

National School Boards Association

School Board News

School boards are refining policies on military recruiters on campus

09/27/05 -- School leaders across the country are reacting to reports of over-aggressive military recruiters by refining their policies on recruiter access -- without violating the No Child Left Behind Act.

NCLB requires schools to provide student names and phone numbers to military recruiters unless a student or parent requests that the information be withheld. The law also requires schools to give military recruiters the same access they provide to postsecondary institutions and prospective employers.

Some school districts have stepped up their efforts to make sure parents and students are aware of their right to opt out of having their contact information given to recruiters.

The Portland, Maine, school board recently passed a measure to have the opt-out information printed on the emergency contact card all students must hand in, rather than have it buried in the lengthy handbook sent home to parents.

Last year, most parents didn't hand in the opt-out form, but most of those who did, chose to opt out, says school board member Stephen Spring, who says he's concerned about reports from students that recruiters are "too aggressive."

The Portland school board had earlier passed a resolution by an 8-1 vote to have an opt-in form instead. But the district's legal counsel warned against implementing it because other districts that had adopted such a policy were threatened with the loss of federal funding.

Spring, along with board member Ben Meiklejohn, are working on a policy to give recruiters guidelines on how they interact with students, to require recruiters to stay in the guidance office rather than set up tables in the cafeteria, and to limit recruiters to about three days in a school per year.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts sent a letter to all Massachusetts principals advising them how to interpret the NCLB provisions on recruiters.

It says students should be notified that they, as well as their parents, can choose to withhold contact information. It advises schools not to give preferential treatment to recruiters and not to provide e-mail addresses, ages, dates of birth of students, or information about former students.

In Milwaukee, the school board passed a resolution Aug. 25 stating that all military recruiting materials must be appropriately labeled and placed in the guidance office and that parents and students be educated about their right to opt out.

Milwaukee school board member Peter Blewett, who proposed the resolution, says he was “horrified to receive complaints from constituents about recruiters going to students’ homes and talking to them when their parents weren’t home.” In one case, he says, a student enlisted after a recruiter took him for a ride in a Hummer.

He calls the NCLB provision on recruiters an invasion of privacy and says the requirement that students and parents can opt out -- rather than opt in -- is a form of “passive consent.”

“This is a serious intrusion by the federal government into local school boards,” he says. “The federal government has stepped over the line.”

The district has had a “long-established policy to not give out contact information for students,” says Blewett, and he was “surprised to find out our district had released contact information.” He also says he was “outraged” that the district published the opt-out form on the back page of the parent handbook. “Nobody would have a clue that it was there.”

The district administration has agreed to study recruiters’ tactics and investigate complaints, Blewett says.

In Illinois, Wauconda Unit District 118 has approved a series of guidelines for recruiters at Wauconda High School, reports Superintendent Dan Coles.

Each branch of the military is allowed one visit per month. Only two representatives of the military are permitted during a visit, and they must stay at their table and not wander around the cafeteria. Recruiters are only allowed to stay during the lunch periods. They can bring two temporary posters but not large display items. And they must consult the list of students who signed opt-out forms before talking to any student.

Cole says any recruiters who violate these rules will be reported to their commander and could be banned from the school.

The Seattle school board adopted a policy on recruiters Sept. 17 that bans any recruiters, from potential employers or colleges, as well as the military, who harass students or provide untrue or misleading information. “It’s not okay to come in and lie to our kids,” board member Darlene Flynn told the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

In addition, the policy requires all Seattle high schools to have rules stating that recruiters must have written permission from the principal to be on campus and must sign in and out every time they visit a school. All military recruiters must be in uniform, no recruiting is to occur in the classroom, and no private appointments can occur on campus.

The policy also requires that whenever military recruiters are allowed to speak with students, organizations that promote alternatives to the military must be given equal access.

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