

## (Attorney Waller Recommendation)

**Section 7-7.1. Statement of Policy; Definitions; Examples of Prohibited Activities; Curriculum discussions allowed; Role of the school superintendent; Disclaimer Requirement; Consequences of Violation; Protection of Employee Rights; Exemption of School Board Members** —A. Suffolk Public Schools (SPS) is committed to maintaining a politically neutral educational environment that prioritizes instruction, student well-being, and professional conduct. **Employees of Suffolk Public Schools must not engage in any political activity during work hours or while serving as a representative for Suffolk Public Schools. It is the opinion of the School Board that to engage in political activities during work hours or while serving as a representative for Suffolk Public Schools will interfere with school operations, disrupt instructional time, and is not consistent with the overall mission of Suffolk Public Schools.** ~~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 Suffolk Public Schools as a nonpartisan entity.~~

**B. The following definitions apply to this policy —**

*Political Activity* means an activity directed toward the success or failure of a political party, candidate for partisan political office or partisan political group, or the formation, adoption, or changing of domestic or foreign policies of the United States or that of any state or local government. **Providing information to the school community regarding laws enacted at the national, state, or local level that impacts the operations of Suffolk Public Schools is not considered political activity nor advocating for approval of the school division's operational budget considered political activity.**

*Work hours* means any of the hours of a day during which work is being performed for Suffolk Public Schools whether work is being performed on or off school property.

*Representative* means someone who speaks or does something on behalf of Suffolk Public Schools whether on or off school property in an official capacity.

*Official capacity* means actions taken by a person in their role as an employee of the school division and not as an individual.

**B. The following examples of political activities are strictly prohibited during work hours or by anyone serving as a representative in their official capacity:**

~~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:~~

- (1) Supporting or opposing any political party, candidate, elected official, or legislative action.
- (2) Distributing or displaying campaign materials, petitions, or political endorsements.

- (3) Making public statements in support of or opposition to political candidates or policies. ~~while acting as an SPS employee.~~
- (4) Using one's ~~an~~ official ~~SPS~~ title, position, or authority to influence political opinions or actions. ~~including:~~
- (5) Making statements that imply or suggest SPS's **the school division's** endorsement of or opposition to any candidate, party, or political issue.
- (6) ~~Use of~~ Suggesting the school **division's endorsement** in personal political advocacy or campaign materials.

2. ~~Using school resources or property for political purposes, such as:~~

- (7) Use of school buildings, communication systems, email accounts, social media platforms, or other resources **for political activity;**
- (8) ~~SPS-Use of~~ **funded school** events, meetings, or functions for political activity that has been **funded in whole or in part by the school division.**

C. ~~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~~ **is allowed.**

**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.~~

D. **The Superintendent or their the superintendent's designee is responsible for ensuring that this policy is strictly adhered to.** ~~all official communications align with SPS's commitment to political neutrality.~~

- o ~~Failure to obtain School Board approval before issuing such communications may result in corrective action.~~

~~2. Review and Approval Process:~~

- o ~~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.

E. 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.

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

G. 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 with Suffolk Public Schools or school division resources in doing so.

H. 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, **except that members of the School Board are not to engage in political activity while on school property during the school day.**

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