

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 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.

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.

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

- (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.
- (4) Using one's official title, position, or authority to influence political opinions or actions.

- (5) Making statements that imply or suggest the school division's endorsement of or opposition to any candidate, party, or political issue.
- (6) Suggesting the school division's endorsement in personal political advocacy or campaign materials.
- (7) Use of school buildings, communication systems, email accounts, social media platforms, or other resources for political activity.
- (8) Use of school events, meetings, or functions for political activity that has been funded in whole or in part by the school division.

D. Engaging in political discussions with students when teaching an approved curriculum that requires political discussion in an objective manner is allowed.

E. The Superintendent or the superintendent's designee is responsible for ensuring that this policy is strictly adhered to.

F. 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.

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

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

I. 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.