

Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item



Agenda Item: E

Date: January 26, 2017

Title	Final Review of <i>Model Policy Regarding Political Candidates and Public Officials</i> and <i>Model Policy Regarding Controversial Issues</i>		
Presenter	Ms. Emily V. Webb, Director for Board Relations		
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Purpose of Presentation:

Other initiative or requirement. Specify below:
 Action requested by the Virginia Commission on Civics Education

Previous Review or Action:

Previous review and action. Specify date and action taken below:
 Date: October 27, 2016
 Action: First Review

Action Requested:

Final review: Action requested at this meeting.

Alignment with Board of Education Goals: Please indicate (X) all that apply:

	Goal 1: Accountability for Student Learning
	Goal 2: Rigorous Standards to Promote College and Career Readiness
	Goal 3: Expanded Opportunities to Learn
	Goal 4: Nurturing Young Learners
	Goal 5: Highly Qualified and Effective Educators
X	Goal 6: Sound Policies for Student Success
	Goal 7: Safe and Secure Schools
	Other Priority or Initiative. Specify:

Background Information and Statutory Authority:

Goal 6: The model policies provide school divisions with sample policies related to addressing political candidates, public officials, and controversial issues in schools.

§ 30-348 of the *Code of Virginia* establishes the Virginia Commission on Civics Education and its membership as follows:

§ 30-348. (Expires July 1, 2017) Commission on Civics Education; purpose; membership; terms. The Commission on Civics Education (the Commission) is established in the legislative branch of state government. The purposes of the Commission are to (i) educate students on the importance of citizen involvement in a constitutional republic, (ii) promote the study of state and local government among the Commonwealth's citizenry, and (iii) enhance communication and collaboration among organizations in

the Commonwealth that conduct civics education.

The Commission shall have a total membership of 15 members that shall consist of eight legislative members, six nonlegislative citizen members, and one ex officio member. Members shall be appointed as follows: five members of the House of Delegates, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates in accordance with the principles of proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House of Delegates; three members of the Senate, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules; three nonlegislative citizen members, one of whom shall have a background in curriculum development, interactive learning, and multimedia technology, one of whom shall be a current or retired school civics teacher, and one of whom shall be a representative of an organization that promotes civic learning, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates; and three nonlegislative citizen members, one of whom shall be a retired school civics teacher, one of whom shall be a representative of a public policy center of a public institution of higher education in the Commonwealth, and one of whom shall be a representative of the Virginia Press Association, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules. The Superintendent of Public Instruction or his designee shall serve ex officio with voting privileges. Nonlegislative citizen members of the Commission shall be citizens of the Commonwealth. Unless otherwise approved in writing by the chairman of the Commission, the Clerk of the House of Delegates, and the Clerk of the Senate, nonlegislative citizen members shall only be reimbursed for travel originating and ending within the Commonwealth for the purpose of attending meetings.

At the October 27, 2016, meeting, the Board of Education received for first review the *Model Policy Regarding Political Candidates and Public Officials* and *Model Policy Regarding Controversial Issues*. During the public comment period of the October 27, 2016, meeting, stakeholders from the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) and the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) offered feedback on the model policies. The concerns outlined by VSBA and VASS include the necessity of the policy and the process in which the model policies were developed. Also during public comment, VSBA highlighted its policy manual for local school divisions, which includes several provisions relating to the teaching of controversial issues, distribution of materials, and staff participation in political activities. At the Board's request, additional public comment was solicited from stakeholders on November 8, 2016. To date, the Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals (VAESP) has submitted additional public comment. The concerns outlined from VAESP include the lack of age appropriateness outlined in the model policies, the immense responsibility placed on the school principal rather than the superintendent or local school board, and potential lack of policy consistency between individual schools within a local school division.

Summary of Important Issues:

The Virginia Commission on Civics Education is dedicated to educating students on the importance of citizen involvement in a constitutional republic, promoting the study of state and local government among the Commonwealth's citizenry, and enhancing communication and collaboration among organizations in the Commonwealth that conduct civics education. The Commission felt that teachers need clear guidance in the areas of political campaigns and controversial issues. A team of former Virginia and U.S. Government teachers and Social Studies Supervisors drafted proposed model policies (Attachments A and B). The Commission requested the Board of Education to share the model policies with local school divisions, with the hope that local school boards would determine if the model policies are of value in reviewing their current policies.

Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

There is no expected impact on fiscal and/or human resources in the development or sharing of model policies.

Timetable for Further Review/Action:

Upon approval by the Board of Education, the model policies will be disseminated to school divisions for their information via a Superintendent's Memorandum.

Superintendent's Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction provides the recommendation of the Board's policy subcommittee, which was to approve the model policies.

