

Controversial Issues

The Solano County Office of Education (SCOE) believes that students should have opportunities to discuss controversial issues which have political, social, or economic significance and which the students are mature enough to investigate and address. 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.

SCOE 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 they feel is not suitable for the class or related to the established course of study.

SCOE 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.

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.

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 s/he identifies it as such and does not express the opinion for the purpose of persuading students to his/her point of view.
7. Discussion or study of the issue is instigated by the students or by the established curriculum, but not by a source outside of the schools.
8. The discussion does not reflect adversely upon persons because of their race, sex, color, creed, national origin, ancestry, handicap or occupation.
9. The oral or written presentation does not violate state or federal law.

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

Policy 6144 (Continued)

Legal Reference:

EDUCATION CODE

- 51500 Prohibited instruction or activity
- 51510 Prohibited study or supplemental materials
- 51511 Religious matters properly included in courses of study
- 51530 Prohibition and definition re advocating or teaching communism with intent to indoctrinate
- 51933 Sex education courses
- 60040 Portrayal of cultural and racial diversity
- 60044 Prohibited instructional materials
- 60045 Required to be accurate, objective, current, and suited to needs and comprehension at respective grade levels

Policy Cross-Reference:

- 1312.1 Complaints Concerning District Employees
- 1312.2 Complaints Concerning Instructional Materials
- 5145.2 Freedom of Speech/Expression