

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 shall 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 expects administrators and teachers to exercise professional judgment when deciding whether or not a particular issue is suitable for study or discussion. Administrators and teachers 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.

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, staff 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, staff may not advocate his/her personal opinion or viewpoint. When necessary, the Superintendent or designee may instruct staff 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.
5. Students shall be informed of conduct expected during such instruction and the importance of being courteous and respectful of the opinions of others.
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.
8. The subject matter of the instruction shall not otherwise be prohibited by state or federal law.

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When a guest speaker is invited to make a presentation related to a controversial issue, the Superintendent or designee shall notify him/her 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, such as in regards to comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education, parents/guardians shall be notified prior to instruction that they may request in writing that their child be excused from the instruction. Students whose parents/guardians decline such instruction may be offered an alternative activity of similar educational value.

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.

Legal Reference:

State

Ed. Code 220

Ed. Code 48950

Ed. Code 51240

Ed. Code 51500

Ed. Code 51510

Ed. Code 51511

Ed. Code 51513

Ed. Code 51530

Ed. Code 51930-51939

Ed. Code 60040

Ed. Code 60044

Ed. Code 60045

Management Resources

Court Decision

Court Decision

Description

[Prohibition of discrimination](#)

[Speech and other communication](#)

[Excuse from instruction due to religious beliefs](#)

[Prohibited instruction or activity](#)

[Prohibited study or supplemental materials](#)

[Religious matters properly included in courses of study](#)

[Personal beliefs](#)

[Advocacy or teaching of communism](#)

[California Healthy Youth Act](#)

[Selection of instructional materials](#)

[Prohibited instructional materials](#)

[Criteria for instructional materials](#)

Description

[Garcetti v. Ceballos \(2006\) 547 U.S. 410](#)

[Mayer v. Monroe County Community School Corporation \(2007\) 474 F.3d 477 \(7th Cir.\)](#)

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

Westminster, California

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