

**CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

The Governing Board believes that students should be given age appropriate opportunities to investigate, address and discuss controversial issues which have religious, political, social economic, ethical or moral significance. The study of a controversial issue should help students learn how to gather and organize pertinent facts, discriminate between fact and fiction, draw intelligent conclusions, and respect the opinions of others.

The Board believes that addressing such controversial issues, in the school setting, may bear the mark of approval of the School District. Thus, the Board expects 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 is not directly related to the established course of study.

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. After the presentation of a controversial issue, a teacher should be able to assist students on obtaining valid and objective information on such subject and then encourage them to form and express their own opinions only after making carefully considered evaluations.

Teachers sponsoring guest speakers shall either ask 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.

In raising and discussing controversial issues, the Board expects teachers to act appropriately and professionally and be considerate and respectful of the beliefs and the values, however personally contrary to their own they may be, of their students, colleagues and the community.

Nothing contained in this policy is intended to detract from the rights enjoyed by all citizens to engage in political and social matters outside of the work place and outside of working hours.

**CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

In addressing controversial issues the Board expects all employees to act appropriately and professionally and to be considerate and respectful of the opinions, beliefs and values of the community, other colleagues and students.

Controversial issues may be discussed in the classroom, provided that:

1. The issue is related to the course of study and provides opportunities for critical thinking, for developing tolerance, and for understanding conflicting points of view.
2. The issue has a meaningful relationship to matters of concern to the students.
3. Available information about the issue is sufficient to allow alternative points of view to be discussed and evaluated on a factual basis.
4. All sides of the issue are given a proper hearing, using established facts as primary evidence.
5. The issue has points of view which can be understood and defined by the students.
6. The teacher does not use his/her position to forward his/her own religious, political, economic or social bias. The teacher may express a personal opinion if he/she identifies it as such and does not express the opinion for the purpose of persuading students to his/her point of view. If the teacher does express a personal opinion, he/she shall inform the students that the expressed views are personal and are not the views of the Board or the School District.
7. Discussion or study of the issue is initiated by the students or by the established curriculum.
8. The discussion does not reflect adversely upon persons because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, color, creed, national origin, ancestry, handicap or occupation.
9. The discussion is conducted in such a way as to acknowledge, consider, evaluate and balance the diverse opinions of the community.
10. Employees are to act appropriately and professionally, being respectful of the beliefs and the values of students, the community and colleagues.
11. The oral or written presentation does not violate state or federal law. No employee shall advocate or promote the violation of any state or federal law.
12. Teachers discuss guest speakers, topics and materials to be used, with the site administrator or designee prior to scheduling the event.

**CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES** (continued)

The Superintendent or designee shall have the authority to judge whether the above conditions are being met.

Student and employee information obtained by School District employees within the course and scope of their employment is confidential information. Employees may not reiterate, emphasize, disseminate or comment on confidential information outside of the classroom or school setting.

Teachers have the same rights to use District facilities as other citizens, pursuant to the Civic Center Act and the District's Facility Use Policy.

School District equipment and supplies (copiers, telephones, paper, etc.) with regards to this section, are provided for teachers to use exclusively within the courses and scope of their employment. It is understood that the District is a public agency whose equipment and supplies may not be used for personal purposes. In no event shall District equipment and supplies be used to advocate any social, religious or political position or belief.

**Controversial Issues Procedure  
For Principals and Staff**

## Controversial Issues: Procedures for Principals and Staff

The overriding purpose of an American public school education is to help our youth develop into knowledgeable, informed, independent-thinking citizens who are able to participate positively and fully for the good of our society and our nation. With this goal in mind, the schools must strive to produce students who deal responsibly with controversial issues.

The following are procedures to ensure that controversial issues are presented with dignity, respect, aligned with the course of study, and promote mutual respect and tolerance for differing points of view. Based on past experience, 10% or less of the speakers in our schools have been "controversial."

