

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The Board of Education believes that the schools should maintain an atmosphere conducive to the discussion of issues which may be considered controversial. Instruction concerning such topics shall be relevant to the adopted course of study and curricular goals and should be designed to develop students' critical thinking skills, ability to discriminate between fact and opinion, respect for others, and understanding and tolerance of diverse points of view.

The Board recognizes the following rights of students relative to the study of controversial issues:

1. The right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic, cultural or social significance.
2. The right to have free access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community.
3. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
4. The right to form and express his/her own opinions on the controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing the student's relations with the teacher or the school.

Administrators and teachers are expected to exercise professional judgment when deciding whether or not a particular issue is suitable for study or discussion. When providing instruction related to a controversial issue, the following guidelines apply:

1. The topic shall be suitable to the age and maturity of the students.
2. Instruction shall be presented in a balanced manner, addressing all sides of the issue without bias or prejudice and without promoting any particular point of view.
3. The teacher may express a personal opinion provided he/she identifies it as a personal opinion and clarifies that he/she is not speaking on behalf of the school or district. The teacher shall not express an opinion for the purpose of persuading students to his/her point of view.
4. No student's viewpoint shall be suppressed, provided such expression is not malicious or abusive toward others. Students shall be assured of their right
5. to form and express an opinion without jeopardizing their relationship with the teacher or school.
6. Students shall be informed of conduct expected during such instruction and

the importance of being courteous and respectful of the opinions of others.

7. Adequate factual information shall be provided to help students objectively analyze and evaluate the issue and draw their own conclusions.
8. The instruction shall not reflect adversely upon persons because of their race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, religion, or any other basis prohibited by law.
9. The subject matter of the instruction shall not otherwise be prohibited by state or federal law.

When a guest speaker is invited to make a presentation related to controversial issue, the Board requires that he/she be notified of this policy and the expectations and goals regarding the instruction. If the guest speaker is presenting only one point of view on an issue, the teacher shall be responsible for ensuring that students also receive information on opposing viewpoints.

When required by law or otherwise deemed appropriate by the teacher or administrator, parents/guardians shall be notified prior to instruction related to any controversial issue and parent/guardian consent shall be obtained for student participation. Students whose parents/guardians decline such instruction may be offered the option to participate in an alternative activity of similar value.

A student or parent/guardian with concerns regarding instruction about controversial issues shall be directed to appropriate complaint procedures.

Legal Reference:

EDUCATION CODE

51500 Prohibited instruction or activity

51510 Prohibited study or supplemental materials

51511 Religious matters properly included in courses of study

51530 Prohibition and definition re advocating or teaching communism with intent to indoctrinate

51933 Sex education courses

51938 Right of parent/guardian to excuse child from sexual health instruction

60040 Portrayal of cultural and racial diversity

60044 Prohibited instructional materials

60045 Required to be accurate, objective, current, and suited to needs and comprehension at respective grade levels

Policy

Adopted: September 2, 1987

Revised: May 17, 2017

HUMBOLDT COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Eureka, California