



CATEGORY: **Instruction, Miscellaneous**

EFFECTIVE: **1-29-62**

SUBJECT: **Controversial Issues in Schools**

REVISED: **10-21-03**

**A. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

1. To outline proper handling of controversial issues in the classroom. This procedure includes outside speakers (C.5-C.7.), prohibited use of classroom time (B.4.), straw voting (C.8.), and prohibition of hypnosis in schools (B.5.)
2. **Related Procedures:**

Activities by foundations, booster clubs, and other nondistrict organizations .....	9325
Display of commercial materials/advertising; distribution of literature and/or sales by nonstudents and community organizations .....	9350
School clubs, general .....	6240
Student free speech .....	6210

**B. LEGAL AND POLICY BASIS**

1. **Reference:** Board policy: A-3000, A-3500, F-3800, H-5000, H-5100, H-5150, H-5400, I-1210, I-1250, I-1255, K-6500, K-7000.
2. **Controversial Issues.** The district recognizes that controversial issues are inherent in the educational process. Each of us is an individual. Our individualities and personalities have their roots in our different backgrounds and find expression in our differing points of view. Our opinions, therefore, are important to us as individuals. Whenever people discuss upon which opinions differ, they are dealing with controversial issues and emotions usually are involved.

Controversy may arise at unexpected times. Teachers must control situations in order to provide a constructive learning experience. Skill in dealing with controversy is gained through *planned* discussions on controversial issues related to the regular instructional program. Teachers should be objective, impartial, unprejudiced, and unemotional. They should lead students to express opinions on both sides of any question. Student thinking will be stimulated when the teacher points out both strong and weak points of an unpopular position. In doing this, care must be taken that students understand the teacher's purpose in raising questions or making comments regarding an unpopular cause.

3. **Speakers Prohibited**
  - a. Advocates, by reputation, word, or example, of ideologies that seek to overthrow our economic and political way of life and American institutions and ideals.

- b. Advocates, by reputation, word, or example, of race hatred, or those who in any way defame or belittle any race, religion, creed, color, marital status, veteran status, sex, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin age, or disability.
  - c. Advocates of sectarian religion.
  - d. Those expressing philosophies inimical to our accepted mores and standards of morality.
  - e. Those speakers inappropriate to the maturity levels of students involved.
  - f. Those speakers whose topics would not be related to the instructional purposes of the classes or to the purposes of extracurricular or cocurricular activities.
  - g. A candidate for elective office may be invited *only* if all candidates for that office are invited. (Objectives in the study of controversial issues outlined in C.3. apply.)
  - h. Those who advocate use of drugs or hallucinatory compounds or any other substance deemed illegal or who oppose lawful activities of the police, courts, or other agencies established for protection of society.
4. **Prohibited Use of Classroom Time.** Use of classroom time by district employees, citizens, volunteers, or students to promote special interests of individuals or groups or to propagandize students and/or parents is prohibited. Included in this category are activities such as political advocacy and employee-employer relations issues. (Collections and drives by nondistrict organizations are covered in Procedure. 9325; distribution of literature in schools by nonstudents is covered in Procedure 9350.)
5. **Hypnosis in Schools Prohibited**
- a. Demonstrations of hypnosis *or* any use of hypnosis in San Diego Unified School District involving students as observers or as subjects is prohibited. Included in this prohibition are school assemblies or other meetings held during or outside the school day under supervision of school officials (including field trips outside the district).
  - b. It is recognized that hypnosis may be a suitable subject for discussion when appropriate to curriculum content of that class; however, there shall be no instruction in techniques of hypnosis during school hours by school or nonschool personnel while students are under supervision of school officials.

6. **Reporting Presence on School Premises.** In accordance with state law and city ordinance, any person (including a speaker) who is not a student of the school or an employee of the district, immediately upon entering any school building or grounds, shall report his/her presence and the reason therefor to the principal or to a person designated by the principal to receive such report (Procedure 9375).

### C. GENERAL

1. **Originating Office.** Suggestions or questions concerning this procedure should be directed to the Office of General Counsel, Office of the Superintendent.
2. **Definition. Outside Speaker:** A speaker who is not a certificated employee of the district.
3. **School Regulations and Procedures.** Through consultation with faculty, students, and other interested parties, *schools may develop specific written school guidelines that are consistent with this procedure.* Guidelines shall include time, place, manner, prior approval, and penalties for violation when appropriate. These agreed-upon school guidelines, as well as necessary district guidelines and limitations, may be communicated to all students, staff, and parents/guardians (via student handbook, faculty handbook, PTA newsletter).
4. **Objectives in the study of controversial issues:**
  - a. Improve the ability to discriminate between fact and opinion
  - b. Increase skill in critical thinking
  - c. Develop the ability to identify propaganda techniques, including questioning sources of information
  - d. Provide insight into the source of one's own bias or prejudice
  - e. Develop an appreciation of the rights of others to their own opinions
  - f. Instill deepened understanding of American ideals and institutions

**Note:** All sides of controversial issues must be presented--preferably by persons of equal knowledge, skill, and sophistication.

