

## **CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

Bonneville Joint School District No. 93 (the “District”) shall offer courses of study which afford learning experiences appropriate to the age, maturity, and academic achievement level of students. The instructional program shall respect the right of students to face issues, to have free access to information, to learn in environments that are free from prejudice or conscious bias, and to form, hold, and express their own opinions without personal prejudice or discrimination.

### **1. Definition of Controversial Issues**

- A. The Board of Trustees (“Board”) recognizes the need for the teacher to have the freedom to discuss and teach subjects and issues which may be considered to be controversial.
- B. Teaching controversial issues aims to help students critically examine multiple viewpoints, think independently, and develop respectful discourse skills.
- C. For the purposes of this and other Board policies relevant to teaching controversial issues, the term “controversial issues” is defined as issues without a universally accepted viewpoint and that may reasonably create conflict with the firmly held beliefs, values or principles of students or their parents / guardians. Controversial issues include topics related to politics, religion, ethics, race, gender, sexuality, and environmental issues, and other moral or ethical considerations.

### **2. Special Consideration for Sex Education**

- A. The School Board directs that a philosophy of abstinence shall be a part of and the underlying principle in all sex education instruction. However, it is recognized that this alone may not prevent pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases and therefore the Board approves instruction in sex education consistent with the adopted core standards for health education or science courses including AIDS awareness, sexually transmitted diseases, birth control, and general human sexuality.
  - i. In all cases the known facts will be taught, not the opinions or moral judgment of the instructor.
  - ii. This does not preclude giving impartial view points on differing views of controversial issues related to the approved core standards and curriculum for sex education. However, in any discussion related to abortion, as defined in Idaho Code Section 18-8702(1), District employees must exercise great care to ensure the discussion conforms to Title 18, Chapter 87 of Idaho Code 18-8707, which

includes, but is not limited to the prohibition of counseling students in favor of an abortion.

### **3. Support of Academic Freedom and Inherent Responsibilities**

- A. The Board encourages and supports the concept of academic freedom, recognizing it as a necessary condition to aid in maintaining an environment conducive to learning and the free exchange of ideas and information.
- B. The Board also believes that academic freedom carries with it a responsibility that is shaped by the basic ideals, goals and institutions of the local community. These standards are expressed via the goals and objectives of the adopted curriculum, by the adopted textbooks, by Board policy, and by the school's mission statement.
  - i. Teachers shall guide discussions and procedures with thoroughness and objectivity to acquaint students with the need to recognize opposing viewpoints, importance of fact, value of good judgment, and the virtue of respect for conflicting opinions.
  - ii. In the study or discussion of Controversial Issues or materials, however, the Board directs the teaching staff to consider the following:
    - a. relative age and maturity of students;
    - b. District philosophy of education;
    - c. community standards, morals and values;
    - d. the necessity for a balanced presentation; and
    - e. the necessity to seek prior administrative counsel and guidance in such matter;
    - f. the responsibility to notify parents / guardians of a planned discussion or learning activity regarding a Controversial Issue with sufficient time to provide them with the opportunity to request an alternative learning activity for their student, as provided for in Board Policy 2428 Parental Rights;
    - g. The Board recognizes that To encourage the free flow of information and enhance student creativity, unplanned Controversial Issues brought up by students in the classroom may be briefly discussed as long as the discussion is appropriate for the age and maturity of students and related to the approved learning outcomes of the course.
- C. As an inherent responsibility to guarantee academic freedom to both students and teachers, the Board expects that:

- i.all classroom studies will be objective, and impartial and based on Idaho Content Standards and learning objectives approved by the Board of Trustees;
  - ii.teachers will create and maintain an atmosphere of open-mindedness and tolerance, and that no one idea or viewpoint should necessarily prevail;
  - iii.teachers will not attempt, directly or indirectly, to limit or control students' judgment concerning any issue, but will make certain that full and fair consideration is given to the subject and that facts are carefully examined as to their accuracy and interpretation;
  - iv.teachers will exercise professional judgment in determining the appropriateness of the issue to the curriculum and to the age and grade level of the students.
- D. Teachers shall be free to choose supplemental materials to support and enhance the Board adopted instructional resources except in sex education instruction.
  - i.When purchasing supplemental curricular materials, teachers shall submit a request for approval as outlined in [Board Policy 2540 Selection and Adoption of Curricular Materials](#).
  - ii.Teachers may select and use open-source supplemental curricular materials that facilitate and support student learning of approved content standards and learning objectives without approval of the Board provided that the use does not violate the copyright protections of those materials.
- E. The school principal must approve all guest speakers who will address a Controversial Issue as outlined in [Board Policy 2341 Speakers in the Classroom and at School Functions](#).

#### **4. Parent Rights Related to Controversial Issues**

- A. Schools shall allow parents/guardians to withdraw their student from learning activities on topics regarding or pertaining to Controversial Issues by following the process established in [Board Policy 2428 Parental Rights](#), Section 4 Objections to Learning Materials or Activities.
- B. The teacher shall notify parents / guardians at least five (5) school days prior to teaching a Controversial Issue.This will provide sufficient time for the parents/guardians to request to withdraw their child from the planned activity.
  - i.Requests to withdraw students from learning activities are considered academic accommodations as defined in Board Policy 2428 Parental Rights. The school principal and teacher will follow the process specified in Policy 2428 when considering requests to withdraw students from learning activities and/or providing alternative learning

## INSTRUCTION

activities or curricular materials.

- ii. The teacher should have the principal view questionable materials, etc

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Cross Reference: Speakers in the Classroom and at School Functions #2341  
Parental Rights #2428

Legal Reference: Idaho Code § 33-512  
Governance of schools Idaho Code § 33-1611 Excusing Children from  
Instruction in Sex Education  
Idaho Code § 33-6001 Parental Rights