Rationale:

These model policies were sent to the Board of Education from the Virginia Commission on Civics Education. Their goal is for the Board to share the model policies with local school divisions, with the hope that local school boards would determine if the model policies are of value in reviewing their current policies.

Model Policy Regarding Political Candidates and Public Officials

Purpose

To provide guidelines for school-based and non school-based administrators, teachers, and students for dealing with political campaigns in a school setting.

Philosophy

The preparation for effective citizenship requires that schools provide opportunities for students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to meet the challenges of self-government. Learning how to engage with the issues, candidates, and events that animate our political system can serve as the basis for powerful civic learning experiences for students. Schools should encourage students to participate in political campaigns, to meet with public officials, and to engage with issues in a way that develops critical thinking skills and fosters a respect for divergent opinions. Students should be encouraged to become full, active participants in the decision-making process.

Role of the Teacher

Teachers dedicated to preparing their students for effective and engaged citizenship are encouraged to:

- Provide activities and experiences that enable students to become informed participants in the political process.
- Expect that students will participate directly in the political process by supporting the candidate(s) and issue(s) of their choice.
- Introduce students to elected and appointed government officials.
- Require that students attend, or otherwise observe, public meetings of officials at the local, state, and national levels.
- Work with students to translate civic education into community engagement.

Political Candidates and Public Officials in the School Setting

All invitations must be approved by the principal, or the principal's designee.

If a candidate for office is to be invited to meet with students, the opportunity to meet students must be provided to other candidates running for that office in a fair and impartial fashion.

Students should be given the opportunity to question the candidate(s) or officeholder(s) in a manner that is respectful of differing opinions.

Distribution and Display of Campaign Literature in the School Setting

The principal, or the principal's designee, shall determine the appropriate time, place, and manner for distribution and/or display of campaign literature in the school setting.

Model Policy Regarding Controversial Issues

Purpose

To provide guidelines for school-based and non school-based administrators, teachers, and students in dealing with controversial issues in ways that develop critical thinking skills and reflect sensitivity to the emotions often engendered by such issues.

Philosophy

The preparation for effective citizenship includes the study of issues that are controversial. The study of controversial issues shall be conducted in an atmosphere in which knowledge can be freely imparted and the critical thinking of students can be developed through research and classroom discussion within the guidelines of the instructional program.

Role of the Teacher

An issue is controversial when there are substantial differences of opinion about it on the interpersonal, local, national, or international level and when these differences of opinion are accompanied by intense feelings and strong emotions on the part of individuals or groups.

Teachers should use the following guidelines in dealing with controversial issues in the instructional program:

Address controversial topics as impartially and objectively as possible. Do not allow personal biases or personal beliefs to interfere with professional judgment.

Handle controversial issues in a manner relevant to the content of the course and appropriate to the knowledge and maturity of the students.

When there is doubt about the impact of a controversial issue in planned instruction, the teacher should consult with the principal, or the principal's designee, and provide a brief outline of the instructional strategies that will be used to ensure objectivity, fairness, accuracy, and relevance to the objectives of the instructional program.

Encourage critical thinking by offering multiple perspectives on the issues under discussion, gathering information and evidence from diverse sources, considering implications and consequences of varying viewpoints, checking for assumptions, and using questions to guide ideas and clarify thinking.

Do not require that students will reach agreement. Agreement is not a necessary outcome when students engage with controversial issues. Learning to discuss controversial issues in a civil manner that promotes intellectual integrity and preserves personal dignity is expected.

Be sensitive to students with heightened feelings and emotions engendered by a controversial issue proposed for discussion.

Speakers on Controversial Issues

All invitations to guest speakers on controversial issues must be approved by the principal, or the principal's designee. The teacher, student, or student group who proposes to extend invitations must outline for the principal, or the principal's designee, the following:

- The expected contribution of the speakers to the instructional program.
- Plans for preliminary and follow-up discussions and activities designed to help students put each speaker's views into context and perspective.
- Provisions for fair treatment of the views of each speaker and of differing opinions.
- The intended audience for each speaker's remarks.

Teachers should discuss with the principal, or the principal's designee, the advisability of informing parents about invitations extended to speakers who will address controversial issues.

Students from other classes who have not been involved in preliminary activities should not attend the presentation without the approval of the principal, or the principal's designee.

When guest speakers are scheduled for presentation other than in a regular class setting, the principal, or the principal's designee, will determine the appropriateness of the proposed forum for the presentation.

Distribution and Display of Literature about Controversial Issues

The principal, or the principal's designee, shall determine the appropriate time, place, and manner for the distribution and/or display of materials about controversial issues.

Materials advocating specific violent tactics and/or disruption of government functions are not allowed. Expression of student opinion may not be used to present material that is obscene or slanderous; defames character; or advocates violation of federal, state, or local laws or school policies, rules, or regulations.