5. **Outside Speakers.** Possible sources for outside speakers include:
- a. **Speakers in various subject areas**--recommended by resource staff of the Office of Instructional Support.
  - b. **Speakers in human relations and areas other than subject areas**--recommended by the Counseling and Guidance Department, Student Services Division, Office of Instructional Support.
  - c. **Speakers whose knowledge of their subject is apparent from positions they hold** (e.g., professors, elected officials, professional people, recognized artists, musicians)--recommended by outside groups, community, or students. Presentations must be related to the course of study. (Note the limitation on candidates for election in B.3.g.)
  - d. **Speakers whose qualifications and performance have been evaluated** by the professional staff in schools where they have appeared previously.
6. **Preplanning for Utilization of Speakers.** *Teachers should carefully plan presentations by outside speakers, whether a speaker appears in a classroom, cocurricular, or extracurricular situation. Basic considerations in preplanning should include:*
- a. **Prior approval by the principal.**
  - b. **An awareness of the position of the speaker and context of the planned presentation.** In order that objective, unprejudiced, and balanced judgments may be rendered by students, great care should be exercised in the use of speakers who are controversial in their words or example.
  - c. **Appropriateness of a presentation for the maturity level of the group and the relationship to instructional goals.** When possible, speakers on controversial topics should be scholarly experts giving overviews of the controversy rather than advocating a particular point of view; the presentation should be as balanced and as objective as possible.
  - d. **Maintenance of a balanced presentation.** When the speaker, *by reputation, word, or example*, might be regarded as controversial, provision should be made for questioning or rebuttal by persons of equal skill and sophistication. This should take place as soon as possible, preferably immediately following the presentation.

- e. **Prohibition against scripts and/or written statements containing foul language or derogatory comments regarding any race, religion, creed, color, marital status, veteran status, sex, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin age, or disability.** When a possibility of this exists, material should be reviewed in advance.
7. **Site and District Support in Utilization of Outside Speakers.** The district will assist teachers in developing skills needed to deal effectively with controversial issues. Resource assistance, as well as guides in methodology, will be provided.

Use of outside speakers, especially controversial ones, may create concerns, misunderstandings, and complaints in the community. Should this occur when the teacher or site administrator has followed stated regulations and procedures and has handled the situation with reasonable skill, the district will share the responsibility and provide full support.
8. **Straw voting** shall be limited to classes in which the ballot issues have been studied and discussed, and shall be conducted on or after the day of the election--not before.

#### **D. IMPLEMENTATION**

1. **Teacher** confers with principal on highly *controversial issues* prior to their introduction in classroom.
2. **Outside Speakers**
  - a. **Teacher**
    - (1) Outlines preparation of class or group for utilization of outside speaker.
    - (2) Confers with speaker to be sure that instructional or activity purposes will be met, that topic and approach are appropriate for group concerned, and that need to follow district guidelines is understood.
    - (3) Plans presentation to group, following guidelines and prohibitions outlined in this procedure.
    - (4) Provides for questioning and rebuttal of controversial speakers, preferably immediately, by someone of equal skill and sophistication, in addition to questioning by students and teachers.

(5) Informs principal of plans; obtains permission to proceed.

b. **Principal**

(1) Approves, amends, or rejects teacher's request and plan for an outside speaker. (If deemed necessary, refers request to appropriate central office staff via instructional leader.) Permission should be granted only when an activity is in accordance with district regulations.

(2) If approval is granted, observes activity, if possible, to evaluate its educational value.

c. **Appropriate central office staff member**, if matter is referred via instructional leader, examines request on basis of guidelines and procedure; forwards recommendation to accept, amend, or reject to principal via instructional leader.

d. **Teacher**, if approval is granted, implements approved plan; is present throughout program, evaluates activity, and reports results to principal.

e. **Disturbances created during presentations by outside speakers**. In the event a disturbance is created or a program presents inappropriate material in spite of screening precautions, site principal and/or teacher should:

(1) Consider carefully the consequences of interrupting a presentation and decide on an appropriate course of action or nonaction.

(2) Take action as outlined in Emergency Procedure 08 if a presentation creates a disturbance or a possible disturbance. (School Police Services Department should be notified immediately.)

(3) Report situation to instructional leader by quickest means possible and follow with a written report.

3. **Straw Voting**

a. **Teacher** preplans activity; request approval of principal by submitting:

(1) Outline of study and consideration (to be) given to election issues in class.

(2) Detailed plan for conducting straw vote on or after day of election.

- (3) Detailed account of expected educational outcomes to result from activity.
- b. **Principal** approves, amends, or rejects teacher's request and plan for straw vote or refers request to appropriate central office staff member via instructional leader.
  - c. **Appropriate central office staff member**, if matter is referred via instructional leader, examines request on basis of guidelines and prohibitions outlined in this procedure; forwards recommendation to accept, amend, or reject to principal via instructional leader.
  - d. **Teacher**, if approval is granted, implements approved plan; remains present throughout program; evaluates activity, and reports results to principal.

**E. FORMS AND AUXILIARY REFERENCES**

**F. REPORTS AND RECORDS**

- 1. Teacher forwards evaluation of speaker or straw voting to principal after completion (see D.2.d. and D.3.d.)

**G. APPROVED BY**



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Chief of Staff, Terrance L. Smith  
For the Superintendent of Public Education