Controversial Issues

Adopted: 05/11/1967 **| Last Revised**: 09/01/2026 **| Last Reviewed**: 09/01/2026

The Board of Education recognizes that the district's educational program may sometimes include instruction related to controversial issues that may involve strong reactions and responses. Instruction shall be relevant to the adopted course of study and curricular goals.

The Board of Education 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.

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 their 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;

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; and

8. The subject matter of the instruction shall not otherwise be prohibited by state or federal law.

Approval of the Superintendent or designee is required when a guest speaker is invited to make a presentation related to a controversial issue. The Superintendent or designee shall inform the speaker 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.

Policy Reference Disclaimer:
These references are not intended to be part of the policy itself, nor do they indicate the basis or authority for the Board to enact this policy. Instead, they are provided as additional resources for those interested in the subject matter of the policy.

Legal References:

STATE
EDUCATION CODE
220 Prohibition of discrimination
48950 Speech and other communication
51240 Excuse from instruction due to religious beliefs
51500 Prohibited instruction or activity
51510 Prohibited study or supplemental materials
51511 Religious matters properly included in courses of study
51513 Personal beliefs
51530 Advocacy or teaching of communism
51930-51939 California Healthy Youth Act
60040 Selection of instructional materials
60044 Prohibited instructional materials
60045 Criteria for instructional materials
MANAGEMENT RESOURCES
COURT DECISIONS
Garcetti v. Ceballos (2006) 547 U.S. 410
Mayer v. Monroe County Community School Corporation (2007) 474 F.3d 477 (7th Cir.)
Johnson v. Poway Unified School District (2011) 658 F.3d 954
WEBSITE
CSBA District and County Office of Education Legal Services https://legalservices.csba.org/

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Revised:	12/08/1998
Revised:	09/21/2004 (technical)
Revised:	12/06/2016
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