### Purpose

The purpose of these procedures is to provide students with age-appropriate opportunities to investigate, address, and discuss curriculum that may be controversial. The Controversial Issues Procedures are a tool for site principals regarding tolerance and diversity in areas of race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and other controversial issues.

Controversial issues can include topics regarding religious, political, social, economic, ethical, and/or moral significance. The study of controversial topics should assist students to learn how to gather and organize pertinent facts, discriminate between fact and fiction, draw intelligent conclusions, and respect the opinions of others.

### Determination of Potential Controversial Issues

The site principal will determine which topics, curriculum, materials, and guest speakers are potentially controversial. When the principal determines a topic, curriculum, materials, and/or guest speaker are controversial, the following steps will be implemented:

- Principal will review controversial topic, lesson plan, and curriculum with teacher. The purpose is to ensure that materials and content are age-appropriate, provide opportunities for critical thinking, and develop tolerance and understanding of differing points of view. (*Controversial Issues Policy #6144*)
- Parents will be informed in writing regarding any controversial issues at least two (2) weeks in advance. Parent will be given an opportunity to review all handout materials and be provided with the choice to have their child either participate or not participate by means of a permission slip that must be returned to the school. Sites may also choose to plan ahead and send an advance list of controversial guest speakers or controversial issue topics for parent approval.
- Presentations from guest speakers will be monitored by the site administrator or designee to ensure balance and age-appropriate materials. Topics must be directly related to State/District curriculum guides and standards and part of an extended unit (such as History/Science and Health Frameworks)

The principal may consider the following to assist in his/her decision making process when determining if a topic is controversial:

- If you have to ask whether a topic is controversial or not, then it probably is.
- If there are implications regarding religion, political, social, economic, ethical, and/or moral significance that are not part of a district adopted textbook, then the topic falls under these guidelines.
- When uncertain if the topic is controversial, the principal shall consult with the zone administrator and may consult with the site council.

### Controversial Guest Speakers

Controversial guest speakers can provide a valuable experience for students, but their presentations must show a clear relationship to the material currently studied, should normally last a maximum of two (2) days, must be witnessed at all times by the teacher-in-charge, and should contain no information that might promote personal contact with students outside of class.

The following activities are to be in place:

1. Teachers will discuss controversial guest speakers, topics and materials to be used with the site administration prior to scheduling the event.
2. Controversial guest speakers must submit documented qualifications and a lesson plan including objectives, materials and evaluation to be handed out for review by site administration to ensure an appropriate, professional presentation. An evaluation of controversial guest speakers will be completed by the teacher and students after the presentation and submitted to the Site Administrator.
3. Principals will address parental concerns regarding controversial issues in a timely fashion.
4. Parents may address concerns with the appropriate zone administrator and follow the Complaint Policy if they are not satisfied.
5. Personal contact between controversial guest speakers and students outside of the classroom will not be allowed.
6. The principal or administrative designee shall monitor the controversial guest speaker to ensure that the preceding controversial guest speaker guidelines are followed.

### Curriculum/Printed Material

1. Curriculum and materials must be related to the course of study.

2. No tests, questionnaires, surveys, or examinations regarding the student's or parent's personal beliefs, practices, or organizational beliefs shall be administered to any pupil in grade K-12 unless parent is notified and gives written permission. (EC 51513)
3. Videos must follow district policy regarding selection and use of video and film. (*Policy #6161.12*)

Developing students into informed, independent-thinking citizens who treat others with dignity and respect

