

LIST OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

OCTOBER 26, 2020 Board Meeting

WRITTEN COMMENTS

Inclusion/Equity

- Alexander Gibson, agibson@lwsd.org
- Crystal Visperas, EHS Teacher, cvisperas@lwsd.org
- Jennifer Marin, Teacher, EHS Teacher, jmarin@lwsd.org
- Katherine Wold, EHS Teacher, kawold@lwsd.org
- Molly Wilson, EHS Teacher, mowilson@lwsd.org
- Sara Norris, EHS Teacher, snorris@lwsd.org

Remote Learning

- Bryan Prather, bryanprather3@hotmail.com

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Inclusion/Equity

- **Alexander Gibson**, agibson@lwsd.org
Since attending LWSD from 2009-2012, a lot of things have changed. There are new buildings, new mascots, and thousands of laptops in backpacks. There's a new focus on equity and social justice, which is great. But there is one thing that has been remarkably static: the staff. When I was a student, I do not recall having any teachers of color. As a staff member now, it looks equally lonely for students and staff of color. It is more likely than not that a LWSD student will never have a Humanities teacher of color. That means no one close to them to share their personal experiences with race, culture, and politics in the United States—except for white people. And that's not to criminalize white teachers: some of us are doing our best to center BIPOC voices and keep social justice at the heart of what we are doing... but that will never be enough.

This is not an Eastlake problem. I saw the same thing at LWSD's new teacher training, committees, and professional development sessions. Statistically, teaching is a disproportionately white profession, as is Washington State – but this does not mean that qualified and effective teachers of color are not available. *It's just that they don't want to teach here.* LWSD should devote more resources to recruiting, hiring, and retaining BIPOC teachers. If we truly want to help our students become global, future-ready citizens, then they need a district that is more reflective of our society.

- **Crystal Visperas**, EHS Teacher, cvisperas@lwsd.org
A few weeks ago, I was graciously invited to a Linkage session sponsored by the School Board which I heartily appreciate. One of the mothers there said that an educator of color at LWSD has a shelf life of 2 years here in the district. I was shocked, angered and not surprised by that comment.

As an educator of color for 14 years, I have always worked with majority teachers and students of color. I came into this district knowing I would not find my experience here to be either heard or seen and that I would have to work even harder than most of my colleagues who are white.

I have been called the “liberal teacher.” I have been threatened to be sued for my beliefs. I have had students intentionally leave my classroom because my values of social justice this year. I have listened to the silence of my department when it comes to issues of social justice.

And yet, I am still here. But for how long?

The district sent out communication from the Social Studies Department that advised teachers “to maintain neutrality on political issues” and “It’s essential to maintain neutrality as a teacher when teaching about the election and/or controversial issues.” Our 2 department chairs did not agree to this statement. I did not agree to this statement. And our Equity Team at Eastlake does not believe in this statement.

When the district makes asinine comments like these to the entire community, it allows teachers, mainly white teachers, to not lean into these conversations in class. It does not normalize these topics so students feel comfortable to confront and examine their own beliefs and values. It allows white teachers to not talk about race and bias. It allows white teachers to not have the responsibility to defend and uplift the lives of Black and Brown people and that is not okay. We allow these teachers to have an OUT when we ask teachers to stay neutral in tough, challenging and crucial conversations.

So when students come to me in 11th grade, they are faced with a person of color who presses and challenges their thinking. And then, I am ridiculed and spotlighted for that very fact.

Is this what our district stands for? Neutrality? Complicity? The School Board members saw me passionately state the trauma I live through after being in this district for a year and a few months. When we are neutral and complicit and silent, it tells white and privileged students we as adults do not believe in the mission and values of LWSD. It tells Black and Brown children we do not value their lives and lived experiences. And it tells teachers of color that the shelf life is indeed 2 years here at LWSD.

I will never stay neutral when race, racism, and lives of Black and Brown students and humans are the topic of discussion. And I expect the district to do the same. I ask that the district retracts that statement sent out by Jen Rose on October 15th, apologize for the extreme harm it has done, and for the School Board to proudly and boldly say we will not remain neutral. We advocate for our students, teachers, and communities of color. We are active co-conspirators in this fight for social justice and equity.

This is who you say you are. Now, show us. Most of all, show me.

- **Jennifer Marin**, EHS Teacher, jmarin@lwsd.org
My name is Jennifer Marin, and I have been teaching at Eastlake High School in the Humanities Department since 2018. I have enjoyed teaching here due to my administration’s support, colleagues’ professionalism and my students’ engagement, but I also have concerns.

