

Article 7 - Staff Participation in Political Activities, Staff Gifts, and Solicitations, and Fraternization

Section 7-7.4. Purpose of policy stated; personal relationships discouraged in the workplace; when transfers or other employment actions are necessary; displays of affection prohibited; refusal to accept reasonable accommodations; conduct during non-work hours; off duty conduct; physical contact; harassment; employee appeals; fraternization defined; violations. — A. The School Board has created this policy to nurture a working environment with clearly defined boundaries regarding personal relationships between employees in order to maintain an effective school environment for students and employees. The School Board does not prohibit personal relationships between employees but seeks to set forth clear guidelines as to how relationships should be conducted in the workplace.

B. The School Board discourages, but does not forbid, fraternization between managers or supervisors and subordinate employees. Personal relationships between managers or supervisors and subordinate employees create an unreasonable possibility of favoritism, conflicts of interest, and claims of sexual harassment. Such relationships may also create serious problems in terms of objective management, accurate evaluations, and discipline. Whenever there exists a personal relationship between managers or supervisors and subordinate employees within the meaning of this policy, the employees are to report any such relationship to the Director of Human Resources.

C. Where such a personal relationship exists, the School Board or the school superintendent reserves the right to make such employment decisions as are necessary to ensure that the risks enumerated in subsection B of this policy will not occur. Such steps include but are not limited to: transfer of one or both parties to the relationship; required resignation of one of the parties in the relationship (in such cases, the decision as to which employee will resign will be left to the two employees); or adjusting lines of reporting or communication.

D. In order to maintain the avoidance of favoritism in the workplace and to ensure that all employees of Suffolk Public Schools are comfortable in the work environment, employees who are involved in a personal relationship are absolutely prohibited from engaging in displays of affection (such as kissing, hand-holding, or other similar personal contact) while in Suffolk Public Schools and anywhere on property of Suffolk Public Schools during working time

E. In certain situations, it may be necessary to modify reporting structures, transfer positions, or make other necessary adjustments to work assignments when a personal relationship exists between employees of Suffolk Public Schools. Refusal of reasonable modification to an employee's position will be deemed a voluntary resignation.

F. During non-working time, including lunch, breaks, and before or after work periods, employees may engage in appropriate personal conversations in non-work areas as long as such conversations and behavior do not violate the School Board's policy against workplace harassment and as long as the employees avoid displays of affection such as kissing, hugging, etc., at all times while on the premises of Suffolk Public Schools.

G. Employee conduct outside of working hours and outside the premises of Suffolk Public Schools is generally regarded as private, as long as such conduct does not create

problems within the workplace. An exception to this rule is personal relationships between supervisors and subordinates or between employees. The School Board strongly discourages off-duty fraternization to include attendance at happy hours or similar events involving supervisors/managers and non-supervisory employees.

H. Employees are prohibited from engaging in physical contact that would be considered inappropriate by a reasonable person on property of Suffolk Public Schools, in the presence of students, or during any school related activity that occurs off school grounds.

I. Employees should be mindful that the School Board maintains a strict anti-harassment policy.

J. Any employee who believes that he or she has been adversely affected as a result of this policy, or who believes that this policy is not being adhered to, should speak with Human Resources Department for Suffolk Public Schools.

K. The term fraternization within the meaning of this policy pertains personal interactions among employees that cross professional boundaries, particularly between managers or supervisors and subordinate employees, potentially leading to scenarios where personal feelings could influence professional judgment, affecting decision-making and team cohesion among employees of Suffolk Public Schools.

L. Violations of this policy will be dealt with according to Suffolk Public Schools' disciplinary procedure, up to and including termination, depending on the severity of the situation.

Legal Authority – Virginia Code § 22.1-78.