



**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA  
Department of Education**

February 17, 2017

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

**SUBJECT: Model Policy Regarding Political Candidates and Public Officials and Model Policy Regarding Controversial Issues**

At the January 26, 2017 meeting, at the request of the Virginia Commission on Civics Education, the Board of Education approved Model Policy Regarding Political Candidates and Public Officials and Model Policy Regarding Controversial Issues for distribution to local school board chairs. 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 the proposed model policies (Attachments A and B). The Commission requested the Board 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.

If you have any questions, please contact Emily Webb, Director, Office of Board Relations, by email at [emily.webb@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:emily.webb@doe.virginia.gov) or by telephone at (804) 225-2924.

**Background Information**

During the Board of Education's review process, several stakeholder groups spoke of their support or opposition to these model policies.

Supporters for the model policies, including the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals (VAASP), offered that these model policies are not mandates on how to teach certain topics, but rather a reminder of the need for a fair and balanced approach teachers should take when dealing with political candidates, public officials and controversial issues. Supporters further remarked that these model policies offer teachers and school-based administrators the guidance needed to frame instruction that equips students for their role as citizens. Several members of the Virginia Commission on Civics Education spoke in favor of these model policies and the need to encourage critical thinking and promote appropriate civil discourse.

At the October 27, 2016, Board meeting, the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) and the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) outlined concerns, including the necessity of the policy and the process in which the model policies were developed. Also, 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. The Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals (VAESP) submitted concerns, including the lack of age appropriateness outlined in the model policies, the 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.

Local school board chairs and superintendents are encouraged to consider these perspectives as you review these model policies.

SRS/CAC/evw

Attachments:

- A. [Model Policy Regarding Political Candidates and Public Officials](#) (PDF)
- B. [Model Policy Regarding Controversial Issues](#) (PDF)

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