I believe that as a district, we need to commit to these goals:

- 1) Proudly state Black Lives Matter (*BLM*) and denounce white supremacy...and show this reflected in our curriculum (see point 2). Some students are confused by what BLM means. Many think making this statement suggests they are against law enforcement, when in fact, it conveys awareness about systemic racial inequity. We have this opportunity to help students truly see privilege for what it is and whom it affects, and I hope as a district we embrace this moment of increased civic activism in response to the recent tragic deaths of black men and women.
- 2) Re-examine our curriculum to ensure that we have content that speaks to the reality of diverse lived experiences. As a humanities educator, I want our novels' characters and our historical content to push students to understand different perspectives – and confront deeply ingrained, learned biases – because that is what helps all kids succeed in the multiracial, democratic society of the 21st century. I recently learned that the focus for one curriculum being piloted for Senior English is “British literature.” Not to impugn Chaucer or Lord Byron as lacking literary merit, but that’s not the voice our kids need to hear.
- 3) Have an intentional plan to recruit, hire, and retain administrators of color, counselors of color, and teachers of color. Having a mainly white staff teach an increasingly non-white student body doesn’t provide students the important role models they need.

Thank you for your time.

- **Katherine Wold**, EHS Teacher, kawold@lwsd.org
On October 15th, I received a letter on how to teach about elections from the district. Knowing that the district said in the summer that they support Black Lives Matter, I was shocked to see that the document told teachers to “stay neutral” when teaching about the election. I find this wording problematic. It is one thing to be neutral about taxes, it is another to be neutral about white supremacy. I will not be that teacher who remains neutral when human rights are violated. I will teach my students that it is wrong and that white supremacy is the cause of systemic racism. If we do not teach accurately about our history and current events, how can we say that Black lives matter? How can we say that we support any BIPOC students? We can’t and that is wrong.

I also found it very problematic that the document thanks teachers at my school who said they did not approve of the final draft and wanted their name taken off of it. We have heard no updates from the district about this error or the issue of being neutral when human rights are violated.

- **Molly Wilson**, EHS Teacher, mowilson@lwsd.org

My name is Molly Wilson, and I am a humanities teacher at Eastlake High School. I am writing to School Board members today to further encourage the district to advocate for the BIPOC in our communities. Recently, amidst discussions in my classrooms about race, a number of my students of color have come forward to share their experience with racism in our district at the hands of both students and teachers. Students of color have shared their fear and distrust of white teachers and classmates because of this. And, unfortunately, any signs of push back on race conversations in my classroom have come from white students. This discrepancy has revealed a disturbing reality in my classroom – students of color feel unsafe, and white students feel that race conversations are unnecessary. I am strongly urging the district to take action towards supporting our students of color by hiring teachers that come from similar backgrounds and reflect their identities; teachers of color also then need support and assistance in order to work safely in our mostly white district. I am also asking for mandated equity trainings that explicitly teach our staff and faculty members how to address racism in our classrooms and schools. I appreciate the equity training and work that has been done so far, but efforts toward creating an equitable environment for our community is an ongoing process, always.

- **Sara Norris**, EHS Teacher, snorris@lwsd.org

Lake Washington School Board,

I wanted to provide comment on the attached document sent out by Dr. Jen Rose on 10/15/20. I agree with this statement from the document: "As teachers, it is essential to maintain neutrality on political issues."

However, the follow up of this statement in #5 of the Teaching Tips states "It's essential to maintain neutrality as a teacher when teaching about the election and/or controversial issues." I absolutely do not agree with adding in the language "controversial issues". First of all, what does that even mean? Second, for some (like our president), slavery, systemic racism and white supremacy is deemed as "controversial". Looking at our history for what it truly was, and not a white-washed version, is something that everyone should be aware of so that we can understand how our country got to where it is and how to do better. Systemic racism will never be dismantled unless we examine it, study it, analyze it, and then do something about it. Hiding this from our youth, only further perpetuates the problem. I will not remain neutral about basic civil rights that all people in this country should have, even if some consider them to be "controversial issues". My BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ students need me to affirm that they have basic civil rights, are acknowledged, and treated equitably just as other students.

NOTE: *The attachment referenced in her comments can be found at the back of this document, following the written comments submitted.*

Remote Learning

- **Bryan Prather**, bryanprather3@hotmail.com
The latest email from the Superintendent states LWSD is in a High Risk (District). LWSD is not in a high district based off the decision tree. Why are the LWSD kindergarteners not back in school?

