



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

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**Statement by Lee County Board of Education
Chairman Shawn Williams**

SANFORD, N.C. — According to Lee County Board Policy 7720 Employee Community and Political Activities, this policy should not be construed as prohibiting the impartial study and discussion of political or other controversial issues in the classroom setting. This lesson is a perfect example of how issues should be discussed as part of the curriculum, “the discussion should be balanced such that all sides of the issue are discussed.” It is also important to note that by definition, “lobbying is activity in support of or in opposition to legislation. Political activity is about supporting or opposing a candidate for elective office. “Furthermore, “An organization may take positions on public policy issues, including issues that divide candidates in an election for public office as long as the message does not in any way favor or oppose a candidate.”

After a year of focusing on real-world writing assignments that included pen-pals in six different states, a 3rd grade teacher culminated the year with a writing lesson about an issue that would impact students in many different ways. This lesson included a writing prompt on the board “How assistants help” and it included questions “What do they do to help us?” And “How would next year be different without them?” The class brainstormed many different ideas as a group. The teacher stated, “When we are sad or happy we can write letters to lawmakers.” We have a connection in the classroom. Does anyone know who it is? Students named several different parents and one finally named the Lee County Representative. The focus then moved to the computer and the North Carolina General Assembly website where students looked up Lee County and found the name of the parent who represents Lee County. The class looked at the entire list of the men and women responsible for creating the budget.

The discussion then turned to defining a budget and examples were given about how parents have to adjust their budget when the cost of things like gas increases. Students worked on their individual letters to the Lee County Representative. The teacher asked the class, “How can we get the letters to our representative?” Students responded that the letters could be sent home with the daughter of the representative. **The letters were not sent home and in fact the lesson would continue the next day on June 3, 2011.**

The morning of June 3, 2011 the teacher received a visit from the Lee County representative and he stated that his daughter had shared with him that the class had written him a letter. He wanted his daughter's letter. During that visit, the teacher shared that the class would ultimately send an e-mail to him and asked the representative if there was anyone else he could think of to add to the list. The representative said no and shared that they would be pleased with what the legislative group had been able to add back to the budget.

The afternoon of June 3, 2011 the culminating real-world lesson continued with the class visiting the North Carolina General Assembly website to look at a second branch of the government (Bob Atwater). At that time, the teacher asked the students if anyone had a connection to Mr. Atwater. They responded with no and the teacher then shared that the idea of sending the letters home with a student would not work. The class then visited the General Assembly website and the third branch of the government (Governor Perdue). Students were asked if anyone had a connection and the group responded with no. Teacher stated that letters could not be sent home with anyone. Teacher then asked the class for ideas about a quick way to send their letters to all three branches. Students quickly responded with "e-mail". **The teacher then drafted a collective letter from the class for each branch using the language of the students and e-mailed each branch individually the collective letter (attached).** Student names were not mentioned in the e-mails. **The actual student letters were never mailed or sent electronically to anyone.** Students then discussed that even though they were sending a letter about the budget, assistants may still lose their job because balancing the budget is a difficult job. At the end of the lesson, students discussed the fact that there are many different people participating in the decision making process and that once the legislative body approves the budget the money then comes to all the counties. Students discussed the number of NC counties and how much would go to each county and the fact that local leaders including the Board of Education and Superintendent would then decide how to spend the money.

Issues raised about this particular lesson include:

Q&A

- 1) **Question:** Were letters were sent home with the child of the Lee County Representative?
Answer: No

- 2) **Question:** Was the superintendent or any other administrator directly involved in making a political assignment?
Answer: No

- 3) **Question:** Did the superintendent or any other administrator attempt intimidation of a political figure by using students?
Answer: No

- 4) **Question:** Did the superintendent or any other administrator direct teachers to use students for the purpose of political activity?
Answer: No

- 5) **Question:** At any time were the individual student letters mailed to the legislators or the governor?

Answer: No

6) **Question:** Did any other schools send letters to legislators?

Answer: Yes

7) **Question:** Were any Lee County School Policies violated by the teacher or an administrator?

Answer: No

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