

## **Proposed by SB McGee**

### **Section 7-7.1. Prohibition of Political Activity During Duty Hours or While Representing Suffolk Public Schools**

#### **A. General Policy:**

Suffolk Public Schools (SPS) is committed to maintaining a politically neutral educational environment that prioritizes instruction, student well-being, and professional conduct. The School Board affirms the right of employees to engage in political activities on their personal time, outside of their official duties. However, political activity must not interfere with school operations, instructional time, or the integrity of SPS as a nonpartisan entity.

#### **B. Prohibited Activities:**

While on duty, on school property, or when representing SPS in an official capacity, employees are strictly prohibited from:

1. Engaging in or promoting any political activity, including but not limited to:
  - Supporting or opposing any political party, candidate, elected official, or legislative action.
  - Distributing or displaying campaign materials, petitions, or political endorsements.
  - Making public statements in support of or opposition to political candidates or policies while acting as an SPS employee.
2. Using an official SPS title, position, or authority to influence political opinions or actions, including:
  - Making statements that imply or suggest SPS's endorsement or opposition to any candidate, party, or political issue.
  - Including SPS affiliation in personal political advocacy or campaign materials.
3. Using school resources or property for political purposes, such as:
  - School buildings, communication systems, email accounts, social media platforms, or other resources.
  - SPS-funded events, meetings, or functions.
4. Engaging in political discussions with students that advocate for or against any candidate, party, or legislative issue, except when teaching an approved curriculum that requires political discussion in an objective and balanced manner.

#### **C. Official School Communications Containing Political Language or Undertones**

1. School Superintendent and Representative Oversight:
  - Any official school division statement, letter, or communication that may contain political undertones, references to political issues, or language that could be interpreted as taking a political stance must first be presented to the School Board for review and approval.

- The Superintendent or their designee is responsible for ensuring that all official communications align with SPS's commitment to political neutrality.
- Failure to obtain School Board approval before issuing such communications may result in corrective action.

## **2. Review and Approval Process:**

- The Superintendent must submit any proposed communication with political implications to the School Board for evaluation.
- The School Board will determine whether the communication is necessary, nonpartisan, and appropriate for public distribution.
- Only after receiving formal approval may the communication be released.

### **D. Disclaimer Requirement:**

Employees who engage in political activity on their personal time must explicitly state that their opinions are their own and do not represent the views of Suffolk Public Schools. Any failure to provide this disclaimer may result in corrective action or disciplinary action.

### **E. Consequences of Violation:**

Employees found in violation of this policy may face disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or termination.

### **F. Protection of Employee Rights:**

This policy does not restrict employees from engaging in political activities on their own time, outside of duty hours, as private citizens, provided they do not use their SPS position or resources in doing so.

### **G. Exemption for School Board Members:**

This policy does not apply to elected School Board members, as they are public officials and have the right to engage in political activities while fulfilling their duties as elected representatives.

**Legal Authority:** Virginia Code §§ 22.1-78, 22.1-70 (1950), as amended.