<i>Date Range Reported</i>	9/4/20 - 9/18/20	9/19/20 - 10/3/20	10/4/20 - 10/18/20
Kirkland	26.1	39.7	47.7
Redmond	41.1	52.2	44.3
Union Hill	36.3	40.8	27.2
Sammamish	32.8	40.6	26.5

Cases per 100,00 over 14 days by city/area

Lake Washington School District

TO: Principals and Teachers
FROM: Jen Rose, Director, Teaching and Learning
SUBJECT: Teaching About Elections
DATE: October 8, 2020

Teaching about elections provides an opportunity to help students learn about political and social issues and to develop the critical thinking skills that are an essential part of helping them become engaged and responsible citizens and are a part of our standards and curriculum. Study of these issues in our current climate of challenging political discourse and our remote teaching and learning environment makes teaching these skills, responsibilities, and topics an especially complex task.

Lessons and classroom discussions about political and social issues sometimes include controversial content (defined in the policy section later in this document). Facilitating discussions on potentially controversial topics in ways that promote civil discourse, critical thinking, and social justice within a classroom community, ensuring students are respectful and civil to each other, and maintaining classroom and school environments as safe places for all students are essential elements of teaching during this time.

Teachers have a tremendous responsibility to their students; teacher opinions and actions have profound impacts on students and on the learning environment. As teachers, it is essential to maintain neutrality on political issues. It is also essential to teach the critical thinking skills and standards that help students develop well-reasoned and thoughtful responses to the actions and issues that surround us in this time. While it is not appropriate for a teacher to share their personal political views, it is appropriate to teach about topics such as systemic racism, laws and policies related to voting, and the complex history of our country.

To support your work in this potentially polarizing election season in developing student knowledge and skills and ensuring respectful and civil behaviors, we are providing guidance around instructional strategies and teacher resources and a sampling of teaching tips and resources that have been reviewed by Lake Washington School District teachers and administrators to support teaching about elections in a safe and civil environment.

Teaching Tips for Teaching about the Election and Controversial Topics

1. Teachers could ask students to research and discuss facts and information about the policy or issues to which candidates' quotes are related.
2. Students could analyze candidates' speeches to identify and distinguish between facts, opinion, and commentary. They could then discuss the potential impact of each on voters.

3. Students could identify how commonly held values such as safety, freedom, equality and justice are reflected in the Constitution, identify candidates' positions on these topics, and then reflect on how the students themselves relate to the values.
4. Before teaching about the election and/or controversial issues, it is helpful to inform parents and your principal. Sharing the instructional purpose of the lesson or unit, outcomes, and teaching strategies can build support for student learning outside of the classroom.
5. It's essential to maintain neutrality as a teacher when teaching about the election and/or controversial issues. Asking students to clarify their thinking, use evidence, distinguish between fact and opinion, acknowledge and express understanding of the point of view of others, share their own solutions, etc. can be very helpful when discussing controversial topics. It's also helpful to model and talk through how to engage in civil conversation.
6. Teachers should always thoroughly preview the materials they are planning to use to determine how best to use them with students.
7. While teachers should not make statements during lessons and discussions that give the impression that they are endorsing a candidate, and should work to remain neutral on issues, teachers can point out, discuss, or otherwise address uncivil or inappropriate language or comments, particularly when these are creating an unsafe or uncivil classroom environment.

Teaching Tips to Foster Civility in Lessons about the Election and/or that Include Controversial Content

1. Start out with less controversial topics to practice and model civil discussion.
2. Use our Interdisciplinary Skills and Attributes to evaluate candidates' speeches or statements, party platforms, or to create guidelines for classroom discussion and participation.
3. Distinguish between discussion, dialog and debate. Review when each form of communication is appropriate. Discuss the types of strategies used for each form of communication.
4. Teachers should set specific ground rules prior to discussion using language from our harassment policy, in student-friendly language, before lessons or discussions dealing with controversial issues. Teachers can also have students co-develop these ground rules. It's important to regularly revisit these ground rules.
5. Objectively define or discuss terms, concepts or ideas prior to lessons or discussions that may include controversial content. Examples include immigration, religion, reform, justice, gender, and race.

LWSD Definitions and Policy

Controversial content:

- Addresses areas of strong disagreement or differences of opinion among some segments of the citizenry.
- Is often grounded in the principles, values, or beliefs of the people involved, and actions based on these principles, values or beliefs are objectionable to some.
- Has the potential to be emotionally charged both in and out of the classroom.
- Requires careful consideration and planning.

Lake Washington School District policies on Teaching about Controversial Issues (Policy 2331), Civility (Policy 4011), Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying of Students (Policy 3207), and Instructional Materials (Policy 2020) provide guidance to help us ensure that instruction which addresses controversial content supports our goal of preparing students for effective citizenship, and to help us provide a safe and respectful learning environment for all of our students.