- A. When teaching controversial issues, the presenter must use instructional materials that are age-appropriate and that follow frameworks and standards on one or more of the following:
  1. Knowledge and Cultural Understanding: incorporating learning from history, the other humanities, geography, and the social sciences;
  2. Democratic Understanding and Civic Values: incorporating an understanding of our national identity, constitutional heritage, civic values, and rights and responsibilities;
  3. Skills Attainment and Social Participation: incorporating basic study skills, critical thinking skills, and participation skills that are essential for effective citizenship.
- B. When teaching controversial issues, the presentations shall provide students with the following:
  1. Encouragement to be activists in the face of injustice directed at them or others.
  2. Methods to develop sympathetic, comfortable, and knowledgeable ways of interacting with people from a range of cultures and backgrounds.
  3. Ways to develop a voice to express their ideas and have their voice valued.
  4. Opportunities to investigate, address, and discuss controversial issues which have religious, political, social, economic, sexual orientation, ethical and/or moral significance.
  5. Opportunities to learn how to gather and organize pertinent facts, draw intelligent conclusions, and respect the opinions of others.
  6. Opportunities to help students separate fact from opinion and not draw conclusions from insufficient data.
  7. Student discourse on the issue is objective and not malicious or abusive toward others.

## Training

Site principals and staff will review the district's Controversial Issues Policy and Guidelines yearly. Sites will identify training needs to ensure the teaching of controversial topics with tolerance and respect. Training will also include the appropriate education codes and district policies. Data on controversial topics will be collected, including topics, names of guest speakers, and summary of evaluations for all presentations.

## Review

A review of this procedure will be completed within 24 months to determine the procedure's effectiveness and the achievement of providing discussion of controversial issues. Data on controversial topics will be collected, including topic, names of guest speakers, and summary of evaluations for all presentations. In addition, teachers and administrators will be asked for feedback on the procedure to include strengths and suggestions.

The Superintendent shall appoint a committee to review the procedure. The committee shall survey schools, review the data, and report back to the Superintendent within 90 days of the first meeting of the committee. The Superintendent shall forward the information to the PVUSD Board of Education.



# Principal's Checklist For Topics That Are Controversial

Principal: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest Speaker: \_\_\_\_\_

Qualifications: \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson Plan Related to Course of Study \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Controversial Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of presentation: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Monitor guest speaker.

Printed Materials

Age-Appropriate

Relationship to Course of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Controversial Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Permission

Curriculum

Discuss and review topics and materials with teacher.

Review materials to ensure age-appropriateness.

Curriculum materials related to course of study.

Curriculum has followed approval process.

Letter is sent to parents regarding topic, speaker, and curriculum at least 2 weeks in advance. Letter includes a date when parent may review materials and an option to have their child not participate. Site may choose to plan ahead and send a list of guest speakers or controversial issue topics for parent approval in advance (beginning of semester or beginning of year).

Controversial Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Presentation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Letter Sent: \_\_\_\_\_

Review Date of Materials: \_\_\_\_\_

Review and determine appropriate education experience for non-participating students

Parent permission form received

Staff training on Controversial Issues Procedures and Policy.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Teacher's Checklist For Topics That Are Controversial

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest Speaker: \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewed with Site Administrator

Reviewed guest speaker's lesson plan with site administrator

Controversial Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of presentation: \_\_\_\_\_

Monitor guest speaker.

Printed Materials

Age-Appropriate

Relationship to Course of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Controversial Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Permission \_\_\_\_\_

Curriculum

Discuss and review topics and materials with principal.

Review materials to ensure age-appropriateness.

Curriculum materials related to course of study.

Curriculum has followed approval process.

Letter is sent to parents regarding topic, speaker, and curriculum at least 2 weeks in advance. Letter includes a date when parent may review materials and an option to have their child not participate. Site may choose to plan ahead and send a list of guest speakers or controversial issue topics for parent approval in advance (beginning of semester or beginning of year).

