

**Tumwater School District
Board Policy**

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES/GUEST SPEAKERS

The presentation and discussion of controversial issues in the classroom – whether by teachers, students, involved outside speakers or through the use of special instructional materials – should be on an informative basis. Teachers should guard against giving their personal opinions on sectarian or political questions or any other controversial issues until the students have had the opportunity to find, collect, and assemble factual material on the subject, to interpret the data without prejudice; to reconsider assumptions and claims and to reach their own conclusions. By refraining from expressing personal views before and during the period of research and study, the teacher is encouraging the students to search after truth and to think for themselves. The development of an ability to meet issues without prejudice and to withhold judgments while facts are being collected, assembled, weighed, and relationships seen before drawing inferences or conclusions, is among the most valuable outcomes of a free educational system.

The policy of the Board can best be described by listing three basic rights of students.

1. The right to study controversial issues which have political, economic, or social significance on which, at their level, they should begin to have an opinion.
2. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
3. The right of access to all relevant information freely available in the school or public libraries, and the internet as appropriate.

Emotional criticism and the promotion of a cause within the classroom are inappropriate and unscholarly. The teacher's attitude should be that of the true scholar which is truth seeking, open minded, and tolerant.

The district shall offer courses of study which will afford learning experiences appropriate to the level of student understanding. The instructional program shall respect the right of students to face issues, to have free access to information, to study under teachers in situations free from prejudice and to form, hold, and express their own opinions without personal prejudice or discrimination. The district encourages staff members to provide for the free and orderly flow and examination of ideas so that students may gain the skills to gather and arrange facts, discriminate between facts and opinion, discuss differing viewpoints, analyze problems and draw their own tentative conclusions.

Teachers shall guide discussions and procedures, including the use of guest speakers to gain divergent points of view, with thoroughness and objectivity to acquaint students

with the need to recognize opposing viewpoints, the importance of fact, the value of judgment and the virtue of respect for conflicting opinions. Teachers will exercise professional judgment in determining the appropriateness of the issue to the curriculum and the maturity of the students. When in doubt regarding appropriateness, the matter should be referred to the principal.

The superintendent shall establish procedures for the approval of the use of a guest speaker. When an invited speaker expresses opinions which are partisan or considered controversial by a large portion of the community, the school shall provide for the presentation of opposing views.

- A. If the teacher and the principal believe the guest speaker's topic is controversial, they will develop a plan whereby the issue(s) can be presented in an objective unbiased manner.
- B. In the event the speaker's topic is determined to be controversial, the teacher will notify students beforehand that any student who does not wish to attend the presentation may have alternative assignment.

ADOPTION DATE: August 24, 1978

REVISED: March 27, 2014