

Instruction

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The Governing Board recognizes that the district's educational program may sometimes include instruction related to controversial issues that may arouse strong reactions based on personal values and beliefs, political philosophy, culture, religion, or other influences. 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.

(cf. 6141.2 - Recognition of Religious Beliefs and Customs)
(cf. 6142.1 - Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Instruction)
(cf. 6142.3 - Civic Education)
(cf. 6142.8 - Comprehensive Health Education)
(cf. 6142.94 - History-Social Science Instruction)
(cf. 6143 - Courses of Study)

The Board expects administrators and teachers to exercise professional judgment when deciding whether or not a particular issue is suitable for study or discussion. They shall consult with the Superintendent or designee as necessary to determine the appropriateness of the subject matter, guest speakers, and/or related instructional materials or resources.

(cf. 6141 - Curriculum Development and Evaluation)
(cf. 6161.1 - Selection and Evaluation of Instructional Materials)
(cf. 6161.11 - Supplementary Instructional Materials)

When providing instruction related to a controversial issue, the following guidelines shall 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. In the classroom, teachers act on behalf of the district and are expected to follow the adopted curriculum. In leading or guiding class discussions about issues that may be controversial, a teacher may not advocate his/her personal opinion or viewpoint. When necessary, the Superintendent or designee may instruct teachers to refrain from sharing personal views in the classroom on controversial topics.
4. Students shall be assured of their right to form and express an opinion without jeopardizing their grades or being subject to discrimination, retaliation, or discipline, provided the viewpoint does not constitute harassment, threats, intimidation, or bullying or is otherwise unlawful.

(cf. 5022 - Student and Family Privacy Rights)

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES (continued)

(cf. 5121 - Grades/Evaluation of Student Achievement)

(cf. 5145.2 - Freedom of Speech/Expression)

(cf. 6145.5 - Student Organizations and Equal Access)

5. Students shall be informed of conduct expected during such instruction and the importance of being courteous and respectful of the opinions of others.

(cf. 5131 - Conduct)

(cf. 5131.2 - Bullying)

(cf. 5137 - Positive School Climate)

6. Adequate factual information shall be provided to help students objectively analyze and evaluate the issue and draw their own conclusions.

7. 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.

(cf. 0410 - Nondiscrimination in District Programs and Activities)

(cf. 5145.3 - Nondiscrimination/Harassment)

(cf. 5145.9 - Hate-Motivated Behavior)

8. 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 a controversial issue, the Superintendent or designee 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.

(cf. 6145.8 - Assemblies and Special Events)

A student or parent/guardian with concerns regarding instruction about controversial issues may communicate directly with the teacher or principal and/or use appropriate district complaint procedures.

(cf. 1312.1 - Complaints Concerning District Employees)

(cf. 1312.2 - Complaints Concerning Instructional Materials)

Legal Reference:

EDUCATION CODE

220 Prohibition of discrimination

48950 Freedom of speech

Legal Reference: (continued on next page)

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES (continued)

Legal Reference: (continued)

51240 Excuse from health instruction due to religious beliefs

51500 Prohibited instruction or activity

51510 Prohibited study or supplemental materials

51510 Prohibited study or supplemental materials

51511 Religious matters properly included in courses of study

51513 Materials containing questions about beliefs or practices

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

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

COURT DECISIONS

Johnson v. Poway Unified School District, (2011) 658 F.3d 954 (9th Cir.)

Mayer v. Monroe County Community School Corporation, (2007) 474 F.3d 477 (7th Cir.)

Garcetti v. Ceballos, (2006) 547 U.S. 410

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Controversial issues may be discussed in the classroom, provided that:

1. The issue is related to the course of study and provides opportunities for critical thinking, for developing tolerance, and for understanding conflicting points of view.
2. The issue has a meaningful relationship to matters of concern to the students.
3. Available information about the issue is sufficient to allow alternative points of view to be discussed and evaluated on a factual basis.
4. All sides for the issue are given a proper hearing, using established facts as primary evidence.
5. The issue has points of view which can be understood and defined by the students.
6. The teacher does not use his/her position to forward his/her own religious, political, economic or social bias. The teacher may express a personal opinion if he/she identifies it as such and does not express the opinion for the purpose of persuading students to his/her point of view.
7. Discussion or study of the issue is instigated by the students or by the established curriculum, but not by a source outside of the schools.
8. The discussion does not reflect adversely upon persons because of their race, sex, color, creed, national origin, ancestry, handicap or occupation.
9. The oral or written presentation does not violate state or federal law.

The Superintendent or designee shall have the authority to judge whether the above conditions are being met.