

Controversial Issues

The Governing Board believes that students should have opportunities to discuss controversial issues. The Board also 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, which students are mature enough to investigate and address. The study of a controversial issue shall be relevant to the adopted course of study and curricular goals and should help students develop critical thinking skills, such as how to learn how to gather and organize pertinent facts, discriminate between fact and fiction, draw intelligent conclusions, respect the opinions of others, and understanding and tolerance of diverse points of view.

(cf. 6141.2 - Religious Expression In The Schools)
(cf. 6142.1 - Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Instruction)
(cf. 6142.3 - Science Instruction)
(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 caution and discretion when deciding whether or not a particular issue is suitable for study or discussion in any particular class. Teachers should not spend class time on any topic which they feel is not suitable for the class or related to the established course of study. 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 Design)
(cf. 6161.1 - Selection and Evaluation of Instructional Materials)
(cf. 6161.11 - Supplementary Instructional Materials)

The Board also expects teachers to ensure that all sides of a controversial issue are impartially presented, with adequate and appropriate factual information. Without promoting any partisan point of view, the teacher should help students separate fact from opinion and warn them against drawing conclusions from insufficient data. The teacher shall not suppress any student's view on the issue as long as its expression is not malicious or abusive toward others.

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. 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 to form and express an opinion without jeopardizing their relationship with the teacher or school.

(cf. 5022 - Student and Family Privacy Rights)
(cf. 5145.2 - Freedom of Speech/Expression)
(cf. 6145.5 - Organizations Associations)

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 - Anti-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 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.

Teachers sponsoring guest speakers shall remind them not to use their position or influence on students to forward their own religious, political, economic or social views or shall take active steps to neutralize whatever bias has been presented.

(cf. 5145.2 - Freedom of Speech/Expression: Publication Code)

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 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

51500 Prohibited instruction or activity

51510 Prohibited study or supplemental materials

51511 Religious matters properly included in courses of study

51530 Prohibition and definition regarding 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 Criteria for instructional materials

Policy FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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