Our policy on Teaching about Controversial Issues (Policy 2331) includes the rights and responsibilities of students to:

- Study controversial issues and to have free access to relevant information when doing so
- Form and express opinions on controversial issues without jeopardizing their relationship with the school
- Study these issues in an atmosphere of freedom from bias and prejudice
- Recognize that reasonable compromise is often an important facet in decision making in our society
- Respect minority opinions

Our Civility Policy (Policy 4011) does allow for the expression of controversial or differing viewpoints that may be offensive to some persons. However, such expression requires that:

- 1) The ideas are presented in a respectful manner and at a time and place that are appropriate
- 2) There is not a material disruption, or a reasonably anticipated disruption, to the educational process

Examples of uncivil or disrespectful behavior include directing vulgar, obscene or profane gestures or words at another individual; taunting, jeering, inciting others to taunt or jeer at an individual; interrupting another individual repeatedly; raising one's voice in anger at another person; or using derogatory epithets. Educators must always respond immediately when uncivil behaviors are expressed in the classroom or school.

Our Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying of Students Policy (Policy 3207) provides further clarification about unacceptable behaviors that may occur in the classroom or school, and direction about responding.

- This policy states that students will not be harassed because of their race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, including gender expression or identity, mental or physical disability, or other distinguishing characteristics.

- Harassment may take the form of slurs, rumors, “put-downs,” jokes, innuendoes, demeaning comments, drawings, cartoons, pranks, gestures, physical attacks threats, or other written, oral, physical, or electronically-transmitted messages or images.
- When any school staff member observes, overhears or otherwise witnesses harassment, intimidation or bullying, or receives a report of such actions, he or she must take prompt and appropriate actions to stop the harassment and prevent its reoccurrence.

Finally, our Instructional Materials Policy (Policy 2020) allows teachers to supplement the curriculum with materials to support instruction about the election and/or controversial issues. If these materials are purchased for use with five or more students, they must be submitted to our Instructional Materials Committee (IMC).

Teachers should thoroughly review all supplemental materials that are not a part of our adopted curriculum for accuracy and alignment with content area goals and standards. Teachers should also consider the maturity level of their students when choosing to use supplemental materials.

General Resources to Inform Planning and Preparation

[InquirEd Election Year Social Studies](https://www.inquired.org/post/webinar-election-year-social-studies)

<https://www.inquired.org/post/webinar-election-year-social-studies>

From InquirEd, but presented by the National Council for the Social Studies

Tips, strategies, and resources, including a webinar featuring Dr. Paula McAvoy and Dr. Wayne Journell.

Election 2020

<https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/2020-election/>

From Pew Research Center

Publications, interactives, and datasets that relate to the 2020 election.

Resources for Classroom Discussions

Civil Discourse in the Classroom

<http://www.tolerance.org/publication/civil-discourse-classroom>

From Teaching Tolerance

Civil Discourse in the Classroom—based on lessons tested in diverse classrooms across the United States and proven effective with a wide range of students and topics—will introduce educators to basic tools for teaching civil discourse. It is not subject-specific; on the contrary, the tools of argumentation and discussion lend themselves to any subject in any classroom.

Why you think you’re right – even if you’re wrong

https://www.ted.com/talks/julia_galef_why_you_think_you_re_right_even_if_you_re_wrong

TED Talk by Julia Galef

Discussion about our mindset influences how we interpret information. Can be used for ideas about how to frame lessons or discussions, or to have students think about how they and others interact with information.

[Let's Talk Politics: Bias, Dialogue and Critical Thinking](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/lets-talk-politics-bias-dialogue-and-critical-thinking)

<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/lets-talk-politics-bias-dialogue-and-critical-thinking>

From the Anti-Defamation League

Tips and strategies for engaging in these potentially contentious conversations in the classroom and doing so with a critical thinking and anti-bias lens.