Controversial Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Presentation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Letter Sent: \_\_\_\_\_

Review Date of Materials: \_\_\_\_\_

Review and determine appropriate education experience for non-participating students

Parent permission form received

## Controversial Guest Speaker Lesson Plan

Name of Speaker: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Goal(s) for Presentation

2. Essential questions to be taught

3. Assessment of learnings from presentation

4. Activities - include all materials that are to be presented to students

Date of presentation: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of approval by site: \_\_\_\_\_

*Copy to be kept by site principal*

## Evaluation of Guest Speaker on Controversial Topics

	<i>Apparent Weakness</i>		<i>Not a Problem</i>		<i>Apparent Strength</i>
1. Presentation was related to course of study.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Presentation and materials were age appropriate and provided opportunities for students to investigate, address, and discuss curriculum that is controversial.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Presentation assisted students to gather and organize pertinent facts, discriminate between fact and fiction, draw conclusions, and respect the opinion of others.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Overall Evaluation	1	2	3	4	5
5. Would we have this speaker back again?	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Comments:</b>					

Please Return To Site Principal

*Copy to be kept by site principal*

(SAMPLE)  
Pajaro Valley Unified School District

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Permission For School Year

The Pajaro Valley Unified School District believes that students should have age-appropriate opportunities to investigate, address, and discuss curriculum that may be controversial. In order to comply with District Policy #6144 (*Controversial Issues*) parents will be informed in writing regarding the study of a controversial issue and have the right to the following:

- Review all materials to be presented
- Choice to have your child participate or not participate in the study of the controversial issue.

The following are controversial topics that may be presented during the school year:

Please complete and return the lower portion of this letter to your child's teacher so that we may be sure you received this information. If you have further questions contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,  
Principal

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- Yes, my child may participate in the study of all controversial issues for the year.
- I wish to withhold my permission until notified of the specific topics.
- I want to review all materials prior to giving my permission for my child to study the controversial issue 2 weeks prior to the scheduled date for presentation of the topic.

To Be Completed By Site: Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Approval: \_\_\_\_\_

- I do not want my child to participate in the study of any controversial Issue.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

(SAMPLE)  
Pajaro Valley Unified School District

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For Parents Who Want to Approve Each Controversial Issue

Your child's class will be studying a Controversial Issue as follows:

Controversial Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to Course of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest Speaker:  Yes  No Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Presented by Classroom Teacher:  Yes  No Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) of Presentation: \_\_\_\_\_

The Pajaro Valley Unified School District believes that students should have age-appropriate opportunities to investigate, address, and discuss curriculum that may be controversial. In order to comply with District Policy #6144 (*Controversial Issues*) parents will be informed in writing regarding the study of a controversial issue and have the right to the following:

- Review all materials to be presented
- Choice to have your child participate or not participate in the study of the controversial issue.

Please complete and return the lower portion of this letter to your child's teacher so that we may be sure you received this information. If you have further questions contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,  
Principal

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Yes, my child may participate in the study of the controversial issue.

I want to review all materials prior to giving my permission for my child to study the controversial issue 2 weeks prior to the scheduled date for presentation of the topic.

To Be Completed By Site: Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Approval: \_\_\_\_\_

I do not want my child to participate in the study of the controversial Issue.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# Controversial Issue Student Evaluation Form

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Speaker: \_\_\_\_\_

I learned the Following:

Recommendations for future study:

I recommend this topic or speaker for other students:

Yes

No

Comments:

(SAMPLE)  
Pajaro Valley Unified School District

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Permission For Family Life/Sex Education

The Pajaro Valley Unified School District provides Family Life/Sex Education. In order to comply with Family Life/Sex Education District Policy #6142.1 parents will be informed in writing regarding the study of Family Life and have the right to the following:

- Review all materials to be presented
- Choice to have your child participate or not participate in the study of the Family Life/Sex Education

A review of all Family Life materials will occur on \_\_\_\_\_. We encourage parents to attend and review materials. Please complete and return the lower portion of this letter to your child's teacher so that we may be sure you received this information. If you have further questions contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,  
Principal

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Yes, my child may participate in Family Life/Sex Education without my need to review materials.

I want to review all materials prior to giving my permission for my child to participate in Family Life/Sex Education and will attend the review meeting on \_\_\_\_\_.

To Be Completed By Site: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Date of Parent Approval*

I do not want my child to participate in Family Life Education.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Prepared by Special Services