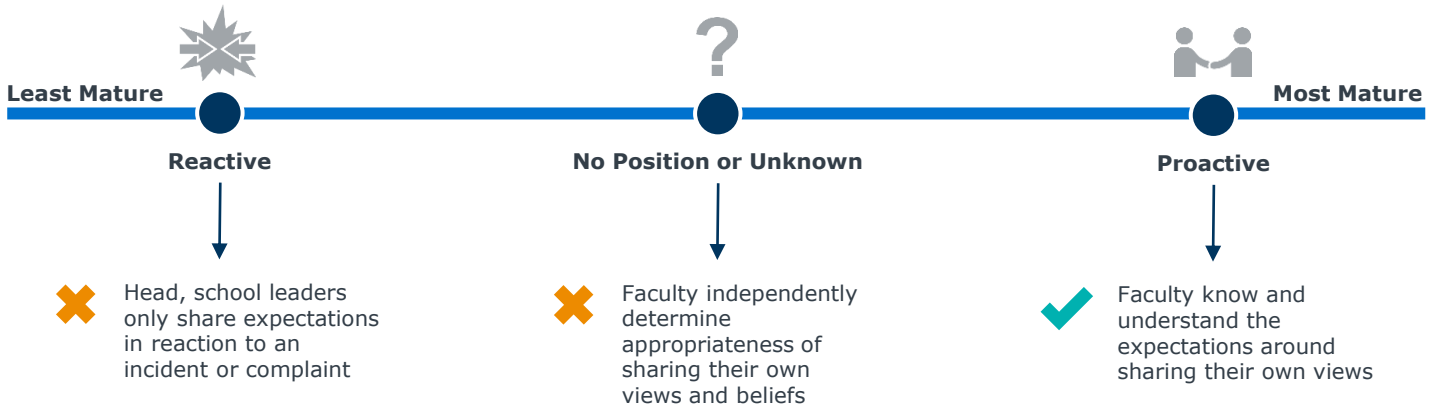
**For each “yes” give yourself one point.**

Total “Yes:”



# Results: School Expression Policy Maturity

## Maturity of School's Faculty Expression Policy



### INTERPRETING YOUR SCORE

*Score*      *Faculty Expression Policy Maturity Stage*



#### Reactive

Your school has a reactive approach to faculty expression policies. Typically this results in confusion about the school's official policy (if there is one), as the expression policy is only discussed when someone has deviated from unwritten or unclear expectations. Go to page 5 to determine your ideal faculty expression philosophy, then use the following guidance and recommendations to create a formal policy and share those expectations.



#### No Position or Unknown

Your school has an unclear approach to faculty expression. This means that while you may have some policies on faculty expression, they are likely neither clearly communicated nor widely enforced. Go to page 5 to determine an ideal faculty expression philosophy, then use the following guidance and recommendations to codify and finalize a formal policy and share expectations.



#### Proactive

Your school has a proactive approach to faculty expression. Likely, you have created and communicated a set of expectations for faculty expression at your school. Well done! Go to page 5 to ensure that this approach is in line with your ideal policy. Then use the following guidance to maintain and build upon effective communication with your school community.



# Ideal Faculty Expression Philosophy Identification

**Respond to each statement with “always,” “sometimes,” or “never” based on your ideal policy, this does not have to reflect the school’s current approach.**

		Always	Sometimes	Never
1.	Faculty should be free to share their political beliefs with students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Students should be aware of their teachers’ political affiliation based on communal knowledge before beginning their classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Faculty should be able to share their views on ethical or moral dilemmas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Students should be able to ask their teachers about personal political affiliations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Faculty members should be comfortable and prepared to discuss their personal political views with parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Division directors should be able to share their opinions on current events and political affiliations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Department chairs should be able to share their opinions on current events and political affiliations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Faculty should be free to address current events as they come up in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Students should be comfortable challenging faculty on their political opinions and beliefs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	Faculty should be able to wear clothes or pins that reflect their choice for political office.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	Faculty across divisions and departments should all, regardless of subject area or grade level, be free to share their political opinions with students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Tally up each “always,” “sometimes,” and “never.”**

Total “Always”

Total “Sometimes”

Total “Never”



# Results: Ideal Faculty Expression Philosophy

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCORE

*Results*

*Faculty Expression Approaches*



**5-11**  
**"Always"**

### Share Own Views

Faculty personal political views and beliefs are widely known. Teachers use their classrooms to expose students to a variety of views on politics, current events, and ethics, including their own. Academic leadership is prepared to support faculty when concerns arise from students or parents.



**5-11**  
**"Sometimes"**

### Share Views, Within Limitations

Faculty mostly do not disclose their views and beliefs to allow students to develop their own. School is clear about when faculty are and are not allowed to share their opinions (e.g. they may share views on local elections and conservation, but not creationism). Academic leadership understands and enforces these limitations with faculty.



**5-11**  
**"Never"**

### Views are Private

School-wide understanding that all political beliefs are personal; faculty do not share opinions under any circumstances. Academic leadership is prepared to remind faculty, students, and families of this philosophy regularly.



**Mixed**  
**Count**

### Unclear

If your results are split among the options, it is possible your ideal philosophy is unclear. Use the questions on **page 7** to create a clear and consistent set of expectations and policy for your school.



# Build and Communicate a Faculty Expression Policy

Use these steps to build and communicate an effective policy on faculty expression to share with your school community.

## 1 Codify and Finalize Your Expectations

Reflect on your results from **page 6** to better understand your current state.

- What is your ideal state for faculty expression (**page 6**)?
- Does this result align with your school's current published policy? If you do not have a published speech and expression policy, please skip this question.
  - If yes, continue to next question. If no, why not? What needs to be changed for alignment?

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Use your results from **page 6** to build a proactive policy for your school community. Your answers to the below questions can inform a final written policy.

- Are faculty permitted to share their political views? Why or why not?  

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- Are there any political issues or topics faculty *should not* discuss with students? Which ones? Why or why not?  

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- What guidance or support will academic leaders need to feel empowered to maintain these expectations and communicate them to faculty?  

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- How does your ideal faculty expression philosophy serve your school's mission and promote its values?  

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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.



# Build and Communicate a Faculty Expression Policy

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Use these steps to codify and think through your stance, as determined by your results.

## 2 Write a Formal Expression Policy

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Use your responses in the box on **page 7** and the checklist below to create a published policy for your school.

This policy should be published and accessible to the school community, as well as include the following:

- ☐ Clear guidance on what is and is not acceptable for faculty to discuss with students
- ☐ Strong rationale for this stance (e.g. why faculty are welcome to share political views in the school)
- ☐ A comprehensive philosophy on political discussions in- and out-side of the classroom
- ☐ Expectations for academic leadership support for this policy
  - What do you expect from your leadership team in support of this policy?
  - What can they expect from you?

## 3 Share Expectations with Stakeholders

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Once you've created the published policy, share your expectations with all relevant groups:

- ☐ Include conversations about expectations in start of school year meetings
- ☐ Share expectations in division meetings and review conversations
- ☐ Inform board of final set of expectations and rationale for stance

## 4 Communicate Ongoing Reminders

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Keep your faculty expression policy top of mind for the entire school community:

- ☐ Send faculty regular expectation reminders
- ☐ Empower leadership team to maintain expectations
- ☐ Use incidents as opportunities to restate expectations and inform response





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