Resources Around Engaging Students Virtually

[3 Participation Strategies for Live Video Instruction](https://www.edutopia.org/article/3-participation-strategies-live-video-instruction)

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/3-participation-strategies-live-video-instruction>

From Edutopia

This highlights instructional techniques specifically designed to engage students in a variety of modes to promote expression and discourse. *** All of the instructional strategies are functional with LWSD approved tools, but not all the tools referenced in the article are LWSD approved)***

[Fostering Civil Discourse: How Do We Talk About Issues that Matter?](https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/publications/Fostering_Civil_Discourse_2020_0.pdf)

https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/publications/Fostering_Civil_Discourse_2020_0.pdf

From Facing History and Ourselves

This resource includes instructional strategies that are great for setting up and maintaining a strong in person or virtual climate and structures to support civil discourse. *** However, please be aware, LWSD does NOT support/encourage unsupervised small groups of students.***

Lesson Plans and Activities About the 2020 Election

Social Justice and Anti-Racist Instructional Guidance Pertaining to Elections

[9 Ways to Teach about the Election: A Social Justice Approach](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/9-ways-to-teach-about-the-election-a-social-justice)

<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/9-ways-to-teach-about-the-election-a-social-justice>

From the Anti-Defamation League

A summary of ways that you can promote student critical thinking and awareness of elections within students by having them deeply analyze election elements and media.

[Suppression of Black Americans](https://www.socialstudies.org/social-education/84/4/beyond-19th-brief-history-voter-suppression-black-americans)

<https://www.socialstudies.org/social-education/84/4/beyond-19th-brief-history-voter-suppression-black-americans>

Published by the National Council for the Social Studies

A short background reading that covers the history of African American voting rights up to present-day struggles, which could be a great content refresher for teachers.

[Let's Talk Politics: Bias, Dialogue, and Critical Thinking](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/lets-talk-politics-bias-dialogue-and-critical-thinking)

<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/lets-talk-politics-bias-dialogue-and-critical-thinking>

From the Anti-Defamation League

Guidance on ways to promote students engaging in meaningful, and reflective civil discourse based off critical thinking around facts.

State Content Specific Resources

[Teaching Elections in Washington State](https://www.sos.wa.gov/assets/elections/mock/teachers%20guide%20curriculum%2010.08.2018.pdf)

<https://www.sos.wa.gov/assets/elections/mock/teachers%20guide%20curriculum%2010.08.2018.pdf>

From the Washington Secretary of State

Lesson plans and classroom activities for grades K-12

[Mock Election Toolkit from the Washington Secretary of State](https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/mock-election/#/landing)

<https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/mock-election/#/landing>

From the Washington Secretary of State

Mock Election Materials for Students

General National Content Resources

[Election Central from PBS](https://kcts9.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/presidential-campaigns/)

<https://kcts9.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/presidential-campaigns/>

From PBS

Resources and Lessons for teaching about elections and the history

[Teach and Learn with the 2020 Election](https://www.nytimes.com/spotlight/teach-the-2020-election)

<https://www.nytimes.com/spotlight/teach-the-2020-election>

From New York Times Learning Network

Writing prompts, challenges, lesson plans and other resources for teachers and students to learn about and discuss the elections.

[How to Assess the Strength of a Democracy Blogpost](https://facingtoday.facinghistory.org/how-to-assess-the-strength-of-a-democracy)

<https://facingtoday.facinghistory.org/how-to-assess-the-strength-of-a-democracy>

From Facing History and Ourselves

This blogpost was written in 2017 but includes a list of elements of a healthy democracy that could be used to spur critical thinking and reflection with students.

[Election Security: Fundamental and Threatened](https://www.socialstudies.org/social-education/84/4/election-security-fundamental-and-threatened)

<https://www.socialstudies.org/social-education/84/4/election-security-fundamental-and-threatened>

Published by the National Council for the Social Studies

A background resource/context resource for teachers which provides an overview of the concerns around election security, including voter suppression, foreign influence, and the role of civic education. Additional links to further reading are also included.

[Teaching about Elections](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/teaching-about-elections)

<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/teaching-about-elections>

From the Anti-Defamation League

Education resources, lesson plans, family resources and other election-related content to assist in teaching and talking about elections.

Resource To Help With What to Do Right After the Election

[The Election is Over... Now What?](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/the-election-is-over-now-what)

<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/the-election-is-over-now-what>

From the Anti-Defamation League

An overview of a potential way to create closure for students after an election, which also gives them an opportunity to write to an elected official about what their hopes or concerns are for that elected officials time in office based off prior learning about the official and the policies they support.

Fact Checking and Analysis Sites

[FactCheck.org](http://www.factcheck.org/)

<http://www.factcheck.org/>

Nonpartisan, nonprofit “consumer advocate” for voters that monitors the factual accuracy of what is said by major U.S. political players in the form of TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews and news releases.

[Politifact](http://www.politifact.com/)

<http://www.politifact.com/>

Project of the *Tampa Bay Times*.

Independent, nonpartisan news organization.

[FiveThirtyEight Politics](http://fivethirtyeight.com/politics/)

<http://fivethirtyeight.com/politics/>

From ABC News

Data and analysis of politics and election. More suited to secondary students.